INTERVIEW XVIII

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH A. CALIFANO, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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C: In late 1965, when I went down to take the President through the legislative program--in July of that year, Congress had passed legislation that put a health warning on cigarette packages. I proposed to the President that we recommend legislation that would ban cigarette advertising from television. We'd go through the legislative program--we won't get into that now, wait until we get to that--just constantly for a couple of days. At this point we were just driving in a car and I was trying to juggle this enormous big book, and Charlie Schultze was the head of the Budget Bureau. The President turns to me--and I'm smoking a cigarette--and he says, "The day you quit smoking those goddamn cigarettes, I will send legislation to Congress and we'll get it passed, banning television advertising of cigarettes. But not until you do that will I do it." I never quit while I was in the White House. I didn't quit until 1975. I mean, working for him it was impossible.

On the [Arthur] Goldberg--well, we talked about that, didn't we? Goldberg's appointment to the UN [United Nations].

G: Not really, no. I know you and Goldberg were down at the Ranch a weekend shortly thereafter.

C: It's usually been said that Goldberg had to be lured off the Supreme Court by a lot of arm-twisting by the President. My recollection is different, and I can't tell you where I get it from. But my recollection is that at some point in 1965 after the President had indicated that he was going to replace Anthony Celebrezze as secretary of HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] and put Celebrezze on the court, Goldberg sent word through [John Kenneth] Galbraith--or Galbraith was a self-appointed volunteer--to Johnson that he, Goldberg, would be interested in being secretary of HEW. Johnson decided to make John Gardner secretary of HEW because he wanted--Celebrezze had been the right guy to get the legislation passed. He was a terrific politician. He was very good on the Hill. But now we had this complicated stuff that had to be executed and implemented. He wanted to get somebody with a sort of high prestige profile who could attract an entirely different kind of person than before had been attracted to HEW. I don't mean to denigrate people that had been there, but brighter people, people that would be better able to run these complicated programs.

G: Was Celebrezze ready to leave HEW?

C: Yes, I think he wanted to be a judge. That's my recollection. I mean I was not in the White House at the time. I may have been there at the time the switch was made. I don't think I was there at the time Celebrezze decided to go but, yes, he wanted to be a judge. It all fit perfectly.

G: But the President wasn't going to name him to the Supreme Court, was he?

C: No, no, no. He named him to the circuit court [U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit]. He wanted to go back to Ohio where he had been governor. He named him to the Sixth Circuit. He did exactly what Celebrezze wanted.

But the President knew then in the back of his head that he had Goldberg and he could get him. He landed on Goldberg for the UN job I think for a whole variety of reasons. One, he had a lot of labor negotiating, lawyer-type experience. Two, he was well connected at that point in time in the liberal Jewish community from which we were beginning to get rumbles about Vietnam, and he could help with that. Three, he'd be a nice piece of assurance to the Israelis at the UN. We'd have a Jew and we'd have their friend. My recollection of it was that it was instantaneous. I mean once Goldberg was offered it, he accepted it. But that Goldberg in his own mind had difficulty in establishing, "Why do you want to leave the Supreme Court to be a UN ambassador? If you're a lawyer, why did you go on there in the first place?" All that kind of stuff. And it fell nicely into the whole arm-twisting image that Johnson had created.

G: There was also the suggestion that Goldberg's role at the UN would be a much larger one particularly in terms of Vietnam negotiations or settlement, he would play a very active role in the peace process.

C: Well, everybody Johnson brought on board was promised an enormous role and they'd be involved in everything. I don't doubt--I can even remember him at the Ranch saying, "You'll be involved in everything and I want you to be involved in everything. You're my second secretary of state." I don't know if he used those words but that kind of stuff. When he made Jack Connor the secretary of commerce he said, "I don't [want] to make a move on the economy or on anything without you. I want you there." When he brought Bob Kintner to the White House he said to him--poor Kintner--"I want you to read every paper I see before I see it. I don't want anything to come to me--I don't want to be at a single meeting you're not at." Then, of course, Kintner took that literally and tried to

make a move on the staff, despite several people telling him not to do it. But he had such a difficult personality that finally everybody said, "Let him sink of his own weight." And the poor bastard started reading every paper and then the President raised hell as to why Kintner was looking at these papers, why they all had a little "K" on them, whatever they had. Raised hell. Kintner was just befuddled and bewildered by all of this and the poor guy, he had been a reformed alcoholic, not for long, but when he came there he had gotten off the booze. He'd been an alcoholic, gotten off the booze and he went back on the booze. It was one of those tragic things. He really never should have gone into that kind of a pressure cooker.

