INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM BUNDY (Tape 2)

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

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M: You had, I think, probably completed chronological coverage through 1964. You had spoken of the reviews at the end of the year after the election, and also of your knowledge of the alleged feelers that U Thant had indicated.

B: All right. Well, you want me to just go ahead then and talk?

M: Well, maybe this, as a way of starting. The generally accepted account is that by the end of 1964, the situation in South Viet Nam was rapidly deteriorating, as far as their government was concerned. Is there ever going to be any question about that deterioration? Was this so self-evident that there can be no doubt that it really was that bad?

B: Oh, I don't think there's the slightest doubt. It was true in all you could pick up from what was going on in the countryside. But, above all, the thing that I think most bugged the President and everybody was the inability to get together politically and really get a government that seemed to be made up of people who knew what they were doing and knew how to work with each other. And that was just a black cloud hanging over everything in the latter months of 1964. I guess we sent some of the most strongly worded telegrams--"Tell them to get together." I'm not sure we didn't push an Ambassador in the field harder than he should be pushed. I think Ambassador Taylor's handling of the generals on one occasion on about December 21--I have refreshed my memory by sorting my own papers--may have not been as productive as it should have been; but whether there was that kind of minor mistake or not, you can't get away from the way this was. This was a very basic point because, as I think I said in our first go-round, the hope in May and June of 1964, and along right through '64, was that if you had to act you'd be able to act in support

of a government that had shown it had a degree of legitimacy and a mandate and so on. Well, you certainly couldn't say that; in the fall of '64 you had the Council of Notables and then the first government of Huong, and then the military and the Buddhists from opposite sides went to work on [Tran Van] Huong and made his position very difficult and eventually untenable by January. So that was a part of it.

Then, taking that as one strand--and the whole picture of deterioration, that this was just coming apart--what you couldn't figure out was how much of that was loss of confidence in their ability to hold out against Hanoi and the Viet Cong, and fear that we would desert them. And undoubtedly, that was a big part of it. Ambassador Taylor's cables of the period, which on the whole I think were very statesmanlike, really in effect came down on the question, "Unless we show that we're really with this, this is a self-perpetuating downward spiral of political ineptitude." That was certainly one of his major arguments.

A second element in the situation--and one where I do have vivid personal recollections that involved the President--was the question of whether we retaliated for specific acts, particularly directed against Americans. One such incident took place in the attack on the Bien Hoa Airport--

M: That was right before the election--

B: Just before the election. And I think that was as tough a decision in many ways as the President ever had to face. Here you had a stated policy dating from September 8 that we would respond to very much this kind of thing. And I think the Joint Chiefs, and not because they were just looking for a pretext but genuinely, said, "If this policy means anything, you ought to do something." I don't know exactly what advice they gave to Secretary McNamara, but I think their assumption initially--as I got it by various

contacts in the Pentagon--was that we would in fact take some action. But it was a terrible position for the President to be in, and I don't just mean in small political senses--I mean in terms of a distinct upset to the country just at a time when it needed to settle down and digest what had happened in the way of the election; and he wanted to get to work on his domestic program, I'm sure, and all of that.

At any rate, I remember meeting with Secretary Rusk, and my distinct recollection is that both Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara said, "It's simply out of the question." I remember George Ball being present at the meeting with Secretary Rusk and the unanimous feeling being, "Well, this is just not a time we can act. There are exceptions to everything, and this is an exception." And the President obviously saw it in that light. The word passed very quickly, "This isn't going to happen;" at least, I got that feel very early. Then the President did have a meeting, as I recall, with all of the Joint Chiefs in which he spelled out, in effect, that this just couldn't be done at this point; that he was as worried as ever about it; and we needed to do everything we could, and so on. It was a "fight-talk" kind of a meeting, a rather emotion-laden meeting coming at an emotional time. I never questioned in the slightest the President's feeling that that could not be done at that time, but it was obviously another real clap of thunder in the gathering storm.

A second similar incident took place on December 24 or so when they put some bombs under one of the bachelor officers' billets--Brink's, so-called Brink's billets, in Saigon--and killed and wounded a number of our junior officers. Well, on that occasion, and this was during Christmas and I'm not able to recall whether the President was actually in Washington, but I recommended and have some reason to believe my brother recommended,

although it was entirely independent as all our actions were always--that is to say fundamentally; we'd check afterwards, sort of come to a conclusion, but we were not ever talking without talking to our chiefs--that we felt this did call for something. This was sufficiently outrageous and so on and so on. And that matter was strongly debated. My papers don't indicate exactly who stood where, and I'm not sure that's the core of the matter on these questions anyway. In the end the President looked that one in the eye and decided not to do it.

M: But there was substantial opposition to it?

B: Yes.

M: He didn't overrule it by himself?

B: No. Now, at this point I come to a third strand; first strand, deterioration; second strand, specific attacks on Americans; third strand--this systematic planning that was set underway immediately after election, and I suppose owed something in its urgency to the Bien Hoa business, which was a working group, I've forgotten its name, established under what was I think at that moment of time still called an Executive Committee--the term passed out of usage very shortly after. Now in this working group, I was appointed chairman and told to assemble the appropriate people from Defense, JCS, CIA, and the White House. My recollection is that the leading and most active members were McNaughton for Defense, Admiral [Lloyd M.] Mustin for the Joint Chiefs, George Carver, as I recall, for CIA, and Michael Forrestal--no, he was gone from the White House, he was working with me. That's what it was, because he left in January. That's another story. But he was with it for awhile. I've forgotten who worked on it. I guess Chester Cooper, perhaps, from the White House staff. I really don't want to put a nail in that one--anyway, it doesn't matter. And that group set up a series of options:

in effect (1) trying to do all we could the way we were, which we increasingly said--successive drafts show we got more and more bearish about that in November and December. Secondly, to go really into a hard, tough, drastic bombing program, which we thought would inevitably lead to such a degree of hullabaloo and outcry that we would be forced into negotiations at an early stage. And the third, and the one that really lingered in people's minds, was an in-between, more gradual bombing program, recognizing that you would be under some pressure to move to negotiations [and] that you, in fact, might wish to see if there was such a possibility at some point; and, in effect, playing it a good deal by ear. Now, this was a far from unanimous group, I should say; at least, I think it's fair to say McNaughton and I were overwhelmingly agreed. But Admiral Mustin strongly felt that the strong bombing program was the one that made military sense. He tended to discount more than the rest of us the risks of Chinese or even Soviet action of some major sort. We had estimates from the Agency--all this will appear in the papers, and I don't need to do more than sort of place it as part of the backdrop, because this stuff was going up all the time in draft form, but this was typical of President Johnson's period as of President Kennedy's before it--that a great deal of the most important papers didn't get set in concrete. I think I mentioned that in my first interview.

M: Yes, both of those bombing scenarios did include the possible necessity of supporting the bombing staging areas with troop support?

B: Actually, I think that doesn't appear in the November-December papers of this particular group. It <u>had</u> appeared, as my papers establish, in September briefly. But it really wasn't to the fore in the November-December period at all. In fact, I think the Department of Defense history says that it

doesn't appear at all in the papers, but I'll take whatever the record shows on that. At any rate, we were thinking-- we thought numerically the South Vietnamese forces were adequate to the job; we thought they were still stout enough to do it; if you lifted morale and the government took hold of itself, manpower didn't seem at that point to be the problem.

So that's the third strand. Now, there's an important element in this that was creeping in--more than creeping in, taking root--that what we were talking about was a great deal more than retaliation for specific incidents. It was a consistent and planned program in response, if you want to use a subtly different word, to the whole North Vietnamese course of action. It was a revival of pressure with the objective a revival of the morale of the South Vietnamese. I think that in the end was really the first aim.

M: But not a one shot--

B: But not a one-shot thing. A great many of us felt that the one-shot thing, if anything, conveyed, after you did it a couple of times, conveyed to Hanoi the idea of weakness; that it was far from being useful--if anything, it tended to play itself out very quickly. And I think this became rather generally felt.

Now, a fourth strand, and one doesn't attempt to sum them all up because I believe there were others--for instance, I think the question of the necessity of major ground forces was brought forward to the President at some time in late January, this by Secretary McNamara and my brother Mac; I wasn't part of that, but--that's another strand for somebody to look for, but I'm talking about the ones I know about. A fourth strand that entered in very strongly from at least mid-January onward was that as the feeling grew that we were going to have to act in some fashion in a stronger way, and I think the feeling was becoming pretty clear that it was going to be

along the lines of the third option that I've described--the gradual bombing program with our eyes and ears cocked for negotiating, playing it by ear. This fourth question was the question of dependents in Saigon. On that, the President had a very strong personal view which was, in some degree, different from at least some of his advisers. He felt you just had to get the women and children clean out of Saigon before you undertook anything in the way of real attacks on the North, because he feared that this could lead to drastic re-reprisals, if you want to call them that, against Saigon; and he felt terribly strongly that you must get the dependents out. Now, this was such a strong personal feeling that it's worth noting, because he really pounded us on this, and I don't want to sound--I hope I don't sound--as though the rest of us were callous to the problem, but we saw the statistical chances of anything significant being in fact done as much less; we were very worried, and, indeed, the President accepted this, that if you evacuated the dependents in any context other than a clear course of action it would have a tremendous depressing morale effect in Saigon. Well, this problem was beaten back and forth and became a real hang-up, or so it appeared from where I sat in the latter part of January.

Well, by the latter part of January, the whole thing was pregnant with the thought that you were going to have to do more and have to do it pretty soon.

M: Was there a strand that involved an increased infiltration, or increased DVN activity?

B: Well, the evidence at that point certainly indicated that the infiltration was steadily going up. We didn't have it nailed down absolutely cold-turkey, as I recall it, by, let us say, the 1st of February that the North Vietnamese were sending regular units. We did know that you were picking up North Vietnamese regular individuals.

M: Uniformed?

B: In uniform. We reconstructed that they'd been coming down since roughly the end of June; and we even then calculated, and I certainly would believe to have been the fact now, that they had reached the bottom of the barrel as far as the native Southerners were concerned, and so they started to dip into capital, as we'd say in Boston.

M: So one of the questions then--the reason I dwell on this is some of the critics have made quite a point of the timing of DVN units--

B: That is correct.

M: --and this argument seems to be over whether they were units or individuals.

B: Well, to me, the argument is perhaps most clearly available in Hilsman's book; that they really hadn't started in on a major North Vietnamese infiltration and did this only in response to the bombing. To me that is just nonsense on the evidence and on any reasonable judgment both. On the evidence in the sense that North Vietnamese regulars had started to come in June, in small numbers, in replacement lots I suppose you'd call it in the old lingo, and as we knew, not categorically in February although we may have pretty clearly had it from sensitive sources which we couldn't discuss anyway, but we certainly had by March or April a clear picture. We had multiple prisoners from the units themselves. Well, on the evidence alone, they had started to send the regulars, and these were movements which, if they arrived in country in December must have been sent in motion not later than September--long before there could have been any real expectation that we would get into a systematic bombing program. Now, I think Tonkin Gulf alerted Hanoi to the possibility, but they surely wouldn't have needed alerting. I think Tonkin Gulf probably did play a part in the very interesting reversal or change, drastic change, in Soviet-North Vietnamese relations that

took place after the removal of Khrushchev--and incidentally this is a point worth noting about the fall of '64. It's a strand in the story although it didn't have any great effect on us.

M: Stronger support from Russia?

B: Well, in the summer of '64, my own reading, and I gave it to a lot of newsmen in these terms at the time, is that Khrushchev wished Southeast Asia were under six feet of water. When he was overthrown in October, this was very quickly followed by the November 7th celebrations, at which, lo and behold, Pham Van Dong turned up; and the red carpet was rolled out and a very red hue indeed! And this was known, and one read this as something that both sides wanted--Hanoi wanted to have a balanced relationship with Peking and Moscow, and it looked as though Moscow wanted back into the poker game. And we surmised even then that the ante for coming back into the poker game might be some military hardware of some sort, and there were reports of traveling back and forth in November, December, January. We had built up by February 1st, let us say, a pretty clear picture that the Soviets were by way of negotiating a resumption, in effect, of arms aid; we didn't, I think, then know it was going to be surface-to-air missiles and all that it turned out to be. And we associated Kosygin's visit in early February, with sort of reformalizing good relations, good Communist-bloc relations, between Moscow and Hanoi. So that was a strand in the picture. It came to bear, of course, on the question of Kosygin's presence in Hanoi at the time of the first bombings; and therefore, it's a strand too, in a sense.

