

INTERVIEWEE: CLARK CLIFFORD (Tape 5)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

December 15, 1969

F: This is interview number 5 with Mr. Clark Clifford in his office in Washington, D. C., on December 15, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Mr. Clifford, let's go back and pick up the Department of Defense, which we were talking about in an earlier interview, and trace your association with its evolution and with some of its reorganization, and most particularly let's talk about the Department as it existed as a Department under your administration as Secretary.

C: All right, sir.

F: Which ought to be a full order.

C: Yes, it is. But it's a fascinating story, and I believe it's not been told before. I came into the White House in the Truman Administration in the spring of 1945, perhaps just two months after President Truman came in following the death of Franklin Roosevelt in April of 1945. When I came in there to serve on the staff, we were still at war with Germany and with Japan. So that I had the opportunity of working with President Truman during the closing months of the Second World War. After the war was over, it may have been toward the end of 1945, one of my early assignments was to conduct a study regarding the possibility and desirability of unifying the Services. We had then just a War Department and a Navy Department. President Truman remarked one time that we could never go through another war with the archaic organization we had in the Second World War. Even though we finally won, it was despite the organization that we had and not because of it.

So through '45 and through the year '46 I really gave a great deal of time to this, interviewing both civilian and military persons in the War Department and the Navy Department. Also conferring from time to time with important leaders on the Hill. And toward the end of '46 I submitted a report to President Truman and then started a series of meetings. We met a great deal in an effort to iron out the differences of approach and opinion regarding unification. I might say that the major stumbling block that we had was the Navy. The Army was willing to enter into a type of unification. They were willing to have the Air Force separated from the Army. They weren't anxious for it but they felt a better organization could be achieved, and there had been the Air Wing of the Army. It had no Air Force in the Second World War, but the Navy remained entirely recalcitrant.

F: Afraid it would be submerged, or because its function was so much different?

C: The Navy mainly was opposed to unification because they felt that it would decrease the

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standing that the Navy had. As a separate department with a Cabinet officer, the Secretary of the Navy, they had certain standing with the President and in top government circles which they would lose under a plan of unification. One of their main objections was that they would lose that direct contact with the President because no longer would there be a Secretary of the Navy in the President's cabinet. Also they had great power on the Hill. They long had a relationship with Carl Vinson, who was chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee, and they liked having a Naval Affairs Committee on the Hill, instead of an Armed Services Committee; and they felt that it would degrade their standing and reduce their effectiveness mainly in the area of their assigned mission, and perhaps even more important than that, the ultimate question of how the defense dollar is divided between the various services. James Forrestal was Secretary of the Navy at the time and he fought unification every step of the way, and did it really quite adroitly and successfully.

So in 1947 we ended up with the first unification act. It accomplished some of our aims but failed miserably in other directions. It did accomplish the creation of the separate service; it did accomplish the creation of a Secretary of Defense. Incidentally, that act also created the CIA, which is sometimes forgotten, and also created the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But the basic defect in the act was that it made the Secretary of Defense really just a coordinator; it did not take away from the three services sufficient authority for the Secretary of Defense really to govern the Department of Defense.

- F: Was there a feeling on the part of the secretaries of the services that they in one sense would be under secretary of defense with these particular functions; in other words, that they were playing now a subordinate Cabinet role?
- C: No question about it. They all felt that way, but the Secretary of the Air Force and Secretary of the Army, I think, both recognized that and were willing to accept the downgrading of their positions. It was the Navy that refused to accept it. But President Truman, with that rather curious perspicacity that he oftentimes displayed, named Mr. Forrestal as the first Secretary of Defense; and Mr. Forrestal went in there to try to operate the Defense Department under this woefully deficient act of Congress. After some period of months, I remember the incident distinctly, Mr. Forrestal called and talked to me over the phone and said, "No one could make the Defense Department work under the present law;" and he wanted to go in and talk to President Truman about it and hoped that I might go in with him because we had worked so closely together. And the meeting was a fascinating one. Mr. Forrestal at that stage was very clear on what was needed, and he chose a course of action that is rarely selected by men. He was completely forthright with President Truman and in effect said, "I've come over to tell you I have been wrong. And if this job is to be done, as it should be done, then the Secretary of Defense has to be given responsibility and authority and control."

So we then went to work and it took about two years. Then along came the

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amendments in the Defense Act of 1949, which for the first time really created a Department of Defense, headed by a Secretary who was given the proper measure of authority and given the power to run the Department. The Navy accepted it then because their foremost advocate had decided that it was in the public interest to do it, and they went along. After that the Department of Defense progressed some as years went on. It would depend pretty much on the identity of the specific Secretary.

In about '53 the Eisenhower Administration put through another Amendment that strengthened the Department some and then I think another one in '58, so by the time Secretary McNamara came in, in January of 1961, the machinery was there. Some Secretaries had used it to some extent; some hadn't used it very much. There is a great deal of truth in the charge that in most instances the Secretary of Defense is a captive of the military services. They know--the military services know so well what it is that they want, what it is they're doing. They train their men in the Pentagon. A man by the time he reaches an important position in the Army will maybe have been in the Pentagon six, seven, eight or ten years. In comes a new civilian Secretary, so he's just not a match for these men who have spent their entire lives in the field.

F: You're using a transient against someone who was there before and will be there after, too.

C: Exactly, and oftentimes you sense the attitude of all the three services that civilian Secretaries come and go but they go on forever. Mr. Robert McNamara came in in 1961 and had some very strong ideas about it. He and I had a number of long visits about the matter. I gave him the information that I had going back to the genesis of the Department itself, when he took over the Department. He gave it, I think, for the first time the kind of strong civilian management and control that President Truman had envisaged back in 1945. Secretary McNamara tightened up the operation, he unified the services in many ways--central procurement, central direction, infinitely greater centralization of control in the office of the Secretary of Defense. It is my belief that all of this added a great deal, both to the effectiveness of our military and to the economy of operation.