G: Why did LBJ bring him in in the first place?

C: Television. I think he wanted to improve--the core of what Kintner could have done for the President was, one, to improve his personal television image, how he looked on television, how he spoke on television, how he handled himself on television; two, to help him understand what television could do for our policies, for our programs to get the message across; and, three, to help him and all of us understand better what kind of an impact television had on people and why television did that. And Kintner didn't do that. At least in my mind, that was a role that we genuinely needed played--how little we understood about it.

We started to get a bunch of mail at some point in 1965--it was shortly after I was over there--about a group of women in Vietnam, and we didn't know what the hell it was all about because there was nothing written about it in the newspapers, nothing in the *Post*, nothing in the *Times*. Finally Arthur Sylvester, who was the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, said, "You dumb ninnies,"--was a favorite expression of his--he

said, "They're on television every night. They're on the evening news. Washington is--[Robert] McNamara and [Cyrus] Vance and [Roswell] Gilpatric and you and [Dean] Rusk--are all working and you read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. The country is watching television and that's where they're getting their news. That's why you're getting all of these letters." I remember it because, you know, the President with those three TV sets, it made me very conscious thereafter of knowing--and I read every day when I didn't see it, the news summary so I knew what had been on the tube and understood it. The President was very conscious of the news.

When I was in the Pentagon, [Jack] Valenti called me one day and said the President wanted everybody on the White House staff to have a radio, a really good portable radio, pocket-size portable radio. There weren't many of them in those days. And I got the best we could. And then he wanted a card with the major radio stations all across the country, about twenty or thirty of them, so that wherever anybody was, in an airplane or anywhere, they knew where on the dial the all-news station was. I had a box behind my desk when I was in the White House which had direct feeds to ABC, NBC, and CBS. I guess they all did. And I would get whatever the network was broadcasting. I didn't get the local stuff. But three of the buttons on that box were programmed to give me the direct feed. I rarely used it but he wanted that. It was incredible.

G: Did the fact that his own family owned a television station influence his attitude toward TV?

C: No, I don't think that. It may have made him more sensitive to the potential of television. I think he was just an incredibly good politician in the public sense of that term as well as

the private, back alley corridors of power sense. And he knew how important television was going to be.

There is one marvelous story which relates not to my years in the White House but to later. My father-in-law, Bill Paley, the chairman of CBS, told me that for years when Johnson was in the Senate he would call and talk to Paley or Frank Stanton, who was then the president of CBS, and bring them down to Washington and say that he wanted the station in Austin to be what was called a mandatory buy, that when someone bought the network for an advertisement, they had to include that station. They turned him down because there was another CBS station that overlapped at that point in time into part of Austin or part of the area in which the Johnson station was, and it didn't meet other criteria. In 1954, at about seven o'clock in the morning, the morning after the election, on his [Paley's] private line, who he thought virtually no one had the phone number, rang, which meant it was 6:00 a.m. in the morning Texas time, and he answered it. It was right next to his bed, woke him up. And this voice got on the phone and he said, "Bill, you are talking to your next majority leader of the United States Senate and I want that goddamn station to be a mandatory buy." And I said to my father-in-law, "What did you do?" He said, "We made it a mandatory buy." (Laughter)

G: Let's talk about [Adlai] Stevenson's death for a moment. Any insights on the relationship between Stevenson and LBJ?

C: No.

G: Did he discuss his association with Stevenson with you?

C: I have no recollection of that.

G: Any insights on other potential successors to Stevenson? [Mike] Mansfield, [William] Scranton and [Eugene] McCarthy were all mentioned as possibilities.