Well, all right, by late January you had this sense of possible imminent action; you had a series of very well-organized and thought-through cables from Ambassador Taylor saying, "You have got to do this, if you're going

to hold this show together," and so on. I'll let those cables speak for themselves; they're a very significant part of the story, of course. And the result was the President's decision to send my brother Mac and whoever else it was--I've forgotten who the party included--McNaughton, I've forgotten--to Saigon to go back and forth over it; to particularly, among other things, look at this question of how do you time the evacuation of dependents? Well, he arrived and had talked for a couple of days when bango! Pleiku happened! And he got on the phone, Ambassador Taylor was on the phone, Ambassador [U. Alexis] Johnson was on the phone to the Secretaries' room between the Oval Room and the Cabinet Room as we met; and the time of day will be established by others, my recollection is night, but I may be wrong--night, Washington time, early morning their time. And since it has come up in a couple of writings about the thing, I just happened to have chatted the other day with my brother Mac, who says that as far as his recommendations to the President--the recommendations from the field were unanimous that we had to respond and do it right away, and all the rest. He made the point, just worth noting, that he did this before he had gone up to Pleiku which he did in the course of the day, as I recall, and visited the wounded in the hospital and saw what happened--

M: Critics have said <u>that</u> trip was--

B: There has been a lot of talk about this produced an emotional atmosphere in the whole decision. Mac is entirely clear on the timing; that is, that there had been these phone exchanges and cable exchanges and the decision had been taken for practical purposes. My recollection is precisely the same. Now, what he reported after Pleiku and in what degree of emotion, I don't know; but I'd look awful hard at the suggestion that he was so moved by the sight of wounded Americans as to have changed his objective judgment, which would be serious in any event. But any of us who lived through the

war have seen wounded men; it's a horrible sight, but it is not one that you change your judgment on the basis of. In other words, if there's one thing more than another that seemed clear from where I sat throughout this whole thing, it's that the decision to act at Pleiku and recognizing that this very likely led on into a systematic, gradual bombing program of the North, was not emotional, was not impetuous, was not the alleged "Alamo spirit" of the President, or any of those things. And I would add that on the timing, the choice of going right ahead immediately, the question of Kosygin's presence, was well and truly debated. I have penned notes that I haven't really looked through, but I just flipped my eye down them as I put them away for file, of a meeting at the White House, I think on the 8th, in which Tommy [Ambassador Llewellyn] Thompson was present; and the question was raised, "How would the Russians take it?" Well, it wasn't thought it would be particularly good, but then the countervailing argument was, "How do you wait? Suppose you wait until Kosygin leaves. You'll lose the impetus. Suppose he decides to stay; suppose he decided to wait a couple more days?" We didn't know--we knew his announced departure time, at least I think we did, I'm not positive of that--but if you sort of waited and hung fire it diminished the effect of the thing.

Well, that takes you up to the parts I most distinctly recall in the initial decision to start at Pleiku.

M: Was that unanimous here? You said it was unanimous in the field.

B: That was unanimous here. Now the only--I think I'm right in placing at precisely this point in time, that evening meeting, Washington time--Senator Mansfield's clear and explicit dissent and the President's rather brusque rejection of it. Senator Mansfield was invited to a large meeting. I've forgotten how this spaced with the calls back and forth from Saigon, and

the confirmation--I've forgotten who was on the phone, it may have been Cy Vance, but I just don't recall. Somebody was bringing in messages--"Are they unanimous in Saigon?" "They were solid and unanimous." "Have you talked to each one individually?" "Yes," and so on. I seem to recall all of those elements. But at some point in the course of that evening, Senator Mansfield was brought into the meeting and sat right across from the President--I don't know whether it was in the Vice President's chair, it doesn't matter--and what had happened was gone over, its background, the recommendations from the field, the whole thing. The President, in effect, rehearsed all that he already knew for the benefit of Senator Mansfield, and there may have been others--I simply don't recall--

M: I was going to ask about other Senators.

B: I don't recall who was present. I hope somebody kept notes of that.

M: I'm sure the White House did.

B: But I do recall very vividly, and again I think I'm right in placing this on the evening of the first decision, that Senator Mansfield said to the President, "I would negotiate. I would not hit back. I would get into negotiations." And it was dryly, but very feelingly put, and the President was to me unexpectedly brusque in dismissing it. "I just don't think you can stand still and take this kind of thing, you just can't do it." And he didn't really pursue the question of how you dealt with negotiations, this was something we all had in our minds. But in any case, I simply record that vignette; knowing, as I had some reason to do, the close personal relationship over the years between the President and Senator Mansfield, I was a little taken aback that the President should be as crisp as he was on that occasion. What I think it reflected was that he'd gone through this in his mind forty-six different times; he'd tried that exit; and he didn't see anything but darkness and gloom in it. And it was

more than he could do in a moment of decision to take the half or three-quarters of an hour that he might otherwise have taken to sort of put his feet up and say, "Mike, really, look, what have we got to negotiate with? We're in a hell of a weak position," and so on. I don't think he explicitly made these points replying to Senator Mansfield, nor do I recall that anybody in the executive branch said, "This is what you ought to do." My distinct recollection is that George Ball, who had been questioning the whole idea of this systematic course of action felt you had to act at this point. I'm somewhat startled to find that Henry Brandon of the London Sunday Times, in the account that he has now published in serial form and is turning into a book, says that George Ball now takes the position that he felt he had to go along on this if he was to hold any influence with the President. I don't know whether that's what George Ball felt about the position he was taking. I didn't so interpret it at the time. I think he undoubtedly felt that the train was picking up speed, and we'd better hang on and get ready to drop off; but that you couldn't control the thing, or to use the metaphor, you couldn't control it or get any kind of a landing net or anything unless you still stayed aboard it. In other words, you had to go up and hold on, but he wouldn't have gone much further up--I think that was clear.

M: That's what came out in his book.

B: That's not an inconsistent position, and I'm inclined to credit that rather than what Brandon says, and I repeat it's hearsay, is George's current position.

Well, anyway, to the best of my recollection it was unanimous in the executive branch. I don't recall that the President did as he sometimes did, went right around the table and said, "Do you agree--do you agree--do you agree?" But there was no doubt that it was accepted as the inevitable

and right decision, the logical culmination of all that we had been thinking and so on--

M: And fairly clearly understood that it was the beginning of a regularized policy?

B: Yes. Well, now that's where--then a break at that point in order to introduce what, to me, was a different period, the period from February 8 to, let us say, March 20. Because I think most of us assumed that this was bound to mean--there was another incident, three or four days later; we acted in response to that-- feeling as we did, that any series of tit-for-tat things ran its course very quickly, and in the end became a very weak signal to people in Saigon and to Hanoi, that we had to move to the other, and we had to set it up as policy and do it--get on with it, and all the rest. Now at this point, and the cables that I have looked at show one aspect of it, the President got into a very firm set of mind that this was not to be depicted as a change of policy. That we were doing what was necessary, that was the policy; that this was just a couple of new things we were doing, but it wasn't a change of policy. He wanted, in effect, to mute the whole thing. I don't know the reasoning that brought him into that. Its results were some rather sharp stops and starts in the executive branch; the one that I happened to have seen in the cables was guidance to the field on how to depict the policy, and then a crisp note at the top, "Not sent, by White House direction," about the 16th of February or something of that sort. And I remember Mac telling me, "Look, get this straight. The President does not want this depicted as a change of policy." Well, I hadn't said anything in public, and I had no intention of saying anything in public. Obviously, we all took our cue from the President. But I record, I think, the honest feeling of those of us who had been working

closely in the whole series of events and thoughts that had gone into this, that we thought it would in effect have to come out as clearly stated upgrading of our resolve and our whole scale of action, and be depicted in that light. And the President did not wish to do that.

Now, another strand in this February to mid-March period had to do, and this is a very lesser one but one where I have personal deep regrets, and I don't think the President had any direct involvement, and I think it was one of the things we didn't serve him well on, and that's the "White Paper." The White Paper--over and over again in the planning process, we had said, "We will need a White Paper; it must be kept current," and so on and so on. And there was something. But when we came to look for the something about the 10th or 12th of February, it just wasn't very good; it didn't seem powerful, didn't seem very strongly marshaled. We had rather thought, and this I take considerable measure of personal responsibility for, that the picture of growing infiltration had sunk in. There had been a backgrounder on it in January, the press seemed to be ready to believe that was the case, the whole thesis that this was warranted action if it kept up and increased, we thought was more accepted than it was, certainly in intellectual circles and so on. And in the face of the kind of sort of awakening to the issue, than in fact took place. Really, the issue was so dormant, and people weren't activated to it; and we underestimated immensely the degree of controversy there would immediately be on this rather factual question--how much of it was Northern. And the result was that the White Paper was done, and then revised at white heat by George Ball, by me, by others, so that it was rhetorically a rather strident lawyer's brief, which I think was wrong as to tone alone. And as to the evidence, we should have played up areas where it was clear and strong, which was people. And we should have left out completely, for example, one annex

having to do with the number of weapons, which was trivial.

M: That was the one that the critics emphasized.

B: This was one of these damned cases where you put a thing together and nobody looks at it as a whole; because those of us who reviewed the text didn't know there was an annex and didn't know what the annex proved on the weapons. And here we absolutely led with our chins on this one, and the I. F. Stones and others of this world just went to town on it, and I think our best friends were dismayed by the quality of what we were able to put up.

Now part of that was withholding sensitive sources, which--I think this was the last days of John McCone, if I recall correctly; he left in April or May. John McCone was absolutely adamant for the protection of sources, and I suppose he was right. I'd like to have seen something more put in about that, because this was what we had used, for example, in the previous year to persuade the British that there wasn't the slightest doubt of what we were talking about at the time that we were talking to the British about the possibility of stronger action. We needed to bring home to the British government that we knew what we were talking about on the facts; and we had succeeded in doing so. But McCone was absolutely adamant, and this was, of course, his bailiwick; and we all recognized that there would be serious costs if, in fact, the other side caught on to some of the things that we had. This part of my interview, certainly, should be top secret, at least. And I think this is quite important to cut out these particular references and treat them rather carefully, because we're at a twilight zone.

But in any case, we didn't have that stuff; we hadn't really marshaled it properly without that stuff; we should have had an intensive six-man interrogation team in the field from the preceding June, doing nothing but

follow up to document and nail down case after case after case and so on, and really, frankly--in this as in other respects--I don't think J-2 in Saigon was big league until, roughly 1967, when General [Michael S.?] Davison took over.

M: The damage had been done by then.

B: It was just not a really crisp professional operation. It was all right--I don't mean to make it sound as though it were downright bad, but it just wasn't imaginatively on top of this kind of thing. I say that parenthetically. And I think most people who followed the war would tend to agree with it.

Well, anyway, we did a lousy job on the White Paper, and that came out on February 27-28, along in there. This was an indication of evolving thought toward--and really the policy was making itself and, in effect, declaring itself through our actions. And this was what the President wanted--"Our actions speak for themselves, but there is no change in policy."

M: This keeps there from being, incidentally, doesn't it, a specific date on which it was definitely and irrevocably decided that this was a policy? In other words, it was one of those things that happened over a period of time?

B: Yes, if you looked for a date, what was being done against the North changed its name somewhere along in here from "Flaming Dart" to "Rolling Thunder"; and the day that you got the first series of strikes authorized under rolling thunder, which as I recall was sometime in mid-March, was it.

Now, a third strand, and one that I'm not quite clear how it weaves in -this is where a really precise job needs doing--is the interrelationship between what was being done on the bombing and what was underway on the diplomatic front. As I recall, we went to the United Nations and reported what we had done and its justification, but we never thought the United

Nations could be an effective agent. We then, as now, and then as at all times, didn't really think U Thant was the fellow to really carry the ball; but more than anything else, the United Nations on its face thrust you into the question of putting the Soviets inevitably--and whatever their real possibilities of exercising any useful influence--into the position of being Hanoi's lawyers. And so it was a lemon right through for that rather basic reason.

M: This was the point at which U Thant had just made his speech, isn't it, that if the American people knew the truth, they--

B: Well, this was in March--February or March--yes. Well, he was personally unhelpful. And I think that may have entered into the President's extra dose of reserve at all stages about the United Nations, and the Secretary of State's. But I think on an objective analysis, the United Nations as now constituted is simply not capable of getting into something which forces a line-up between the major powers. It's as simple as that. Harlan Cleveland handled it pretty well in an article.

But the serious diplomatic track of that period, and one that had very little publicity, but I think was significant at the time and may even still be significant, is the fact that the British did at once move to see whether the Russians were prepared to act, as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference of 1954 and 1962, to act in an exploratory fashion in the nature of good offices, as the term is sometimes used, to see what could be done among the nations concerned in those settlements toward peace. Now, this seemed to us a very promising way of really seeing what could be done. It didn't involve convening the Geneva Conference as such; we were quite leary of that, had been leary of it in the preceding year even as to Laos; had been much more favorable to the Polish limited membership proposal for that

reason. But the co-chairmen acting back and forth with resourceful diplomacy seemed a very hopeful thing; and when the British put it to the Soviets, it was with our full backing. The Soviets hung fire on it, my recollection is, for two to three weeks. And we gradually got the feeling, "Well, they can't be ready to go ahead. This need not, this should not, hold us up indefinitely." I think we would all have been somewhat impatient. And in the end, about the 18th of March, [Andrei A.] Gromyko gave the British as cold a turn-down as you could get. That's an interesting episode in hindsight, whether the Soviet hesitation indicated that they were trying or ready to act to some degree. I suspect Kosygin was a bit put off to have the bombing start when he was there, but I don't believe that would have affected their cold turkey look. I think they'd assumed we were really ready to let it go down the drain. I think that had been their assumption. But they would also have sensed, "These fellows are unpredictable;" they had experienced our stiffening in Korea.

Well, anyway, this is all too speculative. It doesn't have too much--and I don't know how much it has to do except that, in effect, with these various things going on--the diplomatic uncertainties, the President's desire to let the actions speak for themselves--you didn't get to where people were really feeling you were clearly embarked on something until along in early or mid-March. Now that immediately triggered, of course, a whole host of controversy--"What are we doing?" A tremendous number of diplomatic initiatives, and there's no need to go through those. They're in all the lists and the papers and so on and so on. Then you had Max Taylor's return and some meetings about April 1, and a vast number of ways of helping the situation--I think we flooded him with well-meant lists of points and suggestions, and Carl Rowan went tearing out there, and the

whole thing was--we were stirring madly a bouillabaisse that had no stock in it.