Now, what was the situation then when I came in? I came in on March 1, 1968. I shan't dwell too long on the operation of the Department itself. I inherited the McNamara team, extraordinarily able fellows who were dedicated to government service and national security--

F: Had the Pentagon bought, in a sense, the McNamara package?

C: The military had not. They went along because McNamara was a very strong Secretary of Defense and backed up by strong Presidents. First in President Kennedy and in President Johnson, and they really had no alternative but to go along.

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F: He had the power and he knew how to use it.

C: He had the power and he knew how to use it. And there were a number of them, the broader men with wider horizons who recognized McNamara's merit, and cooperated with him from that standpoint. But generally speaking the military dragged its feet on a lot of the reforms by Mr. McNamara. But during the year that I was there, having inherited McNamara people, who were very able, in a general way we went along with the same type of organization that he had. Some of the procedures I changed because my work habits were different than his. I was a much greater believer in consultation with a small group, whereas he saw people just individually and then reached his own decision. And I placed I think greater reliance upon having a small workable staff than perhaps Mr. McNamara did.

In the year that I was there also I attempted to make a contribution toward a recognition by the Defense Department of the social responsibility that any department of government has that spends close to \$80 billion dollars a year. And in that regard I furthered programs that Mr. McNamara had started to do all in our power to eliminate racism in the services. Also, we made great strides in elimination in housing problems that had grown up around bases. We put rules into effect that if a landlord did not rent without regard to race, color, or country of origin, we placed him on a list and no military personnel could rent there. And in the course of a year my recollection is that the number of proscribed apartments and housing areas must have declined something like 30 percent down to 6 or 7 percent. We made great progress with it.

F: Did you have some legal authority for this, or were you just doing this by your own weight?

C: We concluded that the Secretary of Defense had this right himself and there were some decisions that indicated that if it should be taken to the Supreme Court their interest in eliminating the whole question of racism was such that we would very likely win the case. Nobody wanted to take us on in that particular area.

F: I remember, going back to the Eisenhower Administration, that Clarence Mitchell once complained to the President that on bases themselves certain aspects of racism continued; and Eisenhower had sent down as President an order to eliminate such activities and to, in a sense, integrate within the base. So I presume you've got a precedent and a pattern here which just needs in a sense some strong implementation.

C: I think the precedents were there. I agree with you that it had even become something of a tradition going back to President Truman; I think he was the first that really made progress in that regard. So that what we did was expand it, further it, and to a great extent realize the results of work that had gone on for a great many years.

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- F: Did this create unusual problems for you at those particular bases where you did have discrimination?
- C: Only for awhile, only for awhile. Where there had been really quite serious discrimination, we had an enormously valuable weapon, for a landlord just saw his building empty.
- F: You've got a power of the purse there.
- C: Oh sure. Boy, they just began to fall into line. And we had a program, too, of acquainting the personnel on the base of our program so as to prevent attitudes of discrimination on the base itself. So that those military personnel who were white began to cooperate better after awhile through a process of education and I think orientation.

Also, we instituted certain programs that I believe Mr. Laird is going to go on with. He told me some time ago that he intended to, and that is that there's no reason why the Defense Department shouldn't give attention to important developments, for instance, in the field of education. The Department of Defense is very deeply in education, in schools on bases. It's a marvelous place to experiment with new types of education and we began to do that. Also, the Defense Department is one of the largest builders of housing and we put in a program to experiment with more modern ways of building housing for large numbers of people--prefabricated housing, metal housing--so that the program was installed to test out different ways of housing. The military, or the Defense Department, is one of the largest builders of hospitals in the country and we got a group together to plan a completely modern automated hospital. The theory being that if we could demonstrate that this could work, then we could send those who were important in its development out to locales, counties, cities, states, and help them with more modern hospitals. So the whole concept was based upon the fact that there is a social obligation.

The function of the Defense Department is not just to train a man to kill. Along with that you would hope to recognize that not only is the strength of our country abroad of interest to the Defense Department but what is perhaps of equal interest, even possibly more interest, is to develop a greater strength domestically. With the development of that greater strength in our whole domestic structure we are better able to withstand attacks from without. And the converse of that is that if the structure of our country begins to deteriorate internally, then is the time that we had better be prepared for the very worst to happen to us. Because it's weakened our whole will to defend our country, so that I would hope that the Defense Department would continue to take a deep social interest in what it can do to prevent discrimination, to increase and improve living conditions of our people by pioneering and new kinds of housing, new school construction, new hospital construction, then work with locales so they can do this.

The Defense Department has a marvelous service to perform in this area. It will not be easy because the military services are not sympathetic with such a plan. They think

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that they have just one function and they don't wish to be deterred from that. Also, there's going to be substantial and continuing problems on the Hill. There are a number of persons on the Hill who think the Defense Department should just stick to the training of military personnel and the building of military hardware. In the number of talks that I had on the Hill at the time we were urging this program, I contended that we could go ahead and do the job for which the Department was intended to do, but at the same time do it in such a way that we did recognize certain social responsibilities that all of us have as citizens. I think some headway was made on it. I had a long talk with the new Secretary, Melvin Laird, and he has since made a speech embracing this general concept. We will not be able to make the real progress in this regard while the Viet Nam war is on. He has some ideas about programs, but feels that he must postpone them; I had to do the same. As soon as we get the Vietnamese war over with then I would expect substantial progress in this regard, and I think we ought to continue to keep the Defense Department conscious of the contribution that they can make in this area of our domestic life.

F: Do you think by training and background that the military would naturally not embrace this sort of program, or do you think in time they too will come around just as they have on unification?

