INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: RAY S. CLINE

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Dr. Cline's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

C: Well, I'm sure you recollect the timing and the formal definitions of the Mongoose operation better than I do, but as I recall it, it was a persistent theme in national security circles' thinking about Cuba that we ought to be able to overthrow Castro, or get rid of Castro as people tended loosely to say, in other ways than by invading his island, as we sort of did in the Bay of Pigs, or trying to murder him, as later on we all discovered that a few people had had in mind for some time.

Just for the historical record, in case it makes any difference, the existence of the formal plan to assassinate Castro is the only operational program of any consequence that I know of that I might have been exposed to and was not. Dick Helms never mentioned it to me. I learned later that he didn't mention it to John McCone for a long time, too, so I guess I shouldn't have my feelings hurt, and I'm sure he was trying to keep it covered up for many good reasons.

But at any rate, after the Bay of Pigs and even after the Cuban missile crisis, I know that the Kennedys and John McCone, who talked to me about it almost as soon as I came back to Washington in the spring of 1962 to become deputy director for intelligence, were

preoccupied with the Cuban threat, the affront of having a Soviet-oriented communist regime in the Western Hemisphere. In those days people still spoke about the Monroe Doctrine as being a concept which ought to underlie our policy and ought to justify rather strenuous measures, if we felt they were necessary, to prevent the importation to this hemisphere of what they used to call an alien form of government. Of course, the original alien form of government was monarchy and this is the communist dictatorship. But as I say, that idea that the United States had a kind of responsibility to prevent the form of government which was viewed as alien to our institutions, very correctly, I think, from taking hold in Cuba was occasionally discussed. At least the idea struck responsive chords whenever it was touched on. Now, Mongoose, as I understand it, was the operational plan, which seemed to me to be very amorphous, to bring this about after the Bay of Pigs failed. As far as I recall, it stayed on as a program up till the time of Kennedy's death. I'm not even sure whether it ever got wiped out, but it certainly got called off eventually.

G: Were your analysts ever asked to evaluate the plan. . . ?

C: No. As far as I can remember, I was authorized to discuss this with some of my analysts in terms of the problem, the issues, and my opinion on Mongoose was very specifically asked by McCone. But no formal papers were ever written that I remember, nor I suppose would they want any of the desk level analysts to know that it was an approved project. However, John McCone was always more relaxed about some of these things than other people in the clandestine services

might have been, and he talked to me regularly about it, not telling me everything he was thinking and doing, I am sure, but asking my opinion on many subjects and saying, in accordance with the understanding which we had in general, that I would be a kind of cut-out between the clandestine services, for whom I had worked some, and the Directorate of Intelligence, which I then headed. So I could formulate the questions knowing full well the operational problem in a way which would elicit the information needed from the analysts without necessarily and preferably without giving the analysts the detailed picture of where the policy makers were going, that was the concept. I used to say I was supposed to be a permeable membrane between the analytical and the operational sides of CIA.

G: You let some things through and others you prevented?

C: And I took that very conscientiously and would indeed call in key analysts and say, "Just thinking out loud, if you were asked the following questions, what would you say?" And they were pretty savvy and may have guessed pretty well what I had in mind, but we observed the proprieties and did not surface the operations. I'm sure Mongoose wasn't known to very many people. In fact I don't recall until long afterward seeing any very formal paper on it myself, but I wrote down suggestions for McCone. Chet Cooper, who was my assistant or deputy part of that time and was working into the White House in a staff circle to which he I think eventually went full time, was involved in some of that planning and he wrote memos for McCone, as I recall it. We certainly discussed what, as far as I could figure out, had to be

essentially a program of economic warfare. Now, there was an operational side to it in that some of the teams that had been prepared for infiltration of Cuba for various purposes, to collect intelligence or organize a resistance group or anti-Castro resistance group or whatever, were infiltrated to do what I would call superficial economic sabotage. They tried to cause trouble for the economy of Cuba. That was the angle, at any rate, of Mongoose that I worked on and commented on and may have written some papers, though I don't remember them anymore as to exactly what they were.