C: Well, Mansfield was, by this time, majority leader, so I don't think it was realistic to think that he would have taken the job. But I don't have any recollection of conversations with the President considering any of them. I don't think he ever would have offered it to Gene McCarthy, but I don't know, even at that point in time.

G: During these early weeks of your work at the White House there were a considerable number of congressional briefings of congressional leadership. My notes indicate that you attended at least some of these briefings. Is that right?

C: Yes.

G: Why don't you describe what one of the briefings was like?

C: I'll try. Let me tell you while I think of it. On Vietnam you should go back to November of 1964, right after the election, the trip that Vance and McNamara and I think I made to the Ranch when Bob went over a whole lot of stuff with the President; maybe the base closure issues and what have you. But also the memoranda that McNamara was sending to the President on what to do in Vietnam because my recollection is we had about four or five options. We were ready for a big build-up and we were quite surprised that the President didn't move right away. Okay? I can't--you've got to get--

G: I'll get that.

C: Let's deal with the legislative briefings later, when we get to the legislative program at the end of the year or we get to early 1966. The briefings in July were largely on the war and the economy, I guess, but the economy wasn't a big issue yet; the war was the issue. And he basically would have McNamara and Rusk get up and speak and he'd speak. The

extraordinary thing about it was he'd give them a certain amount of time. He had an alarm clock. We actually had an alarm clock, an old, loud, ticking alarm clock which he'd put right on the floor. And the alarm would go off at six minutes or five minutes or whatever he'd give them and that was it.

G: Is that right?

C: Nobody's told you that?

G: No.

C: Oh, Christ. It was incredible. I was flabbergasted. And Rusk was quite eloquent. I mean McNamara was McNamara: bang, bang, bang, bang, bang--facts, numbers, answers, what have you. Rusk was always eloquent. He was very persuasive, thoughtful. And then Johnson would come on and give a major pitch for what we were doing. The build-up---I must have--the press conference, the [Abe] Fortas thing, the John Chancellor thing--did I tell you? No? The day we announced the build-up of troops which was the first week I was there, I think, we went to the Pentagon that morning. He took me with him for a cost reduction ceremony. We had created a cost reduction program in the Pentagon, and we gave awards each year to people who reduced costs. Bob wanted the President to do it this year and he did. And it was perfect timing because it was the day of the press conference in which he announced the troop build-up in Vietnam. We're driving back in the limousine--I didn't tell you this?

G: He said to get something ready for a Supreme Court appointee?

C: Yes, yes. Okay, I won't go over it again.

G: Why don't you though, I'm not sure it's on the tape. Why don't you, it's not long.

C: Well, [Bill] Moyers, the President and I came back in the limousine from the Pentagon and the President said just as we get out of the limousine he said, "We've got this big announcement"--he started talking about it coming back--"so we ought to have some other news, not just this." Just as we were getting out of the car, he said, "We'll announce the new head of the VOA [Voice of America] and we'll announce the new Supreme Court justice." And he walked off. And he said, "Give me a statement. Give me a brief statement on each of them." So Moyers said, "I'll do [John] Chancellor." We both knew Chancellor was going to be head of the VOA. "And you do the new Supreme Court justice." I said, "Who is it going to be?" Moyers said, "I don't know. I thought you knew." I said, "I don't know." So he said, "Call the President." So I called the President, first time I ever called the President in my life. And he said, "Write me a paragraph that would fit any major Washington lawyer, somebody like Clark Clifford but anybody." So I wrote a paragraph and I brought it in. Marvin Watson was there and I went in and there he was sitting with Abe Fortas. Incidentally, please get me, if it's down there, Carol [Agger] Fortas' letter to the President.

G: That is there. I've seen it, yes.

C: I don't have to make notes of this. Will you remember?

G: Yes.

C: Okay. But, in any case, that was when he said to [Abe] Fortas, "You can either"--Fortas didn't want to go on the Court--"come over to the announcement with me now or sit here and watch it on television, but I'm announcing it." Fortas got up and went with him, sat in the room and he announced it. I took Fortas back to his house in a White House car from that announcement or after lunch. For all I know we . . .