M: And that ends up as a disaster whether it's at table or diplomacy, I expect. But, now, that is the immediate background of the Johns Hopkins speech--

B: That is the immediate--now, the Johns Hopkins speech I'm not a good witness on, because I had stayed through the Taylor review, and then just come back from an Ambassadors' meeting in Asia and was very tired and went off for a few days, not realizing that it would come to a speech as quickly and so on. So I really didn't get into the middle of that speech at all. And I don't know how the "unconditional discussions" phrase got in there, although I think it reflected--I certainly very fully reported to the Secretary a meeting with the Democratic Study Group, for example, which raised this question, and I said, "Well, the answer really is yes. We aren't imposing any conditions on discussions." This, in fact, was our implied position--

M: [Senators George] McGovern and [Frank] Church had made a public speech on the necessity--

B: And what with the non-aligned nations coming out and asking that; in effect, it was coming at you from many sides. Like so many other things in government where, I suppose in this case--I don't know whether Dick Goodwin claims to have originated the set of words, this he may have done--but there's very seldom unilateral and unique invention in these matters. This thing was coming at us from a great many sides, as was the idea--now, this I have an interesting vignette on--as was the idea of a serious U.S. commitment to regional economic development in Southeast Asia.

Now, there, I have a rather direct personal footnote on that, and the dates can be established independently. But my economic deputy, Robert

Barnett, had for a long period of time been giving me "think pieces" on the possibilities in this regard. He had expressed dismay that the United States was not taking a forthcoming position in the negotiations looking toward the creation of an Asian Development Bank. He pointed to the Mekong as something that, while we were doing a little on, a lot more might be done. He urged that we put this onto our plates. Quite frankly, I don't recall this exactly, I myself would have felt that this would be taken, if it were done as a major policy act, as a very weak signal indeed; and a not plausible one at other times.

But at some point in March, I sent stuff over to Mac--and this was done direct as I recall; it wouldn't have been a controversial matter, anyway, it certainly had been discussed enough in the department--material for the President to make a response if this subject were raised, saying, "Yes, I think this is fine," or something of the sort. And at some point along the way, the President did in fact decide on very short notice to have a press conference. Either the question came up or he said, "What new ideas have you got?" and Mac said, "Well, here's one we've been kicking around for a little while. You may want to give it a run and see what it looks like." And the President may, by then, have had some contact with Tex [Arthur] Goldschmidt and others on the Mekong project who, I think, had a good to do, certainly in the April time-frame, with his thinking--at least, so I've been told.

M: I see him next Tuesday night.

B: You might want to ask him about that. But this I do claim to have had something to do with, because Barnett gave me this stuff. I in turn wrote it up in such a way that it was suitable for the President to say something. I sent it over to Mac and said, "You tinker with this, but this is really

something the President can say if it's constructive and it fits in," and so on. The President said it at noon, and as Mac reported it to me--and certainly one could see the results--it got an immediate, very favorable play, this press conference mention, on a limited scale. And the President realized he was on to something. Now I think, in fact, it responded to all his deepest feelings of the development of Johnson City, Texas; in Pakistan, as I'd heard him express to Ayub in 1961, in my most vivid encounter with him when he was Vice President. Incidentally I left that out yesterday--that was a deathless experience, the Ayub visit, and a deeply memorable and warming one. My goodness, that was really quite a marvelously handled thing, and the President used the occasion to get across to me, certainly, and I'm sure to everybody else there, including Ayub, the depth of his feeling about what could be done to develop a country and how terribly important it was to do it.

Well, anyway, that whole strand of his deepest thinking was engaged in this. I may be in the position of doing just what I say Dick Goodwin has no right to do; in other words, six other guys may have had the idea first, but I can describe a set of events that did seem to have--you sent the papers over and Mac said, "Well, I put it in the hopper, and he used it, and now he thinks it's the greatest thing since sliced bread."

M: I think you can claim that one.

B: I make the claim with all historic deference, and with a very clear, clear and emphatic footnote, that the man who'd really been pushing me on this thing, and I really didn't know where the Asian Development Bank negotiation stood or anything else, was Barnett, my deputy, who is a very dedicated and very wise fellow--who has worked in this area a long, long time.

M: You indicated that the unconditional negotiations part of that speech

that had the billion dollar Mekong plan in it didn't really represent what you thought was a change in anything. Is that correct?

B: Well, I think it was a very important--what is change and what's not change, particularly in your diplomatic posture, depends a great deal on who says what at what level and in what words. And in that sense, anything said by the President in those terms was a significant change. And it was the affirmation of a position that we had by then realized we had to take, and which was a significant difference--a significant dfference. We really got ourselves into a fair amount of hypocrisy later on, and I think it was not one of our wiser moves, to say that that had always been our position, because of course it really hadn't been our position. And anybody who tries to say that it had been a consistent position will run into a buzz-saw of "think" papers in the 1964 period, and I wrote a fair share of them; but I think it was universally felt that negotiations--we were not ready for them. Sure, we were ready to send Seaborn up to Hanoi, a very important act, and to nibble at it; and to see if something could get started very, very quietly off in a corner somewhere, where it wouldn't have disruptive effects and all the rest. And we wanted to see what the color of the other side's position was, and we got a pretty clear picture that it was a very black color, from our standpoint.

M: Dark red.

B: A dark red would be all right. Dark red will do it nicely. But there are plenty of papers in the '64 period that say, "We have got to be in a stronger position before we can have any realistic hope of negotiations." Now, in essence, if you look at the thing really cold-turkey, the start of the bombing, the harbinger that the United States was going to stick with it, that put us into a stronger position. We were in a different position,

and we took a different public position. I think, myself, that's the fair way to put it. I don't insist on it, because others can characterize it as they want, but the fact is we really weren't operating on the basis of being ready for discussions without conditions, at least in any public fashion. We took all the initiatives. As I think I said in the first interview, for the whole of the five years I know anything about this, we took all of the initiatives at all times, but they were very cautious and tempered initiatives in '64 and up till mid-'65, up till April '65.

After April, and in April, with the response we made to the Seventeen Non-aligned Nations, which was practically coincident with the President's Johns Hopkins speech, we embarked on and lived by a rule that it didn't matter whether it was [Kwame] Nkrumah or--

M: Who is was--anybody.

B: It didn't matter a bit. Anybody who could get something serious under way, we would show up at the drop of a hat. And the President applied some rather exaggerated rhetoric to this, which rose to haunt him in April '68.

M: Is that his rhetoric rather than some of his advisers?

B: I don't know who wrote that. It always made me cringe a little bit, because I could so readily see circumstances where.... Big general propositions always make an instinctive cautious professional--I guess I call myself a professional in this respect--cringe a bit.

M: You could think of some places that you wouldn't want to go to do it from the very beginning.

B: At the same time, I don't think that anybody in my position is in a position, really, to judge how important it may be for the President to make his point so emphatically clear that it gets across to the country. And undoubtedly it did make a lot of difference to the country that the

President took this position. I wouldn't doubt for a minute that the on-balance judgment of the Johns Hopkins' speech was that--apart from how we thereafter sort of felt we had to jump up and say, "Aye," every time somebody said anything, regardless of how far-fetched or the rest of the timing factors; that was a significant drawback in a sense--but the immense advantage of it was that it did put us in a real posture, not only domestically, but in terms of our relationships abroad, that made a great deal of difference and undoubtedly got us through with many, many fewer scars and difficulties with the British, with the Japanese, the ones that I regard as, you might say, really significant and responsible sectors of official attitude throughout the world. I'm digressing a little bit, because the evanescent, cloudy thing called "world public opinion" doesn't move me very much; but the opinion of key groups in key countries is a matter that is very direct and concrete. I don't mean you can leave the generalized image of the U.S. out of account, you know, but I think you really have got to weight it, and put very distinct weighted grades, on what's important. I don't know, I always got the feeling that the President saw it somewhat in that light. Certainly he never showed the slightest feeling--he would speak impatiently about people who talked in terms of world images. But that's of no matter.

Well, this is up to the Johns Hopkins' speech and all of that.

M: And the first bombing pause follows shortly thereafter--

B: Then you get another series of events. Surely, one of the most unfortunate single things that ever took place was Mike [Lester B.] Pearson's speech at Temple University on the 11th, or thereabouts, of April, which happened to coincide with Senator Fulbright's first call for a bombing pause. But the idea that the Prime Minister of Canada would come down and, on American

soil, lecture the President of the United States on what his policy and his moves should be in a very delicate situation that Mike didn't know all that well--well, I leave it to others to tell this, and I think the most climactic interview took place, just the two of them, and was never recorded. I know that Ambassador Ritchie--Charles Ritchie, the Canadian Ambassador, told me in a rather wry tone of voice after Mike Pearson had come down and gone out to Camp David with the President, that, "After lunch Mac and I were invited to go for a walk." So, I think there's only one man who can properly say what was conveyed to the Prime Minister on that, but I've heard from many Canadians close to Pearson since, that the message came over loud and clear that the President thought this was dirty pool. And the President was in a very intense "He who is not with me is against me," kind of mood in this period, which reflected itself--and I simply note this; I don't have personal knowledge of the circumstances reflected--in the withdrawal or the postponement of invitations for Shastri and Ayub to come to this country. He seemed to be motivated by the feeling that these fellows, who really weren't going to come out four-square for what we were doing--this was just more than he could take at a time when he had to start pulling people together, and it would have hurt what he was trying to do on Viet Nam. I think he also believed, and I can't weight this, that it would hurt the foreign aid program in which, of course, they figured very heavily and which came in for an intensive review in June and July in any event, in respect to India and Pakistan. But this is not my firsthand knowledge; the President, as so often when subjected to outside pressures or the possibility of further ones--outside pressures in the case of Pearson and Fulbright, a potential degree of pressuring from Shastri and Ayub--he bridled very, very strongly indeed; which was,

it's hardly news to say, a very strong characteristic of the President's.

Well, at any rate, there were those who were urging an early pause within the Executive Branch, really at the time of the Johns Hopkins' speech.

M: Was there a specific group or location of these people?

B: Well, I think it was sort of in the air. I think Secretary McNamara may have had the thought; George Ball had the thought; Mac had the thought; I had it; and it was very much in the air in early May--oh, well, late April or early May. It was "Let the furor from these blankety-blank outsiders cool off, and let's see if there's a way to do this." And we had it on the drawing boards.

Well, then, of course, you had the Dominican Republic. And I leave aside as not being mine to judge what the Dominican Republic did to a hunk of liberal sentiment, and I use the word in quotes or not, depending on the taste of the listener; because I think some of them are phony, but some of them aren't. A hunk of liberal sentiment was deeply antagonized by our actions in the Dominican Republic and the very strong attempt to justify them on the basis of what may have been very strong evidence, but which again couldn't really be produced, of actual Communist involvement and so on; and I think there was a very unfortunate degree of link-up that weakened public support in a critical "liberal," "intellectual"--but somewhat broader than either--area.

M: Fulbright--

B: Fulbright was put off it completely. But the major point in terms of the operations and the thoughts concerned with Viet Nam was that it tied government in bow-knots. I've never known a period in eighteen years of government where the government could handle two real hot potatoes at a time; it's very hard to do. You couldn't handle Cuba and India together

in the fall of '62, and in this case Viet Nam took a back seat for a week or ten days. Now, that wasn't too serious, but it did mean that when we went into the pause, and the President finally went for the pause, which was about the 12th to 15th of May, it wasn't as well thought through as it should have been. My brother Mac and I were largely responsible for the draft message to Hanoi. Of course, it was reviewed by the President; but it was reviewed as the considered opinion of his advisers. I think the Secretary of State obviously very definitely reviewed it. My recollection is he was in town at the time. But I think it had been well and truly criticized to me privately since, and at the time it was criticized by [Foy D.] Kohler and subsequently by Tommy [Llewellyn E.] Thompson, both of whom were out of the play on those particular days. And I think it's a great pity that we didn't have the extra reflection, and somebody to draw back from it, and so on. I again take high degree of the blame because it was a crisp, kind of a lawyer's document, with no--with the sharp edges of the argument showing. And I don't think it was one of our good or well-handled--now, I don't think the result would have been different, as with so much else in the whole negotiating history. I can easily be critical, as I think all of us could be, of the particular ways things were handled, without feeling that it necessarily--or even that there was more than the most miniscule chance that it changed the result. I don't think it did in this case at all. I don't think there's much doubt that Hanoi was not ready a bit to respond in any of the ways that could have remotely--by way of cutting down infiltration, cutting it off, whatever it might have been--we really wouldn't have gotten anything started.

And I think the best evidence of that is what began to happen on the ground beginning in mid-May. This you can establish very clearly from

the papers, and my recollection, of course, is that you had a rather more hopeful turn in our view of the situation during April and May. Things seemed to cool down a bit on the ground, and the Vietnamese seemed to be holding together, and so on.

Beginning about May 18--that's the date my papers establish; I'm obviously not saying that from recollection--but beginning along in there, the other side launched an offensive, really a very intense offensive, carefully prepared operations.

M: Was that during the pause?

B: No, this was right after the pause--well, just coincidental with the handling of the pause. I may say, there's one pause episode which was the delivery--with the North Vietnamese fellow in Paris saw the French on the 18th, just as the bombing, in fact, was being resumed, was reported to us in a semi-clandestine fashion on the 19th, I think, and officially on the 20th. We couldn't see much in that. I merely record that if it was anything it was saying, "Perhaps we won't require the Americans to withdraw in advance," but that was taking off veil number one where at least four had to go before we were in business. At any rate, I don't think that was significant, and I don't think there's any doubt that Hanoi wasn't about to move. They knew, I think better than we, as they did I think throughout this period, that they were in a very strong position on the ground. And when they started this offensive May 18th or thereabouts, it went like Gangbusters! That was the most successively, utterly depressing six weeks of action reports I can recall, was May and June of '65. They really were just--not a day without some overpowering ambush or some unit cut to ribbons! And then a couple of naked statements that just jumped out of the page at you! "This batallion is no longer fit for anything!"

It had disappeared, or gone over, or what had happened to it? You didn't even know! And you just got the feeling very rapidly and progressively that the Rot had really set in.