C: I would expect that if the programs can be devised so that the military will see that they are profiting by it in addition to the country profiting, I believe they will slowly come around to it. One area, for instance, that we spent quite a lot of time on was the education and training of military personnel. When a young man, eighteen or nineteen, goes into the military service, he's just out of high school. He can learn certain lessons in the military; he even can learn a trade in the military, which will be very valuable to him, make him a better citizen when he comes out, and help to strengthen our country. The military says, "Well, that might be so but what good does that do for us?" The fact is, wars of the future are going to be fought more and more and more with highly skilled trained men. Men to man the electronic systems, men to manage the most infinitely complex instruments of warfare and you start these men on certain training then; even though after two years they might leave the service, you get those men back later on, they've had this basic training that can prove to be an asset of enormous value to the military services. And I believe that slowly the military will come to understand that. But they believe that if they get an appropriation, that each dollar should go just to the specific task of training soldiers and creating equipment. If a dollar gets off in some other area, there's a certain amount of resentment, even though after awhile I think they will recognize that the long-range result of it will lead to better personnel, more intelligent and trained personnel, and so a better military service.

F: In part of what you were doing there was not exactly an overlap but there was at least the parallel course with some of the activities that you're trying to promote in Health, Education and Welfare. Did you make any attempt to coordinate programs or are you running your own pretty independently?

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- C: No, there was no particular effort to coordinate at this early stage of this development. What we did was keep the other Departments informed of what we were doing, and many of them were fascinated with what we were doing and would send back, after we would inform them--we'd keep them supplied with literature--they'd send back suggestions and ideas and occasionally we'd have meetings about it and they'd want to know the results. Some of their programs were affected by some of the programs that we were instituting, so there was a cross-fertilization of thinking throughout the Administration that was really quite valuable. And no sense of competition that I was conscious of. There was great encouragement from the other Departments for this particular program and great interest in the kind of results that we would achieve.
- F: I've been struck as an academic with what the military has done in the study of languages, which has been fairly significant, you know, and the fact that this branch of education has been something of an inspiration to the teaching of languages in the more traditional academic areas. And you were in a position to try some things, because you had the funds and the personnel that perhaps other agencies would like to but couldn't.
- C: There are any number of areas in this regard. There can be major developments in the whole health field because you have gathered selected persons of approximately the same age, you have control over them, you can control--
- F: You don't have to have the finesse of a private doctor who can prescribe but can't follow them through.
- C: That's right. You have control over them, you can control the kind of clothing they wear, the kind of housing they live in, the kind of climate in which they operate; and already some substantial successes have come out. Right now the influenza treatment is based to a great extent upon Army experiments in which they had different groups, maybe as many as five hundred men in three or four different groups, and they would try different treatments upon them, then subject them to the same kind of conditions. Out of that has come really quite a valuable and useful flu vaccine. So there are any numbers of areas of that kind in which the military services can recognize a far higher and certainly more exciting responsibility than the routine training of men to fight and kill.
- F: Did President Johnson show an active interest in this program or did he just in effect accept it and was passive about it?
- C: He did show an active interest in it. I think it's clear that if you take progress in the civil rights field, in the elimination of discrimination, more progress was made in President Johnson's Administration in the whole field of racial discrimination than had been made in the preceding hundred years. And that I say that advisedly; it's not propaganda, it's just so. And the reason I'm so conscious of it is that when I came in early in the Truman Administration, I'd been conscious of the fact that President and Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt

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had made a very real contribution to the whole field of civil rights. I was interested to note after awhile that their major contribution was in rhetoric rather than in actual legislative accomplishment or even in administrative order. President Truman took a real forward step in that regard and by so doing earned the undying enmity of the South, and as you know they went against him in the '48 election. But he actually did take some steps. Very little was done for a long time after that. Something was done in the Kennedy Administration, but it wasn't until President Johnson came in that real progress was made.

F: It got beyond kind of an intelligent lip service.

C: Right. And so he was very interested in developments of the Defense Department in the whole field of racial discrimination, and I would say more generally interested in the other factors and other areas of progress in this regard, because we were just getting those started. They're still in their infancy, it's in the period of the genesis of these programs, but there's great merit to them and over a period of time I believe they'll bring a real return to the country.

F: There were charges--charges is too strong a word--but people have said that President Johnson was rather tender toward the military leaders, that he tended to think that they were the experts, they knew their business, and therefore was adverse to countering them. Did you notice this attitude?

C: It's always difficult to generalize in a matter of this sort. I think that President Johnson had a real regard and a deep appreciation for the expertise that our professional military leaders brought to the country. He thought very highly of men like General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; General Westmoreland, our Field Commander in Viet Nam; I know that President Johnson had the highest regard for the judgment of a man like General Maxwell Taylor and he would call these men into conferences that involved the national security of the country. He honored them for what they had done. He had very real regard for them personally, and he attached substantial significance to their views and their opinions. However, he only took their opinions and their judgment into consideration along with a number of other factors. They did not control him; he controlled them.

The war in Viet Nam--the military would have liked to have invaded North Viet Nam. President Johnson knew this was wrong, because North Viet Nam has a mutual assistance pact with Red China and just as soon as we invaded North Viet Nam, the North Vietnamese would have triggered that pact and just hordes of Chinese troops would have come over. Every expert that I know in that part of the world agrees to that statement, so there he turned the military down.

The military wanted very much to bomb Haiphong and Hanoi in such a way as to destroy them from the standpoint of any military contribution they could make. For

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humanitarian reasons, and also for international policy reasons he denied them that request. In their effort to destroy Haiphong they also wanted to mine the harbor, and there he was faced with the possibility that a Soviet vessel could hit a mine and go down, and the gravest results could have followed such an action as that. Maybe not only just in North Viet Nam, but in other troubled places in the world like Korea, the Middle East, Europe; they could have made trouble for us. And I think he saw very clearly that the Soviet Union could not have taken that lying down. Their standing in the Socialist world would have deteriorated so badly they would have felt that that was a result they could not accept.

F: Well, now, you were caught in the middle of a pretty big military effort and you came in on it. At the same time there's this constant tension in the Middle East. Were you ever really preparing for the possibility of fighting, going to the aid of Israel in this case and fighting two wars at once?

C: Certainly not while I was there. I don't know what the planning was before, but I was never told to get ready for it. And I was unalterably opposed to it. I wouldn't have sent an American man into the Middle East. I do not believe that that's an area that involves our security so vitally that we can ask American boys to go over there and die. I do not believe it does. The fact is I have some awfully strong feelings about what our obligations are in various parts of the world, and I think our country is going to accept ultimately a concept whereby we become a limited partner in a number of regional associations of nations.