But McCone's thought, and he was very deadly serious about all this, was that it was crucial to have Cuban communism a failure. That if we couldn't destroy it, as he would have liked to at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, directly by military means, we ought to make it as unattractive as possible by making it a poor show economically for the Cuban people. He was not around as CIA Director at the time of the Bay of Pigs, but he certainly espoused the "surgical air attack" in 1962. And I think that economic discrediting was the main thrust of the operational planning in this sort of thing adfter mid-1961. The ideas discussed were so vague, and different people knew different things about what was in hand, that I was never absolutely sure whether something more ambitious was in train, and evidently now I know that for a number of years they were hoping some Cuban agent would shoot Castro and make Castroism definitively a failure. But that was not discussed with me.

We had this concept of two concentric purposes within the Mongoose context. One was to make sure that Castro was not able to export the revolution and communism to other countries, and we were very much on to watching for arms shipments and all that. There were a bunch of crises over it and a bunch of occasions when assistance was given to other Latin American countries in internal security. And all that leading eventually to Che Guevara's death was a side of our operational program in Central America and the Caribbean. But Mongoose, as I understood it, was aimed at Cuba proper and it was to prevent the economy from being successful. I know that the agency sent out lots of operational instructions, and they were still going out years later when I was station chief in Germany, which wasn't till 1966. We continued to get messages occasionally saying go do something to interfere with or damage a shipment of economic supplies of some kind to Cuba in Western Europe, and the justification was, without being very explicit, this implied economic warfare against the government of Cuba. I know, and it certainly has been revealed since, that there were lots of little gimmicks like spoiling the bearings in certain kinds of machinery, putting flat bearings in instead of ball bearings, trying to adulterate petrol supplies with sugar and various contaminants. All of that was part of it, as well as direct attack on certain facilities in Cuba. I don't remember any one target specifically now, but I think it was some kind of mining installations. I think they actually assaulted and tried to blow them up or something.

That's what I understood Mongoose to be, though, to be a mainly economic harrassment war against Castro to destroy him without a direct military assault. Is that right? Is that your impression?

G: Yes, that's right. Do you recall the comments that you were asked to give and what you had to say?

C: Well, not very clearly. I believe that this concept of the tightening economic noose was one that Chet Cooper and I put together in 1962, because I think McCone asked me to pay some attention to it fairly soon after I came back, saying in effect, you know, that they screwed up at the Bay of Pigs and nobody's got any very good idea of what we ought to be doing, but we've got to do something. This is still a serious situation. We cannot tolerate the spread of Castro-type communism in Latin American. And after the Bay of Pigs it seemed obvious that no direct military assault was going to take place, and I felt that the Cuban motivation was not very ideological nor very strong and that Castro would be viewed as a success if he improved the standard of living of the Cubans and be viewed as a failure if he didn't.

So I certainly urged this economic strangulation concept, recognizing, though, that it was not likely to bring the economy to a standstill, was not likely to prevent him from being in rigid control of the country, but that it could make the system unpopular, could make it more difficult for him to take steps both inside and outside the country that we would oppose, and generally move him into measures for his own internal security that would be unpopular with the Cubans

and make it harder for him to operate. So we were in a sense doing what the Russians do so well and using much smaller assets that we had in Cuba, as they do in other countries, to force the regime on the defensive and to use its economic resources unwisely and to experience some sabotage of them.

So I can't say a great deal for this concept except that it was in the ballpark and it was assigned somewhere between outright war and surrender, and that was Operation Mongoose, a sort of classical covert action program supported by the government, as far as I can know, fairly enthusiastically for a time and probably unrealistically enthusiastically on the part of some of the politicians. We never saw it, as I said, the people I talked to in the DDI [Directorate of Intelligence], nor did I ever hear the operators in DDO [Directorate of Operations] wax very optimistic about its being totally successful. But the feeling was, well, we're supposed to make life tough for Castro. Bobby Kennedy certainly wanted it, [so did] Jack Kennedy, while he was alive, and there isn't much else you can do except take targets of opportunity. The only thing I remember that really still impresses me was the fact that John McCone, who was a businessman, felt that this could have a distinctly deleterious effect on the Cuban economy, and he was relentless in pursuing it. He was the one who would say, "Have you reminded the station chiefs everywhere in the world that if they know that some transaction involving trade to Cuba is taking place, try to do something about it. Try to make it unsuccessful." So he was committed to it perhaps more than almost anyone

else and maybe under other circumstances it might have been more successful. But I think it suffered from two things: first, in 1962 the success of the Cuban missile crisis kind of eased the feeling that we had to do something about Castro though it didn't change the basic analysis, and then of course Jack Kennedy's death in 1963 changed all the bidding in terms of government policy-making generally.