Coincidentally, it came apart politically. The government of [Dr. Phan Guy] Quat, which had gone in in late February; and incidentally, another element in my account of the February-March period is that this was the period when Khanh was finally being invited over the side, and when Quat came in. Now, Quat was a good fellow.

M: Quat's the one civilian, isn't he?

B: Yes, he had been the Foreign Minister--Dr. Quat. I'd known him at Manila the preceding year; we all had respect for him; he seemed a possibility. He actually--had been thought of Prime Minister way back in '55, as I was able to recall from my exposure at that time. But anyway his government came apart in May because of the Southern-Northern business-attack by the Southerners--it just couldn't hold on. And the upshot, which didn't happen until June 19th, was the new Ky and Thieu government--the military directorate in effect, which seemed to all of us the bottom of the barrel, absolutely the bottom of the barrel! It had to stop here, there wasn't any place to go after that. The civilians had failed, the military had not done it well up to that point, many military people had been sloughed off, this was the last holding-point, you might say, in the government.

So this was the backdrop for the set of thinking that went into the July 28 final decision. Now, the papers are I think quite full on this. The Pentagon papers are very full on exactly what was decided when and where in relation to force strengths. And we got ourselves in this period into this unfortunate element contributing to the credibility gap that we were so reluctant--and I think this was a Presidential order--to disclose

that our forces were really engaged in combat. We ended up acknowledging it through McCloskey, the State Department spokesman, at a time when the papers had been saying it for days, you know. In this respect, I think you'd have to say the President's policy of not biting the bullet at any point in a public sense, and saying, "This is what we're doing and why we're doing it," of not letting it be said even at a senior level, "This is what we're doing," sowed dragon's teeth in terms of this credibility gap charge. He played the cards so very close to his chest, and one is bound to say that this was his influence and his choice. It always would be in many things, it would be in anything, of course, really, but this was very particularly his way of doing it. And the question for exploration by the real scholar of as difficult a period as any President of the United States has ever passed through, is how did all of this relate to what he was trying to do to get the Great Society enacted on the Hill. This is the contrapuntal theme, and I don't understand how it related; but it's obvious that it cut across. It was as if you were studying a planet's motion in astronomy, and you realized it was 45 degrees off the course you'd expected, and there must be some very attractive body in the area that was pulling it off course. This happened in the way the President was reluctant, in effect, to announce anything that resembled a new policy in February. It happened in the reluctance to reveal how far we were in fact going with limited numbers of ground forces; it had, I'm sure, everything to do with the change in the form of the decisions of July 28; that is, the last six-days change in the form of those, which I'll come to in a minute. But in June--well, everybody who was reading the reports could sniff, gee, you could just sniff rot. Max Taylor was brought back. The end of June we had a whole series of papers that included

one by George Ball saying "This is it. We can't hack it. Cut it out!" Not because he didn't believe that it would be very serious for Southeast Asia if we did, but he said, "You really can't make it. I saw what happened to the French, and you can't make us that much different no matter how powerful we are; and it'll wreck us, as we flounder and fluff," as he saw it, "wreck us in Europe," and so on and so on. Well, his papers speak for themselves.

M: This is a real strategic dissent rather than a tactical one?

B: Yes, a real strategic dissent. Now, there was a line of thought, which my own name is to a degree attached to, that said--let's say, we were at 75,000, by the end of June, forces in there--that said, "Let's go up slowly, because it's going to be very tricky to handle with the South Vietnamese, it may cause them to lie low and think Uncle Sam will do it; it's impact across the board is not one we can now assess; and can't we go slow?" And you can find in the papers that both Ambassador Taylor and Ambassador Johnson were a little inclined in this direction as of the end of June.

Now, certainly speaking for myself, I can say that I no longer held that point of view by mid-July when McNamara came back. That's worth saying, because there's no superseding paper saying, "Mr. President, I now feel that the middle course I have suggested to you in my memorandum of July 1 is just not the thing to do. But I did join--what I want to say is I joined heartily and emphatically in the decision to go hard and fast up, which was essentially the decision of July 28; and this July 1 memorandum, which the DOD historians have made a good deal of, was what so much is when you have this kind of a grave thing. "Let's see how this one looks." I've never known one of these real anguished decisions which didn't produce people

taking different positions at different times in the discussion. You're just bound to try it out, and in this case the President expressed interest in the line of thought, and so I wrote it up at his request, as I recall, in a memorandum to him which appears in the papers. And it reflected [thought], I think, at the time.

Now, there was a great deal of anguish at that time among the papers that are not available in the library and that certainly are of some interest; not because they went to the President, which they didn't. But I had an exchange of correspondence with five Asian Ambassadors which went to the two Secretaries and to Mac, at least, and may have had some minor impact, worrying the issue, getting their judgment--this was [Edwin O.] Reischauer in Japan, [Winthrop G.] Brown in Korea, [Edward E.] Rice in Hong Kong--our best China man--[Graham] Martin in Bangkok, and [William H.] Sullivan in Vientiane. And I wrote them a letter saying, "I think the situation is going to hell in a hand-basket, and we face the choice of a lot more bombing, a lot more forces, of some combination, or letting it go and seeing whether there's a fall-back line in Southeast Asia."

The returns--to summarize them very quickly--were, "There <u>is</u> no other line in Southeast Asia." Martin, most emphatically, but Sullivan only secondly, just said, "There is no holding point in Thailand." I mention this because I think, in this respect, this exchange contributed an important element of the background in thinking. I'm trying to study this more thoroughly at the moment; it's the only thing I think it worthwhile to study--what were the judgments, the sort of center of gravity of government thinking--that there was no fall-back line in Southeast Asia, really, unless you acted? Thailand would be in desperate shape.

And I recall, and I've never been able to place in my mind, nor has Bob McNamara, the only person I've talked to about it. At one meeting with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara--it could have been any time between February and July, I don't recall it--when there had been a CIA estimate of the consequences in Southeast Asia of our just letting it go, of its going in circumstances where it sppeared there was more we could have done. That's the case you really had. And the estimate was, as sometimes was the case with those estimates, not all that easy to put together. I mean, it sort of took each one individually. Rather than saying, "Alright now, we say there's a 70 percent chance, let us say, or 80 percent chance, that Laos and Cambodia go. All right, then take that as the premise from which you examine Thailand." It really didn't do that. It tended to sort of give you the initial reaction in each one rather than an accumulative. At any rate, with that estimate, I wrote another of these deliberately devil's advocate papers, saying, "Conceivably, we could waffle through if you read this estimate, maybe there are things we could do," and so on and so on. And I recall bringing that in and arguing it briefly with both Secretaries, and their just saying, "Uh-uh! It won't wash!" And whether that was February or July, it to me was a very important point in the thinking of that group of the President's advisers. And I think this is an important general conclusion that there hardened in the two Secretaries, and I think in my brother Mac's mind, and progressively, despite my efforts, which I thought was my job, to argue the other side I became absolutely convinced, absolutely convinced, by early July that there was no half-way, there was no fall-back, it was either you were or you weren't going to do this, and it was going to be a very tough this.

Now another important point, which I'm not satisfied in my own mind about, and which is well worth asking a great many people because different

impressions existed in different people's minds. What did we really think the chances of being successful were going to be in this thing? Well, there, I have personal recollection that's worth recording, that in at least one anguished meeting along toward the latter part of June--I think this is in the period of what was called the Ball Project, and George was writing one thing and I was writing another and somebody else was writing a third. Secretary McNamara had come in with a memorandum that in effect said, "Yes, a lot more," and so on; and then he went out, and all the rest of us [met]. But this is the latter part of June, the first gestation period.

One session where somebody said, "Now really, let's just peel everything off, what are the overall aggregate chances that we can bring this thing out in any kind of shape in accord with our central objective of South Viet Nam running its own affairs?

And I quoted a 35 percent overall chance of that. I didn't attempt to fill out the spectrum of odds. I suppose that if I had filled it out, I think I would have filled it out that there was a very substantial chance of very early failure; the government was so shaky in South Viet Nam, an overpowering feeling at the time that Ky took office that it just wouldn't--that the odds were very significant for that reason along that you'd end up failing. But I argued, and I argued in the exchange with the Ambassadors, and I certainly argued orally at the time, very strongly that even if the chances of early failure were very substantial, as we took them to be, that you had to make the try.

M: Because of the lack of fall-back position?

B: That you wouldn't be that much worse off having made the try; and you'd be very significantly better off in terms of the chances of establishing any

other area. In other words if the United States didn't make this try, the Thai would just, oh, cash their chips, Bingo!, in some fashion, through some form of accommodation or conceivably a change of government to a leftist neutralist crowd, or something of that sort. And the way would be open for the irreversible trend to red-colored mush that was the essence of our forecast for Southeast Asia at the period. So, my own view was a very bearish one. I said, "This has got to be attempted!" I doubted--Ball's papers doubted--that American forces would really be even militarily effective. We weren't all that clear that they could find and fix and hit the enemy. We weren't clear how they'd react--how Americans would react to the climate, on a massive scale. Sure, your picked units were going to be good, but suppose you got beyond your picked units? We weren't clear on a lot of those things. We weren't clear that it wouldn't cause a massive revulsion by the South Vietnamese people; that the Viet Cong wouldn't be able to propagandize them to very great effect that this was the white man's war. We were afraid that there might be a racial aspect in Asia, an aspect that I may say we discussed among ourselves in our Ambassadors' meeting in Baguio [P. I.] and to my surprise got a rather strong consensus that Asia did not look at it in a racial fashion--the bombing, or any other aspect. And I think that was borne out, except for India. Curiously, the further you get from the scene the more it gets a racial cast. It has had a racial cast in India, to some in India, to many in Africa; but you don't get it around the circuit in East Asia. And my witness for that is Carl Rowan who participated in that Baguio meeting, and who subsequently took it on himself to find out a lot about it; and Carl, being the man he is in every respect, was just the man to do that.

But anyway, there were all manner of doubts, and my center of gravity was pessimistic. I find in the file long cables from Alex [U. Alexis]

Johnson, in which one sentence jumps out of the page, "This is going to be a long war!" Alex was bearish. And so I can pinpoint a few sets of attitudes about what people thought. John MacNaughton actually committed his to paper, and I'll let the paper speak for itself: odds on a reasonably successful outcome, an inconclusive situation, or failure, carried forward for three years. My own feeling was that there was thus this very bearish strand that was in some sense conveyed to the President. I can't honestly say that I conveyed this direct to the President, I don't recall having done so. But certainly the fact that nobody challenged George Ball's very bearish thing had this well and truly before the President. Now, others may have been much more optimistic, thought that we could clean it up quicker and so on and so on. I don't believe that was true of the military advice from General Wheeler or others, but I've been struck in some recent conversations that a person such as Secretary Clifford, at that point one of the elder statesmen quietly being consulted, appears to have formed a very much more optimistic view at this period. There was this group of elder statesmen that was brought in on July 8 that ranged from [Dean] Acheson, [Omar] Bradley, people of that stripe, over to Larson and Hoffman--Arthur Larson and Paul Hoffman--who were the dovish members of that group, if you want to use those horrible labels.

M: Is there a danger in that technique, in that the people brought in in situations like that are really not in a position to know the facts, not having lived with them. As you say, Mr. Clifford, for example, formed an opinion that was contrary perhaps to those who were more closely connected with it? Is that a normal danger?

B: I think it's a very great danger.

M: Because Mr. Clifford does that several times. This is not the first.

B: No, that's right. Those successive meetings were rather dubious, I think, because you simply--it always drove me wild, frankly, just from the professional standpoint, that while we could prepare and did prepare, and I have the folders used for these senior statesmen in July '65--some parts of it--I have another one during the fall of '67--they invariably came in, rushing down on the shuttle, you know, and didn't have time to read the papers; there would be this evening meeting in which you'd feed them too well, and everybody would have one more drink than is useful for really hard thinking during the night--I'm being a little blunt about this, I don't mean to caricature it, because these men took this exceedingly seriously. But the facts of time and what you can convey--how do you convey the nugget of the situation? And I think we were always, in effect--there was immense danger of simply mirror-imaging your own thinking. How in thunder do you get people, because try as you will to be as honest as you know how--and I know we did try--you get that effect. Well, I don't know what Acheson--this group has its own; they have a rather special perspective on government thinking, not so much Acheson, because he was in and out a great many times. And of course I frankly say I used to talk quite a good deal about my feelings of how things were going with him from time to time--

M: It would be unusual if you didn't given the family connections [Acheson is William Bundy's father-in-law].

B: So, he's not the one to sort of say, "What was your real view?" But what impression did Bradley have? What impression did George Kistiakowsky have? Now there's a man who interests me very much. I'd like to get back at him in Cambridge, because George became very disillusioned with the whole thing at a later stage, after he had worked on the Jason projects and the Barrier and all the rest. Along somewhere in the course of the

year 1967 he decided that the government was not doing this right--or it had been a wrong idea--I'm not quite clear what the combination was; but I recall very clearly that in July '65 he was very firm for acting. Now what impression did he have on the chances of success? This I can't reconstruct. And I think it's a very important thing to understand because what that group had may or may not be what the President had, but it enters into the total atmosphere of the whole decision which was surely his most critical single decision.

M: Is there a big decisive meeting on this decision like there was after Pleiku, for example, in February?