Take as an illustration Southeast Asia. I believe that when the Vietnamese war is over, the nations of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, and I would hope Japan and possibly even India and Pakistan, should get together and form a regional protective arrangement, both economic and military. This country can give advice, we can give economic aid, and on occasion even give military assistance, but I don't want to see any American boys go out there and fight. And I feel the same way about the Middle East. I think we ought to continue to extend aid to Israel as we are doing, and sell to them appropriate military equipment. I think it helps them maintain a balance in the Middle East so that perhaps they would prevent a larger confrontation from taking place, but the sending of American troops to the Middle East is so serious that I do not now recognize or envision the circumstances that would warrant my voting in favor of that. Because I can see what could very well happen. If we decided to put troops in the Middle East, I think it's entirely possible that the Soviet Union would decide to put troops in the Middle East, and then one step leads to another and maybe we're in it. And above all, I would hope to avoid that confrontation.

F: And President Johnson never suggested you should make preparations in that direction?

C: Never one single word in that regard, and I never heard him mention all through that

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difficult period back in '67--remember the short war; and that was the time for the first time the hot line was used between him and Kosygin. At no time did I ever hear him suggest either specifically or indirectly that we should be prepared to send American troops to the Middle East, and I might tell you it was a great comfort to me that he never did.

F: There was also some pullback on the sending of arms to Latin America because of a belief that they weren't always used for internal defense alone.

C: Yes, that was watched with great care. We have a difficult problem. It's not nearly so simple as some of our Representatives and Senators on the Hill would make it appear to be. What we would like to do is maintain a reasonable balance of power in South America. If any one country gets too strong, then of course you begin to encounter very real danger. So we had a general concept that we felt in order to maintain a general balance of power a country needed a certain type or plane, or maybe a certain gun; then we would take steps to supply them with that.

Also, those who contended that that was wrong didn't recognize that there was another problem. Sometimes if a South American country couldn't get arms from us, then they would turn to the Communist countries for arms you see. And that was a matter of deep concern to us. That begins to develop a relationship between that country and the Communist country. They have Communist pilots over there instructing their pilots and Communist technicians and all, so that you have to look at a good many factors. It continues to be an extraordinarily complex field. But I think we were getting through it reasonably well.

F: In the midst of all of this, in the summer of '68, you proposed the beginning of arms limitation talks, or the renewal of them.

C: No, I didn't. That was President Johnson who did that.

F: That originated with him?

C: It originated with him. The fact is, this was one of the brightest hopes and most eagerly sought goals of his Administration. He must have started that back when he was new in the presidency. I would say it goes back surely to 1964. And he began to plan on the development of a basis for talks with the Soviet Union on limitation and ultimate reduction of nuclear weapons. He brought that along as a result of his personal leadership and this driving compulsion that he had to get that accomplished in his Administration, which was one of the noblest aims that any President could have. And as a result we had any number of meetings at the Cabinet level, and we had an extraordinarily able second-level group that would meet in between and then meet with the Cabinet level. And finally towards the spring and summer of 1968 we finally had reached agreement on all of the basic principles

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to be discussed.

F: Would "we" be at the Cabinet and sub-Cabinet levels?

C: Right. And it involves such disparate arms of government as the Joint Chiefs of Staff on one hand and the peace agency on the other hand. So that ultimately the group was able to reach agreement, and it was one of the really outstanding jobs performed in the Johnson Administration. And President Johnson had it all arranged with Premier Kosygin that on a certain date in August, it was about the nineteenth or twentieth of August, there was to be--let's say it was the twentieth of August--there was to be a simultaneous release in Washington and Moscow. I think in Washington it was 10 a.m. in the morning, announcing a summit meeting to take place between the United States and the Soviet Union representatives, to start the talks on limitation of nuclear weapons. And the President was just about as excited about it as anybody I ever saw. And if the twentieth, say, was to be a Thursday, we were to announce it at ten o'clock in the morning. At about six o'clock the evening before, Wednesday, Russian tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia.

F: You got that close!

C: We got that close, and of course that called off the whole deal and the President was terribly disappointed because it had been one of his most cherished goals. Then even after that was called off by November or so we hoped that we might revive it--the thought--because we were all ready. The preliminary work had already been done.

F: I presume everything had been cleared with Russia at the same time.

C: It had been, but they understood why we couldn't go ahead with the announcement. But the dust from Czechoslovakia had settled by November, and the President still had a hope we might agree on a date and get the talks started because then they would have a momentum that would carry over into the new administration. And when we got in touch with the Soviets in that regard, we found their attitude had changed a good deal, and I think the explanation is quite a simple one. I think the new incoming Administration did not want these talks to start in the Johnson Administration, and I think in some manner that attitude had been conveyed to the Soviets so that they weren't about to sit down and start with the Johnson Administration when they felt that was in opposition to what the new administration wanted.

F: Anything that started now would just be futile.

C: So it did not start. It's unfortunate because President Johnson made such an enormous contribution to it, but let me assure you that in the event there are any real results that ultimately lead to the limitation of nuclear weapons, the one man who will have had more to do with it than anybody else is Lyndon Baines Johnson, no matter if it happens to occur

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in a Nixon Administration. The real credit lies with President Johnson.

F: During this period the role of the National Security Council changed considerably, according to all popular belief. Were you privy to that?

C: I don't know exactly what happened before I came into the Cabinet because I was on the periphery and I didn't meet with the National Security Council. I don't know how important it was. I know only that it wasn't important at all during the year that I was there. The fact is I think those meetings were held because certain people expected them to be held. But subjects would be assigned to the National Security Council, they would be taken up, the subjects would be briefed, there would be some desultory discussions of the points. Then everybody would pick up and leave. And that did not surprise me. My own theory is that you cannot institutionalize the decision-making process at the highest levels of government. You can't say, I'm going to create this machinery and this machinery will produce the decisions. That isn't the way it works.