G: Would it be misleading to say that the vendetta sort of ended with Kennedy's death?

C: Well, yes, I guess you could say that. I think the very bitter personal feeling that both Jack and Bobby had--I called it an obsession once in writing and Arthur Schlesinger jumped down my throat, and Mac [McGeorge] Bundy, for saying that the President was obsessed. But whatever, he was certainly very determined to try to get even with Castro for what he thought of as a humiliation at the Bay of Pigs. I think that did end and it was unique. On the other hand, I think Lyndon Johnson was just as concerned about the problem. I feel that Johnson tried to pick up exactly where Kennedy left off on all these matters. He certainly was not enthusiastic about the prospects of getting involved in the Vietnam War but he never questioned that the nation had to do it, and I think he felt the same way about Castro. Whatever it was we were doing that was anti-Castro, he would continue to support, and it probably took him a while to find out what we were doing. So I don't think there was a big change in policy, but after Jack's death the spirit was just a little different.

G: Less intensity.

C: Yes.

G: Did you have any contact with Ed Lansdale on Mongoose?

C: A little bit but not a great deal. He was the central planner in this kind of operation, but I had a somewhat unusual position, I think, in that I had met Lansdale and met nearly everybody in the clandestine business when I was station chief in Taiwan before I was deputy director. So nearly all the operators trusted me and told me things that technically and in the old days the DDI was never cut in on. So I would sort of float in and out of these things. It often was not my business to write papers or comment on operational programs but every once in a while McCone would say, "Come on along with me to this meeting. I'm going to the White House," you know.

So I would get into some of the clandestine planning more than I really wanted to. And McCone I think was--well, he used to say, "As far as I'm concerned, you're my China specialist no matter what happens." Anything China he would ask me about, and to some extent, for not very good reasons, I think, he felt that everybody had screwed up on Cuba, so he kind of tried me out on Cuba once in a while, too. But that was pretty much at the pleasure of the Director and I never pushed it any farther than he insisted, because I wasn't altogether comfortable sometimes with making proposals and suggestions in the clandestine field when I simply didn't have time or opportunity to do my homework. I know that in the clandestine operational field if you don't know all the details, you're likely to make a mistake, and that's the whole point of those operations is to be meticulous in

handling every possible source of difficulty before it comes up. And since I couldn't do that I tended to stay with the general analysis, which I thought was useful from the DDI but not determinative in the operational sense.

G: One hears in the literature allegations that the operational side of the CIA did not benefit from the comments of the analysts as much as they perhaps should have.

C: Yes.

G: What's your comment on that?

C: Well, I don't know. Maybe I have said something like this before, but let me just briefly say that I feel that the operational mind and the operational personality is different from the analytical mind or personality. It does not mean they're totally different, but it's like a spectrum in which one side tends towards one end of the spectrum and one towards the other. A good analyst obviously overlaps with the preoccupations of a good operator and vice versa. Ideally they would be the same. They would cover the whole spectrum; they'd think all the abstract thoughts and all the possible generalizations and yet get down to all the nitty-gritty of what you can do and how you do it and what sort of personalities you can manipulate and so on.

But basically I would say, in oversimplifying, your analyst is trying to abstract general frameworks of ideas out of any issue he's studying so as to predict what's going to happen next and see patterns of past and future situations, whereas the operator has some such framework in his mind, and the more conscious he is of what it is,

probably the more successful he'll be. But the operator's job is not to tinker with the subtlety of the framework but to manipulate the people and the events, and generally speaking it all boils down to manipulating people. So the personality of a good operator will normally be a hands-on manipulator of people, because that's the way he manipulates events and gets things to happen and finds out things. Many DDI analysts have many of those same skills. God knows, in Washington you have to manipulate people all the time in any walk of life in order to keep alive. But it is a distinction between the end product, which is for the analyst a coherent and articulate set of concepts, and for the operator either data or events taking place that you can report on and describe. So one is more analytical and one is more descriptive; one is more thoughtful and the other more manipulative.