B: Well, as I reconstruct it, and this needs checking against the papers, George Ball's day in court was really in the latter part of June and the very beginning of July. And the President then had McNamara go out and say, "What is it needs doing--how drastically--?" and so on. I have the feeling the President's mind was rather clearly, "We've got to do this!" but he had a check run, in effect, by having this elder statesmen's group in and they pretty unanimously said, "You've got to face up to this one, and do whatever is necessary, even if it gets you into a Korean scale of war," and so on. And that's another question, of course, "Was the scale anticipated?" My impression is very clearly in the sense that for manpower alone, you had to estimate 330,000 the following year; and after all, how different is that from where you wound up? What scale the bombing program would assume, above all the budgetary costs and their implications for the Great Society, I do not know how that came to the President or in what form. This I simply don't know. I can only assume that he at least thought generally about it, possibly he had somebody really go through it. But I just imagine a great many imponderables could have come into that--how

in thunder were you going to cost what the Great Society would really do, when you hadn't got a third of it yet enacted into law?

Well, see Kistiakowsky on that subject, to get the sense of what government people conveyed. I have a list of questions, and I have short notes on what I would say in response to those questions. Whether I said it or not I don't know. But in other words, I have my talking paper for the meeting with this senior group. Well that should be an honest statement, a sort of benchmark of government thinking, but I can't say--you never can say--what impression you make, you and all the others. By this time I don't recall who spoke to the group, who briefed them, who talked to them. I remember them sitting around the table, and physical flashes come back, of sitting next to Kistiakowsky at lunch, of sitting in the Secretary of State's conference room with this group.

And they went over to see the President, and what they thought and said is an important part of the strands of advice he was getting. And it would come near to recording how the case was being put to the jury. Well, my feeling was the President had decided really that he was going to act and act on a very major scale--the question was how. And then you come to the climactic meetings, which were two; and which were very, very climactic!

One was a meeting at which Secretary McNamara practically--very fresh from having returned and I must say, parenthetically, I wish we could install a resort in the middle of the Pacific and force a forty-eight hour decompression period on people each way on any trip to the Asian theater. McNamara was incredible in his own physical and mental capacity to overcome fatigue, but the sheer haste to report to the President--there was just no time for second thoughts on these trips far too often. But in any case, I don't believe there would have been second thoughts. That's very much a

parenthesis that simply pops into my mind. It really doesn't affect--I don't mean to suggest for a minute that more reflection would have produced different results, because there had been a hell of a lot of reflection on this one for a long, long while. It just, I think as a general rule we rush things too much. We let ourselves become slaves of time to an excessive degree. Well, he stated the force need, and he had worked out with the usual thoroughness the implications which, in effect, were a very major supplemental at once and a call-up of the reserves so that we would be in a position to send roughly 330,000 by that time the following year. The recommendation to the President was that he decide now that we would go up by the end of 1965 to something on the order of 175,000--all of these numbers, of course, are subject to check; but I read the papers and I think this is accurate. And that we should put ourselves in the position to go up as high as 330 the following year, but no decision was being taken beyond the 175 and that even that would be subject to the play of the hand. If it turned out the South Vietnamese collapsed, implicitly obviously you couldn't go on, or at least you'd have a whole new ballgame; and you could have a more favorable ballgame conceivably, but it was hardly thought that it would conceivably turn favorably without going at least to the 175, so that everybody expected we would, barring collapse.

Well, at the first meeting, the President went through this, "Is this right? What are the alternatives? George Ball, tell me what you think the alternatives are. What is this case? That case?" It was a bit of a set piece though, I have to say. I don't feel that this was where the decision was being made in all honesty--you had that feeling about that meeting. You had the feeling that--I think McNamara had already reported at dawn to the President and gone over it--you felt it had been scripted

to a degree. Now, this was all the senior advisers; it was a major meeting--I'm not sure it was billed as an NSC or not, but it was a real meat and potatoes meeting. People could have chimed in and said things even if the stage was set. It was not, again, in a parenthesis, as it was in the case for a number of the NSC meetings where they were really simply recitals, quite frankly. I think that's an important thing to say. There was that aspect to quite a few of the NSC meetings under President Johnson. You knew nothing was going to be decided; this was so everybody would understand what it was that was going on and what the view was, and the Secretary of State would recite, and the Secretary of Defense would recite--it was a recital kind of thing.

M: Means of consulting--

B: It was a means of consulting people and of dignifying the institution, but it really wasn't the nitty-gritty. Now this was a nitty-gritty meeting, but it was one where you felt the President had already started to formulate. And, as I recall, he talked at the end, "As I see it, we have one, two, three, four--," and the way he depicted them was an advocate's depiction of them--I mean, very gifted advocate's depiction of them, but it was perfectly clear. He said, "This leads nowhere; this leads nowhere; this leads nowhere; the only thing that leads anywhere at all is this one." He wasn't saying, "This is it, we're going to clean the place up in a year," at all. At all! That flavor didn't exist in these discussions. There was a recognition of difficulty held, I'm sure, in somewhat differing degree among those present, but very much a part of the whole thing. This was a dark and lowering sky, and there was no pretense that it was otherwise.

But then you had--going through it--and then the President said, "All right, this would call for the reserves," and so on and so on.

At that meeting, he said nothing that I can recall about what this meant in terms of the Congressional timetable or the domestic programs or how he'd sell it to the country, and so on. A lot of people were commissioned to come back and talk about these matters.

Well, I forget the exact series of dates, but it was roughly a four or five day span from Meeting A to Meeting B, and there was an enormous change. I got word that the Pentagon wheels were grinding, and so on and so on; but I knew nothing more about it, at least as I now recall I didn't. But new papers came out, two, three, or four days later, quite rapidly, with the same basic decisions, but an entirely different way of implementing. Such that the supplementals as there would be, would be the routine range rather than the special range--I don't know exactly the figures, but that's the way I'd characterize it--and that you would not call the reserves, that through increased draft calls and other measures, you would get through and be able to get the manpower you needed and it could be done. Well, I can't say in so many words what happened, but it seems an inescapable inference that the President sent Secretary McNamara back to the drawing boards, because he had looked in the eye the consequences of a course of action involving taking the matter, on you might say a decisive and great debate basis, to the Congress at that particular moment of time. My recollection doesn't establish--I don't think I have any decent papers on it--any other basis for that change in view; but the upshot was a resubmission of the same decision, but in a form that didn't require a great debate, and just put a different cast on it. And that the Presidential statement would do the work, and there would not be a great debate.

M: Sort of consistent with his view on the bombing in February, and in the troop activity--

B: In a sense, it is. And this is a point I mentioned myself, I think, earlier. And it is a very important aspect of the decision as you look back on it. And it's one on which I can throw no light at all. People have said, "It would have made all the difference," Bill Moyers has said it in print. I can't suppose any of us who lived through this thing and thought and thought again about what might have been done differently would leave this off our checklist. Suppose you had gone to the country and gotten a real mandate, as I think you would have got; but suppose it would have cost you thirty or forty percent--say there were ten key Great Society measures and you lost three or four overboard--I think there's no doubt the President wanted the best of both and this was his way of trying to get the best of both. I would compare his way of going about it with Roosevelt in 1939-41. That's one very broad comparison, perhaps one that would have occurred to him because he'd seen how FDR operated in that period, but it was a major decision as observed from where I sat. The transition from Meeting A to Meeting B was a very important transition; and, in effect, when the President summed up Meeting B, he included an option that was the option that everybody had endorsed at Meeting A. In other words, at Meeting A, everybody went around and said, "That's the right thing to do." Meeting B said, "Well, we had this one, here's its disadvantages," and I don't recall how he summed them up and that's the key point. But he went on and said, "Now, we do the same things, but we do them without this, and that's how we do it," and everybody again endorsed it. The feeling of both meetings was unanimous, with the clear exception of Ball. (end of tape)

INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM BUNDY (Tape 3)

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

May 29, 1969 (continuation of Tape 2)

M: Just go right ahead, from that 28th of July decision.

B: Part of the thing that I'm not clear on, just when it came to the fore; and I rather think this, too, was between what I've described as Meeting A and Meeting B, and dates and attendance I hope will be established on the papers. But at some point in that last week or ten days before July 28, it came to the fore that the President, as part of this decision, wanted a very intensive effort made to see if we could really get toward peace through negotiation. This is a very important part which I don't find really recorded in any of my papers; but my distinct recollection would be that a part of Meeting B, at least, and it may have been in Meeting A but I rather think it was not, that Meeting B included in effect a laying on of hands to George Ball to go forth and get peace if it could possibly be accomplished, and between now and the end of the year. My recollection is that that was at a meeting and in open court, as it were, in what I described as Meeting B, the decisive-action meeting. At any rate, what is crystal clear to me is that on or about the day of decision or within a day or two after, George called me in and said, "I have the mission from the President of doing everything that can possibly be done about peace, and getting cracking with it forthwith."

Now, that leads to a story that is a significant story, does not appear in any account of the negotiations, is in the files, was known to only a very few, and is a very important chapter in things--how we handled it, what was done. In looking at what might be done, you had an attempt through Ambassador [Arthur] Goldberg to rev up the United Nations, but

this had always the limitations and the problems we'd always seen in that forum. Perhaps it could produce some kind of a consensus in the Security Council; we certainly looked hard at that, as we did again in February of '66, and this was an honest try. But if you were really talking, getting to grips with Hanoi, it seemed unlikely that you'd do it even, let us say, in the wings of a Security Council proceeding.

M: You can be honest and realistic at the same time.

B: Sure. Exactly. And I might add that certainly in the United Nations session that followed Tonkin in August of '64 there was the American position of being prepared to see the North Vietnamese come, if they would come, and they rejected it. They turned it down. They did the same in '65; we were pretty clear by August of '65 that even if you thought in terms of getting somebody into the same place along the East River and holing up with them quietly in cafes, this was probably a non-starter. The United Nations proceedings in the formal sense always appeared limited in their impact. They could record the sense of people, and they could help to bring a sort of sense of world opinion, they were a forum in which you could defend what you'd done--a lot of things could be done at the United Nations. But in the formal sense, it seemed unlikely it could become engaged effectively then and later. But even the sort of back-alley aspect had become very dim in the light of Hanoi's refusal to have anything to do with it, which remained, incidentally, consistent throughout and extended to some very cold shouldering of U Thant while he eventually made some overtures in the spring of '67. That's another story.

Well, George Ball then produced very early in August an idea that eventually, well, very shortly, took shape as what we knew in the trade as the XYZ Project; and this, I am sure, was known and reported to the President and must have been, in essence, authorized by him--I have no direct, personal knowledge of a meeting or meetings or discussions in which this was done.

The XYZ Project was to get a specific American, Ambassador [Edmund A.] Gullion, to go and to establish contact with the North Vietnamese representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo, and to sit down quietly with him and say, "Now, I am in a position to know the views of my government. Here's what they are; what are your reactions? Let's sit down and really talk about this. Let's get something very real started here." It would be a particular kind of effort that would be conducted under the most clandestine circumstances, and in such a way that it would be at least in some degree disavowable; that we could, if it were surfaced by Hanoi, say, "Well, this was an American interested in the thing, acting on his own," but equally that Hanoi would in fact recognize that this man spoke with real authority; that this was the American method of getting in touch with them--a method which we supposed was similar to what, at least generally, we understood had taken place in the fall of '53 in the form of contacts in Stockholm that preceded Geneva between the French and Hanoi. The technique seemed to us one that was likely to be understood and commend itself to them if they were serious. The choice of the man, which was George's, was, it seemed to me, brilliant. Gullion had been Ambassador in the Congo, above all had served in Saigon, and had been a well-known proponent of early and full independence for Viet

Nam; he was known and I think had had some contact with North Vietnamese. Most of his work had been in Saigon in the very early '50's.

M: A career professional, too?

B: A career professional, who had left the service for reasons irrelevant to this story, who was the Dean at Fletcher School up in Cambridge, who had complete dedication to the policy we were pursuing, had no doubt of the policy we were pursuing. At the same time, he believed that a major effort toward peace was the right thing to do. Very quickly, the moment he came in to talk to George about it, it was clear that Gullion was an ideal choice. And in the event, I think he performed one of those remarkable and unsung services that don't get in the history books.

Well, he came in; he worked with Ball, and I looked at the products and made some suggestions, but the two of them primarily were responsible for a draft which was an imaginative effort to take Hanoi's four points, which had by then become the Bible of their position--announced in April, reannounced in July, emphasized enormously in an interview with LeMonde on July 14. And take the third point, the one which said, "The future of the South must be determined in accordance with the program of the national liberation front," and, in effect, take the fuse out of it through language that would say, "that the future of the South should be determined in accordance with the wishes of the South Vietnamese people," without specific reference to the program at the front, which was the hooker--clearly the hooker.

At the same time, to establish through rather slight verbal changes in the other three Hanoi points, that we were, in fact, prepared to let North Viet Nam alone, to see a South that was neutral, to withdraw our

forces, stressed and made very clear in the way we put the thing. In short, to go just as far as we could, to use just as much of Hanoi's terminology as we could, while saying, in effect, "The one thing we cannot accept in any way, shape, or form, is your point three; but if you can agree that the people of the South will have the opportunity to determine their own future through some form or process left to be discussed, then we have a basis for discussions."

In effect, it was taking Hanoi's position that the four points must be the basis for discussions and saying, "We can't accept that in the way we read the four points," and part of the object of the exercise was to get an interpretation of that, "But we could accept as a basis for discussion a revised statement that follows the headings, and a great deal of the substance of the four points, and this is what we should seek to achieve." I thought at the time it was a very imaginative way to go about it, and I still think so. It's not an irrelevant story even in '68-'69.

M: Gives them every chance to think they--

B: It gave them all the words you could possibly give them, but you kept the core of the substantive, vital position.

Well, Gullion went over and he had a meeting with Mai Van Bo, Hanoi's man in Paris. The first meeting was chilly, but that did not turn it off, it kept the channel going. He went back and the second meeting was rather forthcoming, or so it appeared.

M: By this time, it's what? September or October--?

B: No, about this time you're at August 18.

M: This was done very rapidly then?