As far as important national security questions were involved, like the war in Viet Nam and other problems we had over the face of the globe, those discussions and the decisions were made in a group that consisted of the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the CIA, and the President's assistant in charge of National Security Affairs. That's where those things were talked out. If we needed anybody else, somebody might be brought in to brief us, but the President learned if you began to talk about very important policies and begin even to make preliminary decisions, when you got a whole group together like the National Security Council, you'd be almost sure to get a leak. But with this small group of five men--that's the luncheon group that he'd have luncheon with once a week--then we'd meet sometimes day after day after day, steadily on important security problems. I think he never had a leak.

F: So in your period, the National Security Council was really a study organization?

C: Yes, matters were referred to them, and there would be meetings at which time discussions would take place. I did not consider it an important cog in the decision-making process nor do I consider it such today.

F: One other question. We talked about the influence of the military people on President Johnson. It's also sometimes alleged that Walt Rostow exerted undue influence. Do you think that he was more than just one more adviser, or do--?

C: I'm not sure that I-

F: This is subjective, I know.

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C: I'm not sure that I know sufficiently about the relationship to give a definitive answer. I know this. From my previous experience in the Truman Administration, when I served as special counsel, I had access to President Truman every day. At any time of day that he wasn't in a meeting or seeing somebody else, then I could always get access. I had also the custom that was established in the first year that I went in there, that at the end of each day I would go in with what matters I might have and have a little clean-up session. It might take twenty minutes or a half-hour or an hour. Sometimes he'd have what he called bourbon and branch water at the end of a day, and I'd sit and talk with him. I knew that that daily access I had to him was enormously important. I knew that the impact that I could have on his thinking by reason of that close presence exceeded that of almost anybody else.

And I think insofar as the relationship between President Johnson and Mr. Rostow is concerned, I know the President had great regard for his loyalty, his patriotism, his dedication, and his judgment. Now it so happened that I differed with Mr. Rostow on important questions having to do with the Vietnamese war. That did not affect either my regard or affection for him or my recognition of his dedication as a patriot. I think the fact that he had access to the President at almost anytime any day gave him a certain advantage, and from time to time I had the feeling that in order to get my view over to the President it took perhaps additional active and strenuous efforts in order to be able to keep pace with other views that were being presented to him daily by those who had daily access to him.

F: You were in on the birth of the CIA. Has it developed along the lines that were originally envisioned?

C: The answer would have to be yes, because the concept of its development was necessarily murky when it was created at the very beginning. We had some--

F: You knew you wanted something but weren't clear quite what.

C: To a certain extent. We had the experience of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services], which was the predecessor organization, and we felt an intelligence group was needed. Exactly which direction it might take was not clear, and I think that the President and the Congress very intelligently used quite general language in creating the CIA. Just, as I might add, our forefathers did when they wrote the Constitution. That is one of the most remarkable efforts ever conceived by man, because they laid down broad general principles, but did it in such a manner that they allowed all kinds of room for growth and even for an entirely different concept that might come about in future years. And a good deal of that existed with reference to the CIA.

One very quick reference. As it developed, it became unwieldy. Jurisdictional disputes became more common, and I think it was not functioning very well. President

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Kennedy called me over to the White House within a few days after the Bay of Pigs debacle, and he said, "I've made a tragic mistake, and I did so, as I analyze it, because the premises upon which I based my decision were erroneous because the information that we had was wrong." He said, "I'm creating a board of nine men, making the head of MIT, Jim Killian [James R. Jr.], the chairman, and I'd like you to serve because I know of your activity in the original birth of the CIA and our whole intelligence concept. And I'd like this group of nine men to conduct the most searching investigation of the foreign operations of the CIA and come back to me and report and make recommendations as to how it could be improved."

And I served on that board for seven years, '61-'68, until I went into Defense, two years as a member and then when Jim Killian became ill, President Kennedy appointed me chairman and I served for five years as chairman.

And I think it did really quite an unusual task, and rendered really a unique service. By the time I left, we had submitted the unbelievable number of some 215 recommendations to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson for changes in the conduct of our intelligence operations abroad. Of course some of those would be very far-reaching and some of them relatively minor.

F: They dealt both with specifics and with generalities, I presume.

C: Yes. Now one quick illustration--or some of them dealt with organization. We were the group that recommended that the DIA be created, the Defense Intelligence Agency. The three services were operating without any real coordination so that we recommended this be created and it was. And it has worked reasonably well; it's worked better than the three separate agencies worked before. I think it could be improved.

F: Is it competitive with the CIA?

C: That's difficult to do. You see, they work very closely together and I'm not in position to say between the two which works the better, but a good deal can be done to DIA to make it more responsive to the needs, not so much of the services, because they've kept their same old intelligence organization, but the DIA should be made more responsive to the needs of the Secretary of Defense. I think it doesn't come through too well there. But in any number of instances, we've found in our travels--you see, each member of this intelligence board would have to go abroad each year and so it gave us information on the ground--and I think now our whole intelligence operation is conducting itself with certainly higher standards, more effectiveness, I think better esprit and overall is doing a better job.

F: Did you get the feeling that the CIA sometimes gathered the intelligence it thought its superiors back home wanted to hear; it was not always just an objective

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chips-fall-where-they-may sort of agency?