Now, I think if you take those definitions not too seriously but indicating the slant toward which the ordinary employee in CIA would lean, one or the other, it's not surprising that communication is imperfect. I don't think that it was as bad as often is suggested. I know that when circumstances permitted, there often grew up a real love feast between various analysts and operators in a given field where they clearly exchanged a great deal of information and analysis and where the two sides of the house felt benefited from it. It was certainly the policy under, first, Des [Desmond] FitzGerald and then--no, first Helms and then Des FitzGerald, when I was DDI, to encourage

a cross-fertilization of talents and information with due regard for sensitive security data.

But that worked both ways. You see, the analysts were very sensitive at that time about divulging photographic intelligence and signals intelligence for which relatively few DDO operators were cleared, just as the DDO people were sensitive about human source plans and operations that they were afraid might be blown. So usually a good operator and a good analyst established a rapport; they each knew the things that they probably would not want to go into fully with the other, but there was an enormous overlap where they could help each other, and they did. The extent to which this happened, as I say, usually sort of depended on the extent to which the DDs pushed it, which was a good bit when I was around, or the accident of some people being thrown together on some specific project and striking up a personal relationship, which then almost invariably could go on without anybody ever suggesting it shouldn't, although the tradition was that the two sides of the house stay separate.

G: Were there instances where people went back and forth across the lines, operators and analysts and vice versa?

C: Oh, yes. Well, of course, I guess my career is the most outstanding, going back and forth several times. But we had a conscious policy, at least when I was DDI, of encouraging that, and of course I had a sort of foreign service in the DDI which I had built up very consciously, saying that the DDI needed the kind of field experience for its own analytical background that you could get in foreign assignments. So

we would set up a post to which DDI people were assigned, but in practice in an overseas station if this guy didn't get up to his elbows in operations it was because he and the station chief didn't hit it off. Because you couldn't live in a station without being exposed to a lot of the operational atmosphere and interest, and if the guy was good from the DDI side, he was usually welcomed and exploited and sent out on what otherwise would be clandestine operations. In other words, the difference between being a clandestine operator and a diplomatic or a scholarly operator is very slight in the initial stages of doing anything. You really just kind of get acquainted with people in finding out what they know, and the DDI people were very good at that. That's one of the ways I used to sell station chiefs that they would find it valuable to have a DDI operator there going around asking big, dumb, academic questions and finding out who knew what and so on.

So I guess I was probably the first DDI analyst to go overseas, back in 1950. I went to London to set up the exchange of NIEs, the National Intelligence Estimates, which were new then, with the British Joint Intelligence Committee. And the British were so anxious to know what the hell we were doing that they took me into their bosom, although I observed the very rigid lines between the operators and the analysts and didn't presume to get into any operations, because there were some rather classical, old-fashioned CIA types in charge. The younger people in the operational side used to come to me and get acquainted with me personally and get me to help them find out what

the British were thinking about this and that, because it helped them in their liaison. So I always felt that was quite useful. I don't believe there was anybody else doing this particular thing, the analyst overseas. But when I was DDI I think we had almost fifty of them scattered around the world. So it clearly was a useful thing, certainly useful for the DDI people, and the brighter, the more imaginative operators soon discovered that in effect they were getting a free hand who had a good bit of academic training that was relevant to the area concerned.

Well, I mention that only to say that the agency, and in my view, the more imaginative people on both the analytical and operational side did do a good bit of cross-fertilization, but it did not break down completely by any means the cultural tradition, the cultural myth that the two sides of the house were totally separate. And I suspect, though I can't prove this, that my time in the Directorate of Intelligence was the heyday of pretty free exchange. The reason I say that is that whereas I had the feeling that Helms and FitzGerald were always very open with me and would answer any reasonable question and put people together at my suggestion if I felt there was some benefit in it for either side, Tom Karamessines, who succeeded and was DDO for a long time, was one of the more rigid, classical compartmentation types and he never really felt the advantages of this kind of cross-information outweighed the possible security advantages that theoretically could be jeopardized.