(Interruption)

C: July . . . What day was that? July 29. Have we got all of these now?

G: For 1965. I haven't sent you the 1966 yet.

C: You might start sending me those.

G: Okay.

C: July 29. You know I may be wrong on one thing. Look here, now I don't see . . . the Pentagon that day. We went to the Pentagon on the twenty-eighth, the day before, and we announced this--

G: The diary doesn't show Fortas in there on the twenty-ninth?

C: Yes, it does. But the President must have told me about the statement on the twenty-eighth and it was the next day when Fortas was there on the twenty-ninth. When was the press conference, the twenty-ninth?

G: Yes, that's what my notes show. (Long pause)

C: No, no. I'm right. The press conference was the twenty-eighth, not the twenty-ninth. So it was--we came back from the press conference and that's when he announced the appointment of Fortas and Chancellor, because it has me going into the office at 12:15.

G: So he really didn't give Fortas a choice, is that right? He just said . . .

C: No, I don't think he did. We went to the Pentagon at eleven o'clock. We were back by 11:35. At 12:15 I go into--I'm sure then I went back to the office and did the statement. Fortas is in his office at 11:48. I arrived at 12:15 with the statement. You just look at this schedule. I mean if this is right, he telephones Fortas at 11:48. Okay? What does B-1 mean here?

G: That's a Dictaphone belt number.

C: Is that an open belt, do you know?

G: No, it's sealed up. None of them are open.

C: I ought to work on [LBJ Library Director Harry] Middleton, to open some of that.

Well, he talked to Fortas then. He must have talked to him about the Court or something. But Fortas was by--that's 11:48 and that's a telephone call. It was a one-minute phone call because at 11: 49 he talked to [Richard] Goodwin. Are these times pretty accurate?

G: Yes.

C: Okay. At 12:15 I arrived. I'm sure [Horace] Busby was in there 12:13 to 12:18 going over the last touches on whatever the statement was. At 12:15 I arrive and Fortas was there when I walked in but she doesn't have Fortas as in. That's what puzzles me.

G: Maybe Fortas came in a back way.

C: Because at least to the best of my recollection Fortas was there, okay?

G: Why didn't Fortas want to go on the Court?

C: I wasn't personally privy to that conversation. The only thing I can tell you that may shed some light on this, is . . . (Long pause) After-- I thought I was at lunch; maybe I wasn't. I thought I went to lunch. In any case, this would indicate we left the President's office. We walked over to the press conference. The press conference was over at 1:20. This indicates that Moyers, Watson, and Goodwin were there at the lunch. I thought I was there, too. Again, maybe this isn't accurate. I thought I left the luncheon and took Fortas back--I know I took him back to his house in the White House car. I can't remember what I went there with him for, what I needed. [Inaudible]

He lives on R Street, just down west of Wisconsin Avenue on a corner, diagonally across from Dumbarton Oaks, big yellow brick house, driveway. You walk through the door and there was a gaping hole. There were steps in the hallway to walk up to the second floor and above the steps was the wall that comes down above any ceiling. And there was a gaping hole that had been cut open and Fortas pointed to it. And he said, "That's central air-conditioning. I won't be able to afford that now that I'm going on the Supreme Court. I don't know how we'll be able to afford it." I got whatever I had to get and I left him there and I went back to the office.

(Interruption)

I notice that that night Mrs. Fortas called the President. Have you interviewed Mrs. Fortas yet?

(Interruption)

I notice she called him and that must have been the call when she said, "Please don't put him on the Court. He shouldn't go on." I notice that at 8:20. It does indicate when the call [was received]. Then I notice at 9:30 he's talking to Richard Russell. I'm sure that was about both Vietnam and Fortas. The next day . . .

G: Any other reaction from Fortas, though, other than that one statement?