- C: No, no. I think I didn't encounter that so much. I believe the facts came in pretty well. There are two problems. One is the interpretation of facts--a quick illustration. When the Soviet Union decided to put offensive missiles in Cuba, reports began to come in to the CIA that there were offensive missiles on Cuba. Now they had already reached a tentative policy decision that the Soviet Union wasn't going to put offensive missiles on Cuba because it was just contrary to every previous experience they'd had with the Soviet Union and with what they considered to be an accurate analysis of Soviet reasoning. So they just didn't pay the attention to these reports, because their mind was closed. And they even wrote some reports, you see, that this had not taken place and they felt the Soviet Union would not put any offensive missiles. On a certain flight, series of flights, it was established without question that there were offensive missiles there. Then came the confrontation. This was one of the mistakes the CIA made and will to some extent still make. Every intelligence--
- F: This is the subjective factor.
- C: This is the evaluation of the raw intelligence that comes in. What interpretation do you place upon it? Now the other big problem, and they've not found the answer--the information now comes in in such enormous quantity that the question is how can you break it down and really pick out those few kernels of information that are enormously important. And the board gave a good deal of attention to this: how can we keep from being so overwhelmed by the inflow of volumes of raw information? And we made a definite effort in that regard, and I think made some progress but not as much as we ought to make. That still is one of the great problems. It'll have to be done to a great extent by scientific means but--
- F: Necessarily have to depend on some lower level people to sift for you.
- C: Yes, and then ultimately even a more sophisticated computer system than we have today is going to have to be used. The computers have helped a great deal, and they'll help more because we have an enormous computer operation in the CIA and in the NSA.

NSA is a very interesting agency. I doubt if you'll find one out of a thousand Americans who ever heard of NSA; it's the National Security Agency. Interestingly enough because this is in confidence, I suppose the NSA today has 110,000 employees and hardly any American knows that the Agency exists. It's larger than almost every department, you see, other than the Defense Department. It's the Agency that's charged with the responsibility of bringing in to the proper sources all the information that passes throughout the atmosphere, twenty-four hours a day. So to perform this function we have personnel in every corner of the earth operating intercepting stations. Sometimes on the ground, sometimes in the air, sometimes underground, sometimes on the sea, under the

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sea, goes on this enormous, really gigantic, task of intercepting all this information, and we could not exist as a nation without it. We have to know what's going on in major countries over the world, and in this manner this is the way we get that intelligence.

F: How does most of the information feed back here?

C: It comes on back to NSA, which has an enormous installation outside of Washington. It's deciphered there, analyzed, catalogued and passed on to CIA and to Defense.

F: Is there any truth to the charge that CIA meddles?

C: Meddles?

F: In foreign affairs? In intelligence, meddles, yes, but that I mean it actually does promote regimes or revolutions?

C: Oh, there is some support for that, but it only does it in the instances where it is this country's policy to do it, and the CIA is instructed to do that either by the highest authority or by State. It does not--in my experience with it over seven years--go off free-wheeling on its own.

F: It does not make independent policy?

C: It does not make independent policy. Now the charge is made on the Hill from time to time that it does, but that doesn't happen to be the fact.

F: On this matter of policy, you had some problems with some of your military people sounding off along certain lines and making independent--or seeming to make independent arrangements. Is that a viable charge?

C: Yes, it goes on and it will always go on. There's no way completely to stifle independent individual views. They get out. You can't just permit it to go on completely without restraint or you'll have chaos. And in the Defense Department when policies were laid down by the Secretary, in the main they were obeyed throughout the Department. Sometimes there would be persons who disagreed with it, who would go to their favorite columnist or radio or TV personality--

(End of tape 5)

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INTERVIEWEE: CLARK CLIFFORD (Tape 6)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

(Continuation of Tape 5)

- F: We were talking right there at the conclusion about the CIA and about some military men in a sense making independent policy, or attempting to; I don't know whether there's anything more that needs to be said on that or not.
- C: No, the comment that I made, I'm not sure it got on the tape, was there will always be the expression of individual views, but it has been my experience that the CIA did not make independent policy, that it was controlled by the White House and the State Department as far as policy was concerned and my experience at the Pentagon was that the military generally followed decisions made by the Secretary of Defense or the Service Secretaries, with occasional instances in which they used their own avenues to achieve either in the press or the communication media or on the Hill their own particular goals which they thought maybe they understood better than any of the civilian secretaries.
- F: I was also thinking about some, we'll say General in Spain who makes certain promises that perhaps neither the State Department nor the Defense Department are ready to deliver.
- C: Yes, I know about that situation. I would say only that I think the newspapers dramatized that to an extent which resulted in a distortion so great that it really just became misinformation. There'd been some preliminary discussions between military leaders, no binding commitments had been made, it was reported in such a manner by certain people who have been exceedingly suspicious of Spain from the very beginning, and it was blown up out of all proportion to the seriousness of the charge. I think you'll notice that it has been a long time since anything's appeared about Spain, because upon investigation the facts really did not bear out the charges that were made.
- F: When a charge like that is made, are you more or less for purposes of self-protection are you forced to make your own at least quick investigation to see that the charges don't have substantiation, or can you dismiss them?
- C: Oh, no. I think speaking from the standpoint of the Secretary of Defense, I think he's got to know the facts, and in that particular instance it went on into the Laird Administration, but I got a full report on what had gone along there and was able to report in detail to Secretary Rusk exactly what had taken place. So it all helped to clarify. Now one of the big problems the Secretary of Defense has is being sure that he is correctly and fully informed, and in the recent incident I think it helps demonstrate it in what has become

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known as the My Lai massacre that took place in March of 1968, when I was at the Pentagon. I heard nothing about it in March of 1968; I heard nothing about it all through 1968,--

F: I was going to ask you--

C: I never heard anything about it at all until I saw it in the press for the first time and I assume that was sometime in November of 1969. And I was asked by the press if I had ever heard about it and I said, no, not until I saw it in the paper. They thought that seemed strange, but the fact is I later learned that Secretary Resor of the Army did not hear about it until April of 1969, and I would only have heard of it through him, and he immediately then notified Secretary Laird, the present Secretary. So Laird's only known about it since April of '69. In that instance, somewhere along the chain of command that story died, just completely. I'm just sure General Westmoreland never heard of it, he was then our Field Commander in Viet Nam, and it's entirely possible that it could have been two or three or four echelons below him that that story just disappeared.