It may interest you in this context--this is getting more into the folklore of intelligence than anything else--but I remember being amused and impressed when I was selected by Allen Dulles to go to Taiwan as station chief in 1957. I went to see Frank Wisner, who I'm sure would not have selected me particularly, although we got along well personally. It just wouldn't have occurred to him to take a senior analyst and do this. He said, "Well, I have a high regard for you and if the boss wants to send you out there, it's fine with me. However," he said, "you know, we have some pride in our traditions in the clandestine services just as you do in the analytical and scholarly world, and I'd like to ask you if you're willing to, even though you are a GS-16"--or whatever I was, and [I] had been around long before any of the testing systems ever got started--"to take the short ops course, so that it can't be said that you don't know what the people working for you know." And I said, "That's great. I think that's a hell of a good idea. I think it would be probably too wasteful to take the long course," which I think was almost a year. But they had a sixteen-week course, I think, several months, and I did take it. I've forgotten how long it was, but it was quite a while and involved going down to the operational training center and going through the whole bit, from night landings and safe-picking [on] up.

G: Did you get your wings?

C: I don't know what I got, but I had an awfully good time. I believe I passed the course with high marks! I enjoyed it thoroughly, wore army fatigues all the time and slept in the bunkhouse down there and got a

lot of exercise. It was a hell of a lot better than sitting around at your desk doing the normal, you know. And knowing I was going to be going overseas soon, it was a nice transition period.

But what I started to say about this was that I brought the instruction to a halt at one point just by snorting. Although we were not supposed to know who each other were, at least nine-tenths of the people in this class knew who I was. A lecturer, who had obviously been giving this lecture for a long time, was stressing compartmentation security, compartmentation of the security, "Don't tell anybody anything." And he had some rhetorical flourish about "You never know who the enemy is. The enemy is the Defense Department. The enemy is the State Department. The enemy is the DDI." Then he looked up and I snorted, and they had to stop the class and start over again. (Laughter)

That myth was very much alive, and yet in practice, as I say, whenever two people saw a common interest, it usually broke down and they pursued it very effectively together. That was certainly what I encouraged, because I always found that it was useful. I never saw a situation--and I usually observed that analysts were extremely secure, because they also, as I say, had their heads beaten all the time about the sanctity of SIGINT and COMINT and all that, and particularly photography, which was new and very sensitive in those days. Nobody ever dared talk about U-2s and satellites. I never saw a situation in which any security was endangered and I saw many in which the two people representing the two different traditions unraveled things and made faster progress and produced better results than they would have

otherwise. And they usually felt that and were very enthusiastic about it.

G: Did anybody come to the DDI and say, "Will this work? We're thinking about committing combat troops in Vietnam. Run this through the mill and tell us what--"

C: Well, that's a little broad kind of a question to get asked, I think, but when I was DDI we did a great many informal memos, DDI memos we called them. They were printed and circulated in limited copies. And in particular we did a number of SNIEs, Special National Intelligence Estimates, which were very operational. If they were interagency like a SNIE, as we called them, there was some effort to disguise the motivation by starting the estimate off with a bunch of hypotheses or assumptions, assuming the United States is in a war in Southeast Asia, assuming this, that and the other. So you didn't have to guess exactly what the situation was or analyze it, but we would try to make those assumptions so that the analyst was clear enough what he was dealing with that he would then be asked to spell out the probable consequences of certain developments in that context. And they would be very practical things like extending the bombing from a fourth of North Vietnam to all of Vietnam, what would be the probable consequences. Most of these SNIEs had "probable consequences of" as their title. So there was a lot of that, and a good bit of it, the same sort of thing, [was] done informally inside the agency either by the DDO or the Director coming to me and saying, "Could you get a couple of your smart guys to answer these questions?" They didn't care how I went

about it, and occasionally they'd say, "Don't tell anybody what we're really thinking of but formulate something so you can give us your best judgment."

So my answer to your question is yes, but not routinely and not as a matter of course. It was probably when somebody was disagreeing with a view that they would decide maybe this is a good one to try out on the analysts and see what they think.

G: Well, in the spring of 1964, as I recall, the contingency that we might have to use air power to get the North to cease and desist was being bandied about pretty freely, wasn't it?

C: Oh, yes.

G: Well, were you asked to comment on that possibility?