C: Not then. But I mean there are other occasions when I talked to him when I--as we get more papers, we ought to pick up Fortas wherever he shows up in my papers. Next time, maybe they can have the papers on that appropriations bill that we talked about yesterday. I notice that the next day he talked to Paul Porter in the afternoon. My hunch would be that that was related to--by that time he must have had Carol Fortas' letter and that must have been related. Again I'm speculating, but I would assume that was related to making

sure that Fortas stayed hitched. Then I notice that night we have the briefing of the governors. Classic Johnson, with no notice at all, he said on that morning, Thursday morning, "You and your wife go with [the] Valentis and go pick up the governors and bring them all back. I'm going to brief them." On Wednesday, the day he had the press conference, he said, "Tomorrow I want you to go pick up the governors. We'll bring them all from the governor's conference here into Washington." And we brought them all.

G: [July 27, 1965] briefing on Vietnam?

C: It was on his build-up in Vietnam. And he had Rusk. I'm sure he had McNamara. He had McNamara, Rusk, myself and my wife; I'm sure he had the Valentis. Yes, the Valentis. Then Fortas, I guess, was out running around seeing his clients because I see that day he talks to Fortas from Cincinnati. I forget which were the clients of Fortas from Cincinnati but I think they turned out eventually to be one of the clients that provided the money for his seminar. I don't think he was out directly hustling that money at that point in time, but I think . . . (Long pause)

This was the President reviewing the options that had been considered to go through his thinking process for the congressional leadership: "pull out all the stops" was just to go to total war; "get out of Vietnam" was the other extreme; "leave things as they are." He dismissed those first three as being unacceptable and talked about whether we should declare a national emergency and call the reserves up. Do you have the actual text to this [the text is in *Foreign Relations of the United States* 1965, Volume III, #94]?

(Interruption)

G: The fifth option was to give [General William] Westmoreland the men and materiel that he'd requested.

C: Yes, which was, as the President put it, doubling draft calls, extending enlistments in the Navy and the Marine Corps, having a special enlistment program and, as he had already indicated, sending, what, 50,000 men--I can't remember what he announced at the press conference--to Vietnam.

G: What the increase was?

C: Yes.

G: Let's see, it was [50,000, an increase from 75,000 to 125,000].

C: I'll go through this as best I can now, but I really would like to have my pad, my actual handwriting. Okay?

G: Sure.

C: Rusk indicated that Hanoi was going to continue to fight. He thought that Moscow would not restrain Hanoi at this point in time although he thought the Russians were more interested in negotiations than the Vietnamese were. He indicated that the Chinese were quite bellicose and whatever we did, even if we stopped, there was no way the North Vietnamese would stop. We'd be turning over South Vietnam to China and the North Vietnamese.

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G: Was there a notion that North Vietnam was controlled to a certain extent by China?

C: There was certainly a concern that the Chinese would come in in some way as they had in Korea. And there was certainly a sense that the Chinese were very much involved in all the mischief with North Vietnam and, as between North and South Vietnam, that the Chinese were on the North Vietnamese side.

The President then interjected that whether you took option four--declaring the national emergency and calling up the reserves and what have you--or whether you took option five of increasing the draft calls and extending enlistments and having a special enlistment program was a matter of technique, strategy, not a difference in substance of what would happen in Vietnam. McNamara then talked about the level of commitment of the North Vietnamese, saying they had 100,000 regular combat troops and 50,000 irregular combat troops, that most of the railroads and highways were cut so capitals are isolated, that they were in control of significant parts of the country and significant areas; that food and produce couldn't move through the country freely; [there was] tremendous inflation and that if we were going to avoid losing slowly, just inch by inch like having your blood drained, we had to get more men over there. [He said] that we were directing attacks against military plants that I guess we thought were where explosives were being stored, weapons were being stored; we'd lost a plane. We sent pilotless planes in.