B: --very quickly, very quickly. The 18th, along in there, the first two meetings. And we were sending him instructions on a very private back channel in Paris, available only to the Ambassador; and we were sending couriers, in some cases, wherever we could. I'm not clear just how--we did one and the other at different times. Ben Read was, as always, in the center of the whole thing; and the file was kept in Ball's office only: the whole project was known in government, to the best of my knowledge, only to the President, my brother, McNamara, Rusk, George Ball, Read and myself.

M: Small team, again.

B: I would think MacNaughton was aware of it. I would think MacNaughton--he almost was always privy on anything that McNamara knew about. But I don't think it was known to the Chiefs.

Now, then there comes Gullion's return for instructions--if it was going to be played, what was it going to be played like? And the next phase, if we had something here? The second meeting gave some promise, and there were remarks of all sorts--remarks about the bombing, remarks about the guts of the situation, as hair-down a session as I think we have ever had with the North Vietnamese, in effect. And it also seemed to authenticate that this man was a serious interlocutor, and that he seemed to take us seriously. Well, Gullion came back for instructions. One of the decisions that was made at that period was that we should, in effect, authenticate the channel by including in a press conference, as I recall by the Secretary of State, a form of words that we had not used before, but which Gullion had used in Paris. In other words, Gullion was telling Bo, "I'm going back, and I'll find out more about this," and

we, in effect, come out with a thing that contains a form of words that nobody in the world will spot except to say, "Well, that's an interesting form of words," but it happened to be verbally identical with Gullion's.

M: Mai Van Bo would spot it.

B: He would spot it. Then he would realize, "This is the--in effect, the radio signature that authenticates that this is the United States government, in fact, talking to me through this fellow."

Well, Gullion went back finally at the end of August. I may have these dates wrong, but I think it's the last week in August. And at the same time, as the result of the on-going bombing program, and this was one of those cases where interplay of bombing and negotiations may have been significant--may have been significant--I do not believe it would have been in most of the other cases where it's alleged that it was; but in this case, I've always wondered. And it was wholly inadvertent, no new authorizations were given. Bob McNamara was well and truly aware that this was very sensitive, that an important effort was underway and was holding down the authorizations. But in some fashion one or two of our missions did hit dikes in North Viet Nam; they were not significant dikes, they may well have been valid parts of the communications network--dikes carried roads and so on; but a limited amount of flooding was caused--very limited, I believe. But this really hit--or it conceivably may have hit, I can't say categorically that it did, but I'll tell what happened--a North Vietnamese nerve that we were trying to pulverize them into agreeing with what we wanted in the negotiating arena. I've always had a grave doubt in my mind whether it did--and this was really inadvertent. We could have stopped the bombing altogether, but we thought

that would have been a tip-off. The intent was to go along in the same key--avoid anything new or provocative. And I'm not sure we achieved it. There may have been, through nobody's fault--perhaps we could have said, "Don't hit dikes," I don't know--we had rules of that sort at different times. I'm not quite clear there. This is a subject to look at. There may have been some changes in the rules of engagement later on. Well, in any event, what happened was this:

Gullion had a third interview which we thought might really get us down to cases. Along about--well, it had to be put off a day or two because of the North Vietnamese anniversary, which is September 2. And concurrently, one of the major North Vietnamese leaders had arrived in Paris--I think it was Le Duc Tho himself, who was subsequently to figure in '68 and '69. And when Gullion finally got to Bo, Bo was cold as ice, and attacked us vehemently on the bombing. I'm not clear whether he mentioned the dikes specifically, but this was the thrust. And the channel never came back to life for practical purposes. There was some further interesting talk, I think it ran out to something in the total of five or six meetings altogether, but I haven't checked the files; and it ran into early October so that we had to scramble madly to protect Gullion in his resumption of the academic year, just as we had to scramble two years later to protect Henry Kissinger under similar circumstances. But it had reached an apparent no-progress situation--it was too much to say it was an impasse, but it was a no-progress situation by October--and Gullion had to come back and said, "I really just can't carry this."

And at that point, George [Ball] had another brilliant inspiration, which was to enlist the services of a man named Paul Sturm to take over

the channel. Paul was a retired foreign service officer, living in Spain by choice, a dedicated and devoted man who had served in Hanoi as Consul, or in the Consulate at any rate, in the '50-'54 time frame, or perhaps earlier. But at any rate, he had well and truly served in Hanoi. A subtle and sophisticated mind, a man whom I had known as a teacher of French at Yale, as it turned out, and whom George had known through his work with the French government in this period and through his overall contact with Indo-China in the early '50's, which had been very extensive. And which contributed to his thinking in a very forceful way.

At any rate, Sturm was enlisted and was brought in, and a whole code system of cables telling him to make certain financial transactions and so on, purporting to be messages from his broker, was devised to tell him to get to Paris and get some instructions and so on. And we had various things. And he tried again at some time, my recollection would be from late October to mid-December, along in that time frame, but he never was able to rekindle it. In fact, he was demoted in effect to contact with Bo's deputy, and total episode added up in the end to that Hanoi wasn't ready to play or move.

Well, since I'm talking negotiations, this is as good a time as any to move on to the pause decision in Christmas of '65.

M: There's a publicized outside attempt in that same period, the Italian channel. Isn't that the time [Giorgio] LaPira and [Amintore] Fanfani--?

B: Yes, LaPira and Fanfani and so on--that was outward and visible. I never thought it had substance, and I don't think so today. LaPira was a self-promoting kind of a guy. It was a case, well--the fall of '65 had had the LaPira episode, but before that and certainly much more damagingly,

it had the [Eric] Sevareid article on Adlai Stevenson's recollections of the whole 1964 U Thant thing, told in a way very critical of the way it had been handled. [Look, November 30, 1965] I have a correspondence with Eric on this subject; I think it was a basic unfairness, in part to Adlai, and in part to the government, to put this out as really what happened. I mean, sure, people say things and there's a school of thought that argues that if a man said it, that's history in itself. But I think there's a higher degree of responsibility to check and reflect. But that's parenthetical. But, anyway, that had been a very damaging episode. And then the LaPira thing in December. (I may say that the Sevareid disclosure caused us to scramble in ways that I've already described to try to reconstruct what had happened, because we really couldn't seem to do it very effectively. And I don't think the file is all that good now.) But the LaPira thing--LaPira reported his findings to his government; Fanfani in turn very eagerly conveyed it to Goldberg in New York. And we immediately took it very seriously and had a message back for Goldberg to give to Fanfani. But before that could be delivered, somebody had talked to Dudman, a reporter. The somebody I've always understood to be a New York lawyer who had been informed of the whole thing through representatives of the [Harry] Ashmore crowd in Santa Barbara, who knew LaPira; LaPira had talked to them about it; they in turn had talked to this lawyer; this lawyer had, and I think perhaps on his own because I have accused Ashmore and [William] Baggs of having been responsible for this, and they swear they weren't. Be that as it may--this is trivial. But in any case, it was leaked. [Richard] Dudman of the [St. Louis] Post Dispatch printed a piece on it, and we then felt, in the wake of

the Sevareid article, we had to make the whole correcpondence public, which we did, telling the Italians at the last minute that we were going to have to do it. I think they understood why we had to. And that, of course, meant that it was bound to come to nothing, but in point of fact, there wasn't anything new in what LaPira had brought back. There really wasn't anything, and our reply was a restatement, and in the light of what we were doing and had been doing and were about to do in the pause and all else, I don't think it's a significant episode. It was much more on sound and fury than substance.

M: The reason I brought it up really was that you mentioned other instances where it was said that bombing damaged the channel. This was another one of those cases--

B: Well, there was one additional bombing somewhere along the way in the course of that, but that wasn't really--that was never really complained about in any way that we're aware of. At least, I can't think of any way in which it was complained about--I'm not sure. Kraslow and Loory may make a lot of this one, but frankly in the catalog of the infinite number of various efforts, the LaPira one would, to me, drop out the bottom as one that had any substance. This is a guy who, bushy-tailed and eager, talked to Ho--Ho or, I've forgotten, it may have been Ho or Pham Van Dong gave him the straight party line. He thought he had something new because he didn't know the party line; we recognized it for what it was and went back with an exploratory message that went as far as we could possibly think of to go. And then the publicity cut right across, and I think that was just plain--this New York fellow, whoever he may have been, was just plain uninformed.

M: [Peter] Weiss, was that who it--?

B: That's the name I've heard, but I don't know this for a fact.

M: That's the Kraslow and Loory name.

B: That's probably right, but I think Kraslow and Loory got this kind of thing pretty straight. Well, the more important thing and the one most directly involving the President, because I don't recall the President personally taking a hand--not from where I sat; undoubtedly he did, but I don't know it--in the handling of the Sevareid thing or the handling of the LaPira thing. He obviously was informed; obviously he made key decisions; Mac would know; I don't. The Secretary would know.

But when you come to the pause thing, I do have quite a bit in the file which indicates "think" pieces on the subject starting in late October. And George Ball urging it, others starting to think about it, McNamara starting to urge it very strongly in early November. And the Secretary of State initially skeptical--Alex Johnson initially skeptical. But by the end of November, strong urgings from McNamara. A general favorable attitude toward it, with great reserve that it would do the trick, but a generally favorable attitude on the part of Secretary Rusk. Mac had come to feel it was the right thing to do; I certainly had come to feel it was the right thing to do. And in my case, my file shows careful attempts to block out how you would play it, who you would send where, what channels you might try to open up and see what noise came back on them, et cetera et cetera--how you do it, how long you would do it, how you'd resume if you had to resume--all the things that we put into these scenarios as a matter of habit. We had the lessons of May, where we didn't think we'd done a very good job--"Let's think this

one through; exactly how do we convey the message," and so on and so on, the whole thing.

So by early December, about the first of December according to the DOD papers I've looked at and that would accord with my own recollection, this was a topic being submitted to the President from his senior advisers as something to take seriously and to think hard about.

Now, the President, was, if I recall correctly, in Texas most of that month--in and out, came back and forth on two or three occasions--but was there during most of that month. And not for the first time, this made it more difficult to operate, quite frankly. It limits your channels of communication; you don't have a chance to talk quietly to him; it's just, from where I sat, it put a significant impediment in the way of government. And obyiously the President needed the time away, it gave him strength that Texas always gave him, it was obviously a very fruitful time in terms of thinking through the broad outlines of his policy problems, but in terms of tactical handling diplomacy in December of '65 and December of '66, on both occasions I felt it imposed very significant communication handicaps on the conduct of government.

M: He didn't habitually take your brother with him, did he?

B: No, he didn't.

M: Of course, Mr. Nixon does take Kissinger.

B: He didn't take Walt [Rostow] with him. Walt would come and go; and it's not to suggest that the men around him weren't doing anything but an utterly conscientious and thorough job of conveying what was sent down; it is just the difference between teletypes and phone calls and the quiet get-together with three or four people. Because it was just very

difficult to do that: (a) it took a lot of time, (b) it was very hard to conceal. You couldn't simply sneak in, as you can in the West Wing.

At any rate, in '65 the President was in and out of town. I recall a couple of meetings when he was in town, when he got extremely vehement about newspaper dope stories that were suggesting that we would be thinking of a pause. And he said, "Who's leaking? I'm not going to think about this. People are leaking. I haven't had any recommendations on this, and I'm not taking it--" And in a sense, he didn't have recommendations; he had think pieces and things of that sort, but they amounted really by that time in my judgment to recommendations. He got very vehement at that time on the question of leaks, and it seemed to throw him off the possibility of looking hard at doing it. And the scripts were written in terms of starting December 10, or something, so that it would be in progress before you got to the holidays and it would run on through and so on and so on. And I think an important part of the dates that were being put to him, and I don't know whether this was argued to him--it seems to me one of those hindsight things in my own case, I put it forward only in that way; I think it's worth looking at the scripts. And I would suppose, and I don't know this, that oral argument and discussion by Secretary McNamara and others may have made the point that if you make this solid try for two, three, four weeks, whatever, and establish that there is not a response, which we think is the most likely outcome of it--I remember one conversation where somebody said, "It's about a 10 percent chance they'll really respond." We didn't really think it was likely to work, but it was a serious try, it would help to convince people we were trying; and it would be very seriously conducted. There

was never any doubt about that, it was not a charade in anybody's thoughts at any time, but it was just that the objective view of the chances of response was not very high. You'd have it out of the way before the President returned for the State of the Union and the Budget Message and all else. And the question that exists in my mind is was there--a double-question, or a triple possibly, I don't know but I just state it the way it comes to my mind now as one worth exploring--was there a chance to put the issue to the Congress in such a way as to impel a great debate early in the 1966 session? Would that chance have been furthered if the pause had taken place beginning, say, December 10 and run its course by, say, January 15? Might that have made a lot of difference? That's the interplay of the domestic and the foreign hand, and I have no authority on it; but I think it's a question worth raising.

And from the diplomatic standpoint, what happened, in fact, was that the President was brusque in rejecting this: "I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to do it, you don't persuade me." There were lots of arguments about it on the occasions he was in Washington and doubtless the argument raged at the other end in Texas as well. And we went into the Christmas period. And then we had these funny Hungarian approaches just before Christmas. We didn't really believe they were authorized, and the subsequent testimony from the Hungarian chargé Radvanyi, is that they were not; they were a cockshy, in effect, by the Hungarians purporting to have some authority, but in fact not having it. But they were titilating; they were intriguing; they were reported to the President. Here he was coming in and saying something would happen and so on--

More to the point, at some time in, I think toward mid-December, [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin saw my brother Mac very privately, as they did periodically. And Dobrynin said, fairly cold turkey, "We think you should try a pause," and it was depicted as a "pause," I may add. Pause--the dialogue, the whole negotiation of the bombing aspect cannot be understood unless you keep it straight that the discussion was in terms of a pause throughout '65. Not until at least March '66 and in the wake of things, did it harden in the direction of "it must cease permanently or unconditionally." And Dobrynin said if you stop for a realistic period, three weeks, none of this five-day stuff like last spring--that'll never do--stop realistically for three weeks, we will do what we can. We can't guarantee anything, we're not speaking for Hanoi, but we will make a serious effort and there's at least a hope it will produce something. A very sober and realistic message, consistent with my belief that the Russians have never misled us; the Hungarians did, while we were not really fooled; the Poles have played shell-games over and over again--the Russians never!