F: One advantage you had, coming in when you did and one reason, I think, leaving out your own personal qualifications, but one reason you were such a successful Secretary of Defense was that Secretary McNamara was caught by history, he was caught on his own mistakes as well as his triumphs, but he was trapped by a history of seven years in office. Now you came in with a completely fresh slate, uncommitted to anything, and you could give it a new examination. There is some feeling that perhaps this hampered Secretary Rusk, as it would hamper any man who stays in office a prolonged length of time, that you ought to have some turnover, despite the values of continuity, that every now and then you ought to relieve someone and just get a new face in. What I'm leading up to is within your knowledge, did President Johnson ever consider replacing Secretary Rusk?

C: Not that I ever heard. He was entirely satisfied with him. He, one, was very fond of Secretary Rusk; two, he thought he was exceedingly able, he knew him to be a patriotic and dedicated citizen, he had long experience and background which President Johnson felt was valuable under all the circumstances, and as far as I know it never entered his mind to replace him. Directing my comments toward the early part of your observations, I agree completely that a man can stay too long in government. His efficiency, his effectiveness, extent of the contribution he makes, diminishes very, very rapidly in my opinion after about four years. Now the first year he spends learning the job. And the second year he's still learning a little but he's making quite a contribution, and then the third and fourth years he's making a great contribution. My own view is that four years is about as long as a man ought to stay in one job, he ought to get out of that job and go into this rather informal pool of experienced men that exists in this country and then be available for some subsequent Administration.

I have another theory, and that is the first time a man serves in government, he's

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only reasonably effective, the second time he serves in government, he's infinitely more effective, and maybe the third time, then he's that rare fellow who makes a unique and outstanding contribution. There's an enormous advantage in having experience with our government. You begin to understand how the wheels mesh, you know where the centers of power are, you know how to get things accomplished. Some of the most unfortunate results we've had in government have been the result of individuals who have held top positions in the business community with no previous acquaintanceship with government. And when they come in, they're given a Cabinet position, and it could be a calamity. So that I subscribe to the theory that Jim Forrestal had, that as men serve in government, they serve, say, for four years, then they ought to get out, they should get out by reason of health, and mental attitude.

F: Maybe recoup their finances.

C: That's the next point, for economic reasons. Then maybe they're out two, three, four, five, six or eight years, and then time comes--they move into a pool in which our country has an enormous investment in brains and experience. Then another President comes in and he reaches in and pulls these men out of the pool. It has a great deal to recommend it. Jim Forrestal used to say, "Why, you take General Motors, they're constantly searching for the best brains in the country. They take them young and educate them and train them, they go to other companies to persuade men to come into theirs, they'll even go steal men to get the best brains because they know that's the only way they're going to succeed." But he said, "How much more important it is for our country that's faced not with showing a profit to the stockholders but with actually finding the means by which we can endure in this very difficult and complex period." So he said, "It's our country that needs the best brains that it can get." And I submit to you the best brains in the country are in this pool of men who have had one, two or three separate terms in government service. The perfect illustration is a man like Robert Lovett, who served as Deputy Secretary of Defense two or three years, went back to his banking firm, Brown Brothers, Harriman, some years later came back as Under Secretary of State in George Marshall's time, went on back to his banking firm, some time later was brought back as Secretary of Defense. By the time he came back--

F: He didn't have to be broken in.

C: He sure didn't. The first day he was in that office he began to run it.

F: Talk about people very briefly. I got the feeling that some of the Johnson Cabinet were getting a bit weary, we've mentioned Secretary Rusk, but you can answer or not. At the time he went out I had the feeling Secretary Gardner, who'd spent four years time in the actual cabinet--but of course you were always around--had probably just about reached the limit of his usefulness, that maybe Secretary Wirtz at the end of the Administration was just holding on until it went out of office. Do you have this sort of--in general--do

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you get the feeling that men do wear out in this job?

C: Oh boy, they really do. There are a number of factors in favor of serving four years and leaving. Your level of contribution starts to decline after four years. If you've been in a policy-making position, you develop areas of resistance to almost everything you want to do. You develop problems with a President. If you stay on too long those accumulate and have a tendency to pull you down. Also, I think to some extent a man who's involved in policy decisions becomes so engrossed in those and so determined to see that they work out correctly that he gets into difficult postures.

F: He gets protective in a sense of his own--

C: Well, I've concluded that one of the deepest of all human emotions is the desire for vindication and you make certain policy decisions that seem right to you at the time and then you stick with them. And even when they become questionable, there's a human tendency to stick with them in the hopes that they'll turn out. So that--

F: The Jim Forrestal who says he's wrong is rare.

C: That's right, that's right. That's a rare bird. And new infusion of fresh faces, a fresh approach is very valuable to an administration. It doesn't happen enough and one of the reasons it doesn't happen enough is because a President--it happens every time and I've been watching it for twenty-five years--a President comes in and he has a large circle of people with whom he's in contact. The second year he's in, it's a small circle, the third year it's smaller, and the fourth year it's just down to a handful, and it happens every time. And out of that handful there--there ought to be a change ever so often so that it doesn't become too inbred and too ingrained. There's no way to order it that way it's just that I hope Presidents themselves begin to recognize the need for fresh life coming into an administration. If I were advising a President in that regard I would say, "Pick the best man you can and tell him at the time, ask him if he could stay for four years, and have some kind of an understanding with him. Well now, if you have something that might be four years and three months to get over something, make that as a general understanding. The fact is that maybe it helps you get a man, too, if you can agree with him on a more limited period."

F: When HUD was instituted, there was a long delay between the starting of the department and the naming of Robert Weaver as its head. Was this just one of the President's failures to get around to things, or do you think he had a real reluctance about Weaver. Did he ever express himself?

C: I don't know, I don't know the answer to that. I had so little to do with that Department.

F: I've got another one that you may know something about, and that is Nicholas

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Katzenbach. After Bobby Kennedy moved on as Attorney General, Katzenbach was then Acting Attorney General for a long time and did not get the full title for awhile and then was later moved over to State. Was this again some questioning of Katzenbach's value or loyalty or did the President ever express himself to you on that?