I guess McNamara or Rusk or somebody must have reported on what [Henry Cabot] Lodge's views were. I'd really have to see my handwriting. I don't know whether that's Lodge or [Russell] Long, okay? I don't know who that is. Carl Albert said he couldn't see following any of the first three options, which were pulling out all the stops or getting out of Vietnam or just staying there and losing slowly. [George] Smathers said our policy had to be to deny the Viet Cong victory. The President interjected then that our objective was to help the South Vietnamese resist aggression and what we wanted was an independent Vietnam. Smathers talked about the need to show them that we really meant business, we wouldn't be driven out, we were not going to get out of Vietnam but we didn't want to start World War III, and asked whether the President was

making any change in policy. Johnson said, "Well, there's a tremendous increase in Viet Cong infiltration in South Vietnam." [Hale] Boggs asked about whether the South Vietnamese were becoming demoralized and McNamara told him that there were no defectors, no deserters, any increase in desertion, among the men in South Vietnam. I guess I then left the room for ten minutes.

When I came back, Congressman Ford, Gerald Ford, asked the President whether we had to get money now or whether he could use the transfer authority and wait until January to get money. I think the President said we needed money right away under either option four or option five. The President pointed out that under five it would be less dramatic than calling up the reserves and less disturbing to the whole country. Ford was concerned about what it would mean to start increasing the draft. McNamara talked about the fact that you could use some of option four and some of option five in the sense that if you needed men right away you could call up reserves temporarily for short periods of time and then send them back home as soon as you had picked up the slack with the draft call. There were ceilings on the number of people in the armed forces and McNamara said that we had authority to lift those ceilings.

(Interruption)

When we got the hard numbers, McNamara was saying what we were talking about was one to two billion dollars right now. [Everett] Dirksen said that we had to stay in South Vietnam and win basically but the next line in the perimeter from South Vietnam was Alaska to Hawaii and we couldn't be forced back to that point, that as far as military decisions were concerned, he'd let the Commander-in-Chief worry about them. He said he was worried about--he didn't want to shortchange our military preparedness for other

parts of the world. McNamara said that we were not, we were not stripping parts or divisions or what have you.

Dirksen said we had to tell more to the American people and Johnson said he was going to, tomorrow he was going to have a press conference, but he didn't want to have any advance troop movements. He asked the leaders not to talk to anybody when they left. Dirksen said we couldn't wait until January; that was five months. We had to act right away; Congress had to act right away. Well, Dirksen said that he didn't think the American people thought the war was as serious a problem as it was and we were in as serious a difficulty as we were. [Mike] Mansfield then said that whatever we did we should really remember that what we were doing was assisting the South Vietnamese in their own defense of their own country, that we were not going to take over this war, that it was not going to be our war.

Let me digress from the meeting for a second because it reminds me of--there came a point in 1966 or 1967, and maybe when we get into that I'll remember when, when the President talked to me about his concern about McNamara. The press was calling it McNamara's war. We ought to try and find out when those stories were. It got to be called McNamara's war. The President said that he saw the strain on McNamara and that this was not McNamara's war; we couldn't let it be characterized as McNamara's war. It was his, Johnson's, war and he would stand up for it, that Bob just didn't have the strength or ability or psychological make-up or what have you to handle this treatment day after day in the papers, calling it McNamara's war. He wanted McNamara; he needed him at that point. So he wanted to get this thing characterized as his war and get it off of McNamara's back. That's a digression from this meeting. It happened much later.

Mansfield also said that we shouldn't get in a position where we owed the present government of Vietnam anything or any government after [President of the Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh] Diem. I think that was a reference, implied, to the fact that there was, whether it was accurate or not, a feeling, recognition, sense, whatever that Kennedy had had Diem knocked off and that there was concern that Kennedy and/or his administration may have in one way or another made some kind of a commitment to the people--who was the guy that succeeded Diem, I can't remember--that we may have made a commitment there to whoever that person was. I'd like to know who that was. [Duong Van Minh]

G: Okay.

C: Mansfield also pointed out that even if we won, even if the South Vietnamese won, we still were going to have enormous problems and they were going to need a lot of money. He said let's just get a stalemate, and essentially end it on a stalemate in some way because he didn't think there was any nation in the world of any importance that would join us as an ally in the war in Vietnam.