Well, coming into the Christmas period and into the week before Christmas, it really seemed as though the President had put it to one side. Now, just how the Hungarian approaches and conversations which began the 23rd of December and were immediately reported to the President I'm sure--

M: Was he in town?

B: The President was away, I think, I may be wrong. But I'm sure he was away at Christmastime--I remember the description of the group he had on Christmas Day at the ranch. He was certainly at the ranch on Christmas Day and for several days thereafter.

The Secretary of State would be the only man I know of who could tell you, or Mac conceivably, how the idea in effect rekindled in the President's mind. I know that I went through Christmas, which saw one of these typical Christmas truce, stand-down-the-bombing things, and then all of a sudden it was directed that it hang on for another twenty-four or thirty-six hours. And that came as a complete surprise to me!

I remember on the 27th, which as I recall was a Monday, we still didn't know what the signals really were. But--

M: You knew that the bombing had been halted--

B: But Secretary Rusk had gone to the Hungarian and said, "You can see, it's not being resumed." It was tentative. And the night of the 27th, I remember this very clearly, both my brother and I went to a party for the daughter of Frank Keppel, then the education fellow, and we were summoned out of that at 11:40 at night and showed up in the Department and the Secretary of State was there and said, "The President has decided to go into a real full pause along the lines of the various scenarios that we'd worked on, and we need to draft messages to Moscow and Saigon," and so on. We had to get Thieu aboard--not Thieu, it was Ky really at that point--aboard hard, and we worked on cables until, oh, four o'clock in the morning. That's just a personal vignette, but it dates when it became a clearly known government decision. And the President, I think, had come to that conclusion somewhere about nine in the evening, central time, and it came to us about eleven o'clock in the evening, Washington time. And we went to work and sent it out. And then the word came back that Ky was aboard, and we then went into wholesale full gear.

M: No trouble with Ky on that?

B: Now, I may say--no, no trouble with Ky. What he thought privately was always an enigma, but there was really no trouble.

Now, an important point to note is that what was in fact done in sending Harriman to one set of places, sending Goldberg, sending Governor [G. Mennan] Williams, the whole--

M: Mac went--

B: Mac went to Ottawa--was very much the President's idea. It was not the kind of script that we had drawn in the Department and that we had kicked around and that the Secretaries had seen, and so on and so on. And this was very much the President's personal imprint that it should be done in this highly dramatic fashion. Some have criticized that on the grounds that it made it seem so theatrical that it must have diminished its credibility to Hanoi as a serious act. I myself don't believe that. I really don't believe it for a minute. I didn't think so at the time, but I think so even less, if that's possible, in retrospect. Because even if some of it was public relations, all right; but if Hanoi had been serious, there would have been lots of ways, in the way the multiplicity of different channels gave them forty-six different ways, to push a button and respond. But I think the proof of the pudding is it is perfectly clear that none of this in any way put off the Russians or the Poles or the Hungarians, and that they took it very, very seriously, and in the way that we intended they should. And they acted on it. Now, the evidence at the time was that [Alexander N.] Shelepin was in Hanoi very early in the game and [Jerzy] Michalowski, the Pole--Shelepin, the Russian, and Michalowski, the Pole; Michalowski, the Pole, without public announcement but known to us (I've forgotten how we knew it, but we did) were in Hanoi

and Michalowski for quite a long period, coming back about the 18th of January. We now know a lot more about what happened there, and this is hindsight, but it's something that the serious historian may wish to use. We have Radvanyi's testimony, the Hungarian Chargé who defected to us in May of 1967--told his whole story. I interviewed him twice; the records are in the Department of State and in the Agency. And because of our personal acquaintance and my deep knowledge, I was asked to do this bit. But he says that the Russians acted with the Hungarians and the Poles; Radvanyi's foreign minister, Peter, with [Adam] Rapacki, the Pole; and the two together, as he tells the story, went to Moscow and got together with Gromyko, and they agreed that the man they would send to do the business for the whole bunch of them was Michalowski, the Pole. And Radvanyi has seen and recited to me from the files of the Hungarian foreign office on this subject, which he examined in the summer of 1966. And he says that those files clearly establish that Michalowski went and made a serious and determined effort to persuade Hanoi to take up this bid and enter in negotiations, and that the people in Hanoi told him, "Absolutely no dice! What gave you the idea that this kind of nonsense would bring us into negotiation?"

M: And he was the Russians' man, in effect, according to Radvanyi's testimony?

B: According to Radvanyi's testimony, he was it; he was the "it" for the Eastern bloc. And Michalowski has said some interesting things about that within the last two or three months in the course of a private meeting of some sort with Governor Harriman, and the files on that are available in the Department of State. It throws a little more light, but nothing changes the picture as Radvanyi gave it to us--that Michalowski got a cold turn-down.

Well, I think it's important to put that in, because if history attempts to judge what was undoubtedly the President's personal touch in the way this thing was handled, I think the clear conclusion would be that that didn't throw anything off. To me, it had clear gains at the time. I couldn't judge at the time whether it was operating to make serious opening of channels more difficult; I didn't think so. I think it's clear in hindsight that it didn't have--that operation--Hanoi wasn't bugged because we were playing it up around the world. In essence, you really couldn't have played it down; the fact of the stoppage was in itself such a dramatic thing; and as it was, in effect, you preempted the public information circuits of the world rather than having them flooded with forty-six different kinds of speculation that some guy with dark glasses had been seen going into a cafe with somebody who looked like a North Vietnamese in Nice.

M: None of you could have traveled out of town, for one thing, at all, without being suspect.

B: Yes.

M: This turn-down was reported to us at the time?

B: Here's what actually was visible to us at the time. As January went on, the Russians said--well, I'm not clear what the Russians said, but they readily conceded that we had run on through the period they had suggested. The Poles kept saying, "Hang on, maybe there'll be something," but the next question on our side was, "All right, Michalowski, what gives?"

M: "When?"

B: "He must have brought back something--what did he bring back?" And the deafening silence in response to that question seemed to us an absolutely

clear indication--and subsequently vindicated by all we now know about the Michalowski mission--that he had struck out.

Then, finally, you had Ho's letter which became available to us something about January 24, initially to the Pope, and then to a whole slug of people all around the world, which was a very harsh, tough statement of every fundamental with no change at all. And that seemed to be as much as saying, "All right, damn you, no! Forget it!" And we so read it.

And, meanwhile, we pushed the button twice in Rangoon, where we had established contact during the pause, through Ambassador [Henry] Byroade. and got nothing back whatsoever.

M: You were in contact with the North Vietnamese there?

B: Yes, there was contact in Rangoon, and there was an attempt to establish contact in Moscow, but never really picked up as I recall. At any rate, as the man who had the responsibility for reporting whether the board was lit up red, so to speak--just everything was "no go"--it seemed to me clear from about the 20th on that this was the only report you could make. And for this reason I said, "Of course, we've got to resume; there's no question about it."

And at the last minute there was a flurry. The Poles alleged that there was a change in one verb in the Ho letter. And we immediately checked that with our own translators and found that in the authorized Vietnamese versions, the word was the same that had always been used, and that in the French versions, over a long period of time it had been interchangeable whether one word or another was used; and this was a French version and it was one word rather than another and so on, and

the English translations again had been interchangeable and it didn't seem to me of any significance. But to make assurance doubly sure, we asked the British to go to the North Vietnamese in Moscow, which they did, and got the categorical statement, "There is no change in this portion of the thing."

So we ran that to earth, and then there was an abortive Polish effort of sorts, and I've never known how thoroughly authorized, through Lewandowski, who enters the script at this point--

M: The Poles had an interesting bunch working throughout this whole period.

B: --through Norman Cousins in New York, and this was handled by Governor Harriman and myself, and the files are fully available in the department. I think it may have been very generally known to the President, but the upshot in our clear judgment was this was far too flimsy to justify any serious argument to maintain the pause. So, the long and short of it is that by the 27th, 28th, the unanimous advice to the President was, "The response has been ascertained; it is negative; there is no alternative to resuming."

M: Was there a major debate over resuming that then takes place?

B: I don't recall that there was. I think there were those who would like to see it hang on. I think we have the question of carrying it through the Tet period, which that year came early--I'm not sure, but I rather think late January, I may be wrong. And there were one or two points and so on. But my general recollection is that there was really no doubt; I think there may have been voices raised--I'm not sure Ambassador Goldberg didn't raise his voice for doing it longer--I'm not positive; there may have been one or two who raised his--but they really didn't have a leg to stand on in terms of anything that you could point to.

M: I was thinking in terms of whether or not anybody might have said, "Look, this was a bad investment when we started it ten months ago, but why don't we--this is an opportunity to just forget it."

B: For all I know, that was argued privately to the President. I rather think that had been the feeling--it would have been the feeling of George Ball, or Goldberg, perfectly honestly, and would have been argued. I don't recall it being argued. Tactical arguments were made to carry it on a little bit longer--maybe this, maybe that, maybe we can do something in the U.N., or something. And in the end we did resume. We resumed on the basis of not going slam-bang in the opening bars and so on, which I think was sensible.

And then we took the case to the United Nations, which I thought was a dubious move; but it was sort of exhausting that, and this was a very strong pressure from Senator Mansfield, and the President was usually quite responsive to that--to Mike's views, Senator Mansfield's views.

Well, I've never had any doubt--that's one episode in the diplomatic thing that seems to me absolutely crystal clear. Now, there are lots of hindsight guesses that there was some Politburo meeting, possibly on the 18th of December--hindsight evidence suggests that there was such a meeting and there's even at least one article in the North Vietnamese press or magazines of January that suggests that there was a division of opinion at that meeting. But what I don't think can be contested was that we had no reason to know whether the timing was better or worse. It could have been better to hold; it could have been just the right time; you never could say on that. I don't fault that in any way at all in terms of concept, execution, and so on. And I myself believe that its

advantages immensely outweighed its disadvantages. I know the President, at least so I've been told and I think I've had it first-hand once or twice, came to feel very much the opposite. To me the pause was essential in terms of domestic things alone, but also had an immensely useful impact abroad, particularly in Britain and most particularly in Japan where it literally cooled the whole fever down, and it never thereafter hit anything like, even in mid-'67, it never really hit the peaks it had reached quite frequently during '65.

M: The [Edwin O.] Reischauer book is very clear on that. He doesn't mention the pause, but the timing he goes into extensively--the difference between '65 and '66, say, in Japan.

B: I think it made an immense difference. It immensely lengthened our lease on an adequate level of world-wide support, again, speaking in terms of key quarters. It lengthened our support in this country; it didn't really seriously damage the situation in South Viet Nam that I could detect. I think it was a net plus, myself; that's one man's historical judgment for what it's worth.

But the President never believed that. He thought he had been talked into doing something that was essentially a sucker's move. This has been said often and what little I have to add personally is in total accord with it. He tended to ridicule and downplay those who had taken the lead in urging this, and I think this was, therefore, a significant milestone in his relationship, particularly, with Secretary McNamara. It did not, as far as I could tell, affect his relationship with Secretary Rusk at all. Secretary Rusk had been very reserved about the whole thing, had been, as I judged him, I think rightly, for it; but that didn't affect

him. But Secretary McNamara had taken a very strong lead on this, and I gather, I'm told at least, that [Clark] Clifford and Justice [Abe] Fortas and so on had argued against it, and their influence was strengthened so it is said, but I am in no position to comment on that. I'm simply saying that--

M: Is that what happened to people who argued the wrong way--they just find themselves subsequently less listened to, less effective?

B: Oh, I think that happens in any human setting, and I have to say that I think it happened unusually strongly with President Johnson. He did tend to--well, I'll put it this way. I think he gave all his advisers, including the most senior, the feeling when their advice was not what he thought to have been wise, or if he decided to do it differently, that it was very much recorded how they had stood on an issue. You did use up a great deal of credit if you advised him something that he came to feel was not the right thing to do. And I think that's human. I wouldn't know how to weight him against others in that respect. But I think in this case, particularly, he felt that something of a pressure campaign had been mounted on him, and to this he was always extraordinarily sensitive.

M: Not just in foreign policy--

B: And I think in this and in other instances, he perhaps read too many newspapers and too many commentators, but in any case, misread them. I really think that, as I compare him in this area with the Presidents I have served and all of whom have been sensitive or certainly become sensitive to public comment on an uninformed nature and to anything in the way of a leak from within the Administration, and so on and so on;

in this particular instance I would be ready to swear that nobody privy to the reality of what was going around in papers on this bombing pause in early December let us say, nobody privy to that reality was talking to the press: (a) because they were men of integrity; (b) but because even if they hadn't been, they'd have had the practical sense to know that this would not be good for the thing that they were urging--that it would make the President less likely to do it. And I thought this was preeminently a case where the President was unable to draw back and say, "Of course, there's speculation that there be a pause." It was almost inevitable that there should be speculation. From things publicly visible, it became--it was what Hanoi was hammering on, had been in a sense all along, but more strongly since August; it was in everything they said, "There is no possibility of anything as long as the bombing goes on." Privately, this was in terms of a pause. And the President, I don't think could really appreciate that there's no way to shut off that kind of speculation, and that it doesn't reflect anything in the least below the most total standards of integrity and loyalty which, in my judgment, were observed throughout his Administration.