C: I'm not sure he ever expressed himself to me on it, but I believe I picked up enough from him and others to know that situation, at least in my own opinion. All a man can do is have his own opinion. I considered Katzenbach a very superior fellow, excellent intellect, good judgment, got along with people well, was relaxed, and a very able public servant. When Bobby Kennedy was killed, Katzenbach was Acting. I believe the President's concern was that Katzenbach had been a Kennedy man, hand-picked by Kennedy and put in the job and that the whole Justice Department was Kennedy and I think this was a matter of concern to him and properly so. He and Bobby Kennedy had not been--

F: Congenial.

C: They'd not been working along together, their goals were different, they were in competition with each other, they were both going in different directions and I think President Johnson always felt he did not stand high in the regard of Kennedy, so that the idea that he would have to run an Administration with a Justice Department which was being controlled by Bobby Kennedy didn't appeal to him at all. And I don't blame him. So he left the situation there hanging for months and months while he gave a good deal of thought to the whole situation. I think he finally concluded that Katzenbach was loyal to him, that he was a good man, was the right man, and then I think he felt too that if he put somebody else in there it might have a very bad morale effect on the personnel at lower levels in the Justice Department. So he finally named Katzenbach and Katzenbach made him a good Attorney General, an excellent one. And it proved to be a decision that the President came to slowly but was glad that he had made it after Katzenbach had been in there awhile. However, being completely forthright, I think the President always wondered whether or not there wasn't a continuing close relationship between Katzenbach and the Kennedys, and the President never felt the Kennedys were for him, and it put a doubt in his mind. Later on when the number 2 job opened up in State, he talked to Katzenbach about that and said he wanted Katzenbach to take it, and Katzenbach made a very difficult but a manly decision. It's difficult to give up a Cabinet post and just take a number 2 spot, particularly under a very strong Secretary of State who has the full confidence of the President. You know you're never going to be more than number 2, but--

F: There's no question who's going to run the State Department.

C: None whatsoever, but he did it and made a very real contribution in his capacity as Under Secretary of State.

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- F: Do you think the fact that by that time Katzenbach was a bit of a target for some dissatisfaction within the country influenced the President in moving him over there? Of course he then brought up--have we reached the stage now where the Attorney General is always going to be a target, because Ramsey was certainly no more popular and now Mitchell--
- C: Ramsey Clark became more of a target than Katzenbach and now Mitchell just has gone out almost and sought it.
- F: Yes, on the days he didn't he sent his wife.
- C: In the positions that he and the other members of his family have placed him, you'd assume that he just chose to take controversial positions.
- F: Did the President ever express to you any feeling that perhaps he was let down by leadership in Congress after he became President? He would know so well, of course, what he and Sam Rayburn had done for Eisenhower's Administration, and I think probably Mike Mansfield was his choice at the time but I often wondered if he didn't feel that Senator Mansfield had in some ways let him down.
- C: I think every President feels that to a certain extent. You'll recall that in President Johnson's early years, let's say those first two years, his legislative accomplishments exceeded just about any other period of American history. He couldn't have had much complaint about the leadership at that time. As time went on, he got through that real flush period, then he complained a good deal about the leadership and I think as a matter of fact, I think he felt more concern about Senate leadership than he did about House leadership. He had been a strong leader, and I think he also wanted a strong leader, but the fact is, as you stop and look, just where was that strong leader? If Bob Kerr had lived he would have been a very fine leader, but the Senate was just going through a period when it did not turn out a man who just naturally assumed the mantle of leadership and everybody permitted him to assume it. Sometimes you have a giant come up at the right time and most of the times you don't have giants.
- F: Did you get to observe the President's relationship with Senator Dirksen during this period?
- C: Yes, yes.
- F: I presume they in some ways came nearer talking each other's language than he did with some members of his own party on the Hill.
- C: No doubt in my mind about it. They'd known each other a long time, they were professional politicians, they understood each other. Dirksen tickled him in Dirksen's

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manner and Dirksen's wit, and so forth, so it was important to President Johnson, too, to get support from time to time from the Minority Senate Leader, and they had a very close and effective working relationship.

F: While I'm thinking of things like some of the civil rights acts that were passed, opening housing, for instance, I think Dirksen could have killed, but he came around in opposition really to party leadership and in opposition I'm sure to his own instincts. I've wondered why, if you examine Dirksen's record, so often he did reverse himself from an immediate position and come around to the Administration's. Was this just a matter of Dirksen arriving at this independently, or do you think he and the President did work together on these issues?

C: It's the latter. They did work together on issues and sometimes when the President had to have him he would say so and I think that Dirksen on occasion would change his position because he felt the President needed him to help.

F: Do you think he ever hijacked the President in a sense as far as location of a facility in Illinois or was this sort of thing tacit and unspoken?

C: Oh, no. He played it very square with the President and he didn't take advantage of the relationship. Now there were times that he came to the President with requests that he had to make, but the President understood that, and the President would try to meet his requests and Dirksen would try to meet the President's requests. As a result it was a relationship that just had the tendency to keep a film of oil over the wheels of government.

F: That's nicely put.

You were Defense Secretary when the April riots broke out. How did that involve you personally? To a certain extent it was a Parks Police matter and a White House security matter, but it also was partially was your matter, too.

C: Yes. It certainly didn't involve me personally. I didn't get caught in it or involved in it. What we did was call upon the troops that we were holding in reserve for such emergencies and get them ready and then stationed so they could be called upon and I'd say, too, that the April riots led to the establishment at my direction of a whole new center in the Defense Department for the handling of civil disturbances. And it's worked well. It's a big job, bringing in troops by plane from as far as North Carolina or Texas, sometimes, and you bring them up and they have to be billeted and handled and equipped and the specific problems told to them. It's a great big job and you have to know when to get them there, and the right time to move them into positions and all. So rather than having this done catch-as-catch-can, as it was done before, we've actually now established a Civil Disturbance Center in the Pentagon. The people who watch the conditions throughout the country and who are expert, becoming more expert at it all the time, and

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when trouble starts then that Center really goes into operation. I believe it's going to be very effective.

I'm beginning to run out of steam now.

F: All right. Let's quit.

(End of Tape 6)

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By Clark M. Clifford

to the

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