I really think it is important to get my handwriting. I want to get [it] right on these racial issue things because I remember the discussions and the rest of this. I believe these are references to the fact that there was some feeling that we would be less inclined to fight for brown people than we would be inclined to fight for white people. Mansfield also raised questions about whether our national interests were involved and I think he said he did not believe that our national interests were involved in Vietnam. We didn't have to win in Vietnam, and we didn't indeed have to fight some massive war against communism in Asia.

Senator [Bourke] Hickenlooper said he was worried about the helicopters we were losing over there, were they working right or what have you, were they safe for our boys. McNamara said we'd only lost seventy-two in four years and Hickenlooper talked about maintenance and they got into a discussion of procurement of helicopters and maintenance and what have you. Hickenlooper said that he thought we couldn't get out with anything less than a stalemate and said, "We win victories and then we lose in negotiations." Johnson said that he was opposed to going into Vietnam in 1954--was that the first time we went into Vietnam?--when he was in the Senate and that we were there now and that was a different situation he faced; he had to deal with that. I don't recall the reference of [Thomas] Kuchel or McNamara. Boggs said we had to take options four or five; they were the only way to deal with this. Johnson said we were trying to get government and our allies together and [Leslie] Arends asked if allies would give any help. And Rusk said, "It is tough. Maybe we could get some Koreans, maybe some Australians, maybe some Filipinos, maybe some New Zealanders, but nobody else." Everybody seemed to agree it would be great to have--my notes end, indicating that Johnson was saying that we just had to help Westmoreland; we couldn't leave him hanging out there. It was a long meeting. It lasted, I see here, a couple of hours.

G: Mansfield seems to have been the only skeptic. Is that your recollection?

C: I think that's right. In that meeting, yes. I don't think it had really, at that stage certainly, dawned on anyone, except Mansfield and, in a funny way, maybe Lyndon Johnson, that there was a chance that what had happened to the French could happen to us. But at that meeting and for some time thereafter, Mansfield was the only skeptic. I mean Wayne Morse and Senator Ernest Gruening from Alaska, I guess they even voted against the

Tonkin Gulf Resolution. But Mansfield at this stage was the only skeptic and his concern was profound. I mean it was sincere and I think he wrote the President a whole series of private letters. Are they out, could you get me those?

G: I'll see. What were McNamara's expectations at this point? You knew him well and had a long association with him. In the summer of 1965, what did he--?

C: I think our expectations were that under all the circumstances that this was the best course of action and this would either get us a victory in South Vietnam or get the North Vietnamese to negotiate, somehow end this war. I mean, nobody wanted the war. I don't think anybody realized at this stage in time when Smathers asked if it was a change in policy, I don't think anybody realized that there would be more and more and more and more.

G: Well, was there a sentiment that if we had this one-time increase that that would do it, that that would shift the balance?

C: I guess the answer to that is sort of, "yes, but" as the President would often say. Yes, there was a feeling that this would be enough because this was what Westmoreland had asked for, but we were probably still willing to commit more if that were necessary to win. We were still in a mode of winning in one way or another. I don't know when we had that famous McNamara picture holding his hand up in the air with the Vietnamese gentlemen. But at least this night, and this is the night before the press conference, and the day of the press conference our rhetoric was that this was enough and we believed that, I think. When I say "we," I think McNamara and Rusk. There was reliance on Westmoreland. There was confidence in Westmoreland, although probably no war was

ever fought with more minutiae involvement from the President and the National Security Adviser and the Secretaries of State and Defense.

G: The President in this meeting expressed the attitude that he had been opposed to our involvement eleven years before but now the fact that we were in provided its own rationale for staying in or increasing the commitment.

C: Well, yes, he did express that here and on other occasions, that we were there, that American prestige was committed. He didn't view it as throwing good money after bad so to speak but he viewed it as we had to win. I mean, Americans always won. The Americans always came out--and we had to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table. Remember we're dealing with an enemy that had no desire to even negotiate or talk; they just wanted it all. I think he also was very--as in other areas but I think particularly in this area he thought he was doing what the Kennedy policy was. I don't think he thought for a minute that Jack Kennedy would have pulled out of Vietnam and let me say at least from the perch I had at the bottom of the pile, I had no indication ever during the Kennedy years and when I was working for McNamara and in the army that we were going to do anything except send more special forces, more troops, win in Vietnam.