M: What would be really bad is to <u>try</u> to shut it off.

B: And that you couldn't shut that off. You could say again and again, "There's nothing in this direction that's being considered by the Administration." You could, I suppose, have got up and said, "We won't do it come hell or high water!" But then you paint yourself into another kind of a corner. In fact, you've just got to take the "No, we're not looking at that," line, that sort of thing--I won't get into this, but--you did the best you could! And I think the President's feeling of having been pressured

on that occasion, and that maybe even the press had been used as an instrument of pressure, which I do not believe one minute to have been the case, played a part; and after the pause whenever issues of this sort came up you felt he was extraordinarily wary. I suppose you'd have to say the President is always a pretty wary man, and that's God knows, part of his strength. But he became extraordinarily wary, resisted, and became a little more inclined to think of terms of where did this guy stand when the chips were down on that blankety-blank pause that I was euchred into in December of 1965?

M: Where does this tendency of his to record opposition and so on lead? Do those who advise what turned out to be the wrong side--do they depart, or do they just not render their advice so fully in the future?

B: Well, it all depends on the man, of course. And mind you, to a degree, this is true of anybody. You or anybody remembers certainly, just for a moment thinking in terms of my relationships within the bureau I remember that a certain fellow kept telling me the Chinese would pile in with everything they had throughout '65 at the levels of bombing we were conducting. And eventually you say, "Well, there's the old stuck record again," and you don't take his advice as seriously. And I'm sure this is the most natural and human thing in the world. But it does have an effect on the fabric. It did not affect, I don't believe for a minute it affected the candor or the nature of the advice that came from the two Secretaries, from Mac in the period that he was active, from Walt Rostow in the period that he was active, from Clark Clifford--from the men who were in the real senior positions. I wouldn't name anybody that I could say trimmed his sails because the President might not like

something he said, or it might initially hit the President wrong. You were dealing with big men, and this is a very important point to note, because there are those who insist that there's a sort of kept voice of dissent kind of thing. [James] Thomson's article in the Atlantic on this subject is, I think, the voice of an inherently small man. I've never known quite why Thomson stayed in government if he felt as he now says he felt. I've never quite understood--in fact, I categorically do not understand the behavior of Richard Goodwin, also, on any interpretation other than a rather sordid and opportunistic one.

M: It was those people's comments that I had in mind. They say, for example, that by mid-'66 anybody who didn't agree was gone or afraid to say anything, one of the two.

B: Well, my impression would be--well, I don't think that's true; but Bill Moyers would have his own particular story. Moyers, I think, generally felt that the bombing needed to be kept down--we're getting ahead of the chronology of the story--but my impression was, to the degree there was a cooling, and obviously there was, between the President and Moyers it had to do more than anything with the simple fact that Moyers was leaving him. And that that was the--the President had a tendency to be very unhappy when people left. But I don't want to seem to be reciting on that, because I don't have any real knowledge on that. Obviously in the case of my brother Mac, if there was any coolness at all it was restored and he was able to communicate at very frequent intervals after he left government.

M: Even called him back for very important uses.

B: Yes, and so that this could fade. But the point I really want to make is about the process itself, because of course you were conscious that

the President might start with a certain point of view. In a sense, there's an element of advocacy in the relationship of the President's advisers to the President in any circumstances. You couch your argument in the terms that you believe will be persuasive to this single judge. Students of government can explore whether that changes the way the whole discussion goes, as compared to a Cabinet system where there is an element of collective judgment and responsibility. In our system where there is only one fellow who is going to make the decision, all your advocacy is keyed to that; but I would venture, and I think the papers will support, certainly my own recollection is very clear, that the quality of men that President Johnson had around him and the way that he dealt with them on the whole created an atmosphere in which you did level. It was tough to level. It wasn't easy to get into a reflective back-and-forth conversation in the meetings to which I was a party. You didn't feel that he was sort of playing with a subject, as President Kennedy tended to do to some extent. This was a very, very big and tough mind; you felt he was latching on to every word you said, and that you'd better measure your words because if you got a fact wrong, he would remember. His oral memory is, as is well known, absolutely extraordinary, and his written memory--I never saw that demonstrated as powerfully, but I am sure it was very strong.

Well, this is an important digression from the story, but it's an important point to make, and it comes naturally out of the account of the first pause.

M: You carried '65 on through--

B: I think it affected the President's--that pause, and all that went with it, the totality of that experience, generally speaking wrote finis for

the President on the effort he had commissioned George Ball to make. And therefore it's in a way a break point in policy, as well as in the relationships of the senior people to each other and all the rest. This is sort of coming into my mind, and I think it emerges as a very clear conclusion from the account I've told you. I really hadn't formed it until this moment. That the President, in effect, knew in late January of '66, "This is tough business. These guys are tough. We beat them at Ia Drang, the Marines wiped them up in August, and Americans are obviously showing they can hack it, we're going at it as well as we know how, much more remains to be done on the civilian side," and this was the purpose of the Honolulu meeting, of course, early February, in which incidentally I didn't participate so I can't add anything on that. And it was a newer and tougher ball game.

Now, one of the tragedies of this thing is that just as this attitude was obviously taking shape--in effect, "Now we know we're playing on a rough and muddy field and forward passes won't work"--just at that moment as he, in effect, dug into it on that basis through the Honolulu meeting of February '66, just as a historical possibility at any rate, he might have tried to set the country into, you might say, cruising speed for this kind of a war with its costs and so on. Just at that moment of time, the South Vietnamese loused it up well and proper, through Ky's dismissal of General Thi and the sympathy Thi had and all that went into the Buddhist and so-called "Struggle Movement" that took over Da Nang and Hue and hung fire until early June. You had four months of having your hands tied, of having the whole cause made uncertain, by ineptitude and division within the ranks of those who were supposedly fighting Hanoi and the Viet

Cong in South Viet Nam. And that seems to me to have been one of the great setbacks. In the end it worked out; I don't need to get into the back and forth because I don't recall any decision peculiarly the President's--obviously they were all his--in a chronology that's pretty well covered in the cables and so on. I don't feel the need to linger on that period.

M: That was the period just after your brother left? Did that affect your position any, as we go into this next period?

B: No, I suppose I'd have to say I obviously haven't had quite as intimate a relationship with Walt Rostow as I had with Mac, and it affected in subtle ways--Walt took some time to become as central in the whole structure as Mac had been. He eventually clearly did in a somewhat different sense that needn't detain us. But my relations with Walt were never difficult. We differed, sure. A lot of us differed. But I had known Walt for many years. He had asked me to come work with him at MIT at one point. I had been a reader in manuscript of his big book, The United States in the World Arena--not a very helpful one--in 1958. He sent it to me for a thorough reading--I don't know how many others he did--but I was sort of flabbergasted and I'm afraid didn't deliver much in the way of comment. But I simply say our relationship had been a long-standing one. And I suppose, in a minor way a few things happened in the White House, like Jim Thomson fomenting a lot of ideas on Cambodia without so much as saying "boo" to me, and then having it go to the President, and the President come back and say, "Yes, do all these things." And Thomson hadn't put in the memorandum that we were doing five of the seven of them already! That kind of thing which happened

in June of '66 was irritating, and would not have happened quite in the same way. I think Walt, and to some extent the President, said, "All right, come up with some new and bright ideas and don't go to that State Department,"--I don't mean to say the President felt that way about me. The President was frequently declaimed against the State Department, the leaks, and so on. But only on one occasion did he think that--well, he may have thought so, but he only said so once--that it came from the Bureau, and I just said as clearly as I knew how, I just did not believe it had happened. I had done all I could to handle that and thought I had a loyal and faithful staff, and I still believe I did. I swear I know of no leak in this period that I am in any way persuaded came out of the FE Bureau with one exception. That was the Joe Alsop story in the fall of 1964, dealing with George Ball's position. I believed then and I believe now that that leak came from Michael Forrestal, and I think it was not a wise thing to do, and Michael Forrestal left government shortly thereafter. In any event, apart from that I think our record was unblemished, but I digress a little. The President obviously felt the State Department couldn't be trusted with the most sensitive things except for a few people. I flatter myself that he normally included me among the few who could be trusted.

M: I was going to say, he had a small list--you're pretty exclusive there.

B: Well, I don't mean to make it small, because I think if you pinned him down, he'd say, "Oh, yes, I trust so-and-so." If you'd said, "Now, come on, you trust so-and-so," the list would have lengthened. But his distrust of the State Department--I'm jumping ahead of myself--was rather dramatically illustrated when he made the trip to Australia in

December of 1967, and the whole arranging of the Rome visit was a study in the President's becoming absolutely convinced that a CBS leak on the possibility of his going to Rome had been the State Department. I believe that the record will establish that it was CBS imaginatively picking up the fact that one of the Presidential squadrons had landed in Madrid, and they couldn't figure any reason for it to be in Madrid except in support of the President going to Rome. And so they started peddling it. But the President was convinced this was a State Department leak. To my certain knowledge, since I got aboard the plane not knowing Rome was a possibility, the Secretary of State and the one or two others who knew about it were absolutely and totally discreet. But it's illustrative. The President had a degree of distrust of the State Department's ability to keep secrets. I wouldn't vouch for how well-warranted that was in other areas; I'd like to think it had very little warrant in mine.

Well, I guess this is a good point to stop in a way. Except I want to record one thing, just to sort of get up to the bombing of Haiphong--that's a good point to break.

The question of bombing the Haiphong POL had been the big apple in everybody's eye in the bombing program from a very early point in '66. The Struggle Movement and all that went with it seemed to me, and I think this was the general feeling, to make it seem like a purely captious act, an ineffective one, countering ineptitude in Saigon with walloping the North harder just didn't seem a wise or powerful thing to do. So it waited until that was settled. It also waited until we had the returns from the [Chester] Ronning episode; that is the Canadian who went up with our blessing and full support, first in March--reported back that

they insisted that the bombing be stopped totally, unconditionally, and then they might talk. We said, "No that won't do. We've got to have some assurances that they will cut back on the things that the bombing is aimed at." I've forgotten exactly how we put it. The record will show. At any rate, Ronning went up finally--we held him off through the Struggle Movement, saying that really we couldn't expect good answers as long as Hanoi must be thinking, as we certainly were, that a collapse in the South was a real possibility. He went up in the end of May, went overin the end of May, finally got down to Hanoi in early June, and came back somewhere around the 16th or thereabouts of June. And by then it was very active that we would do the Haiphong thing just as soon as we were clear. And it was accepted that we should have a reading from Ronning. And the President was, as I have earlier described him by then, impatient about this interrelationship, but he accepted it in this instance, and I went up to Ottawa and had an extensive and careful debriefing of Ronning. I wrote a careful account of it--I think it's in the file--concluded that Ronning had brought back nothing. That whatever hope there might be that he could be a useful fellow of the future was far too general, and that I therefore joined with others very strongly in the recommendation to go ahead on the Haiphong POL.

One other episode in the spring of '66 which was purely a flash in the pan, and I don't really know to what extent the President himself commissioned it. But my papers show that in late April, roughly the period of the 17th to the 25th of April, there was a move by George Ball to say, "Look, if they go on being as inept as they are, and as divided, and aren't able to get hold of the situation, really, this is not going

to be a supportable situation." A perfectly reasonable argument, I might add. Obviously, in George's case, it was what he had believed in any event, and he understood that. Everybody understood that. But it was not the less reasonable for that reason. George wrote a paper, in effect saying "This is the time to pull out." And MacNaughton worked on a paper; [George] Carver worked on a paper; I worked on a paper; Len Unger worked with me--Ambassador Unger, who was my Viet Nam deputy. We had a very small and tightly held group in George Ball's back room, which put together a paper saying, "If this is getting this bad, we have to decide whether we stick it through with a considerable degree of ineptitude, whether we start to look for ways to cushion withdrawal, or whether we really just move to withdraw."

Now, that paper I think will appear--it's certainly in my papers, and I'm keeping my papers in good shape in the Department--. The denouement appears to have come at some White House meeting about the 25th, and the upshot in terms of these papers was that the option to start to pull out was categorically thrust to one side. In other words, however discouraged we were we must carry on with it was the feeling. And there was a brief flurry of similar feelings when Ky moved against Hue and Da Nang, which was mid-May, which he did without telling us. There was a good deal of pique about that in the first night. I remember in the Telecom room at the State Department a good deal of vehement expression about the so-and-so not telling us, taking all these risks and risking the whole enterprise, in effect, on a bold thrust. But in the end he won, and so we all relaxed. So you come to the end of June '66; maybe the POL thing will really hurt them; we're making some progress; we've had a serious setback, but even

despite that, things aren't moving all that badly. That would be the mood I would describe as of, say, the first of July '66.

M: Did the Haiphong thing embitter the Canadians particularly? Did they still think they had something?

B: No. Ronning has recriminated since, but I was very careful to debrief Ronning in front of Paul Martin, always a man looking for an easy interpretation, and to have Canadian professionals there and to compare my notes with them, just to do it in as thorough--so that there would be no difference; and then I really ran rather a trial lawyer of myself about it, and went back over these questions, and Ronning gave the most categorical responses in the key areas. So I think there were circles in Canada who were unhappy about it, but Mike Pearson never recriminated that I'm aware of. I mean, he had independent feelings that it wasn't all that wise and may have said so; of course, that was a break point in the President's relationship with Wilson, too. And the files will show that we told Wilson well and truly what we were going to do and why we were going to do it, and he said, "Well, I don't like it, I may have to dissociate myself from it," and in the event he did dissociate. And there's no doubt that in the President's mind this established Wilson, as far as I know unchangingly, as a man not to go to the well with.

M: That's a good place to stop.

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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Signed William P. Bundy

Date Feb. 23, 1970

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

Date March 11, 1975