G: You've cited Mansfield's admonition. Was there anyone else around Lyndon Johnson who was saying, "Let's go slow," or, "Let's not step up the commitment," or, "Let's take another look about whether or not we really need to be there"?

C: At this point in time?

G: Yes.

C: Not to my knowledge. I hesitate for two reasons. One, the one thing you learned about Lyndon Johnson was that he'd talk to three hundred people you never knew, and two, I don't know when George Ball first became skeptical on this, and I don't know whether he was skeptical at this point or not. But, no. Indeed my sense of everything that happened from my perch in the Pentagon in 1964 up through this point was that the most reluctant person in the administration was Johnson on the build-up. I think in 1964 he took the position that he wasn't going to make major decisions in an election year on war and peace and life and death. He just wasn't going to do it. That's not the context in which you make those kinds of decisions best. Secondly, and the reason I want you to go back and get all the material for November of 1964 is my recollection is we were really ready to go right after the election in 1964. And it was Johnson who was the reluctant dragon. The Pentagon was ready to go; Rusk was ready to go; [McGeorge] Bundy even was ready to go. And it was the President who said he wanted Bundy to go over and take another look or McNamara to take a look, get a sense of what's happening.

G: There was a body of thinking that if we had gone in earlier with more force that the result might have been more satisfactory militarily. Is that--?

C: I just don't [know]. I'm sure you'll have military people that felt that way.

G: Okay. On the other hand, who around him was the most optimistic about our chances of success in Vietnam?

C: I really think at this point in time there wasn't much pessimism. These are rational people and they knew that outcomes like this were unpredictable but I think there was just the general sense that you're coming off the wave and we're going to fight guerrilla wars. We know how to fight them. Bobby Kennedy, Jack Kennedy, the whole--we're going to have

a more flexible, super-great Pentagon with the best secretary of defense in history. I think at this point there was very little pessimism in the administration. I'm sure there was concern. This was the worst problem we were dealing with. I think, also, it was this build-up then, the one or two billion dollars we needed right away and what it did next year, that also, sitting where I was sitting for example, said, "What are we going to do about the Great Society? How do we keep it up?" That led ultimately--and we can talk about it when we get to the State of the Union--to the guns and butter State of the Union which was January 1966.

G: The cost estimate does seem awfully conservative in view of the size of the build-up.

C: Well, McNamara was saying, you know, we were buying only what we needed but, also, I think if you go to those budgets--and I think we stated it, I'd have to look at the budget of January 1966--we kept assuming the war was over on the last day of the fiscal year. That kept the budget down. That's why we kept needing more and more money. That ultimately created a problem, as you know, credibility on the dollars.

G: Was there more of a problem with helicopter performance and maintenance at this point than was indicated?

C: My recollection is dim but my recollection is that the answer to that is, yes, there was a problem with helicopter maintenance and performance. It was not an insoluble problem, but we did have a problem.

G: Was it one that LBJ himself focused on, do you know?

C: I can't remember but I think it would be safe to assume that he focused on every problem.

G: During this time, late summer of 1965 and early autumn, there seems to have been a good deal of public opinion and favorable press with regard to the administration's policy. You

want to talk about that? Walter Lippmann was on board. The approval rating seems to have been very high. (Long pause)

C: We're talking about a couple of more hours just on this when I look at this, when I look at Bundy's memo and I remember the cost issues.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XVIII

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Addendum to the Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

Joseph A. Califano

Interviewed by: Paige Mulhollan, Joe B. Frantz and Michael L. Gillette

I, Joseph A. Califano, hereby remove the restrictions on the use of the transcripts and recordings that states, "During my lifetime I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime researchers may publish 'fair use' quotations from the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case." of the sixty-three personal interviews conducted with me by Paige Mulhollan, Joe B. Frantz, and Michael L. Gillette, currently at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library. (see attachment for interview details)

Joseph A. Califano Jr. — Donor

5-28-19 — Dated

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Director for Presidential Libraries

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