C: Yes, we were involved always a little elliptically. In other words, I was always involved in that kind of planning, either as advisory to the DDO or to the Director, mostly to McCone himself. But I had lots of conversations on those things and we nearly always wrote memos expressing what we concluded after discussion. I remember very clearly--let's see, I was going to say I remember clearly, now I can't remember the date. Just before Bill Bundy became assistant secretary of state for East Asia, Bill was in the Pentagon as ISA, International Security Affairs, senior officer. Bill, you know, had worked with me and took my job when I went to London to set up this exchange of estimates with the British, so I had known him some time and knew Mac, his brother, much better from our Harvard days. So whenever it was that Bill had just been selected, I presume, or was about to be

selected, to go from Defense to State, I remember having a dinner seminar in the agency. This is something Chet Cooper and I tried on; we had several of them where we invited about twenty people from all the agencies for a non-operational but no-holds-barred discussion. I remember John Vogt, who became a general officer, one of the principal planners in Vietnam in the Pentagon generally, was one of the group. Johnny Foster I think was there, I may be wrong about that. I knew Foster.

G: General Anthis?

C: Probably. Buck [Rollen] Anthis, yes. We set up what I guess you could call a sort of shadow NSC for non-official, non-operational purposes, and we discussed Vietnam one night for hours, I remember. We served dinner out at CIA. I'm sure this didn't happen too often, probably had trouble getting it through the admin office later, but at any rate I did it and nobody stopped me. But what I recall is the seriousness of that discussion and the way we went through all the hard questions. And these guys mostly knew what was happening and had seen OP 34A, or whatever that operational plan that was being worked up was. My recollection, though, is that this was in the spring of 1964.

G: That fits.

C: Does that fit? Was that when Bundy went over?

G: I think so, and the term 34A I don't think antedates December 1963 [inaudible].

C: I think that's about right. It was just being formulated; whether we knew the name or whether anybody used it, I don't know. But I do remember thinking and have often thought since that that evening, in about a four-hour conversation with everybody pitching in very strong with their views, we covered every problem that came up in Vietnam later on. And there wasn't anything that didn't come up. We covered all these questions: how far do you go, from helping the South Vietnamese harrass the trails and the shore a little bit with motorboat raids, patrol boat raids, up to--and certainly it was a school of thought that the last items on the 34A would be where you would end up. You'd send in three to five divisions into the narrow neck of the North Vietnam.

We discussed all those possibilities. We discussed the relevance of the North to the South. And I'm sure we discussed whether either the administration or the public had the staying power to take on a burden like this. As so often is the case, people seem to think that no intelligent analysis and speculation takes place when something happens in our government. In my experience that is seldom true. Now, it may well be that it never gets up into the mind of the president and the secretary of state and the people who make the final decisions, it's filtered through so many layers. We were definitely at the assistant secretary level there, which was a high level for having this kind of discussion. But I know going home that night and many times afterwards I thought, well, I can't think of anything that you'd have to take into account in tackling this problem that wasn't

brought up there. And there were a few who thought we would lose if we went into it. There's no way the staying power--as I say, I think we tended to blame it on the politicians more than the public, but at any rate it probably was both--would take the long struggle. At least I know one of my points always in that period was "we're not talking about a one-year problem, we're talking about changing a society in the South, and that's a five to ten-year proposition." I always used to say five to ten when I was giving briefings, and of course nobody would blink an eye at that, but nobody really counted up the cost and identified the strategic goals of the kind of military operations that we ran for five years. If they had, I think they might have come out differently.

I may have told you last time, but I want to be sure to tell you because this is one of the--there are two things about the Johnson era that I'm not sure are in the public record anywhere. One is that it was sometime after that meeting in the late summer of 1964, I believe, that Mac Bundy called me, as he often did, and said, "I want you to do something for me and not show it to anybody." I always at that point said, "Well, I've got to show it to John McCone." And he said, "Well, all right, but, you know, don't let it out of hand." He said, "The President has just asked me for the best informed opinion I could get on whether the losses in security and political stability in South Vietnam"--which set in, you remember, with the death of [Ngo Dinh] Diem in 1963 and were pretty bad there in the early part of 1964--"could result in an irretrievable loss of South Vietnam before election

day in November," or whatever the date of the election was that year, before November 1964. "Old friend, you can understand I don't want anybody to know this question ever got asked." I said, "Well, okay, I'll talk to some people without letting them know why and I'll write you my opinion." And as I remember, I wrote a memo, a rather simple memo, saying the trend was down, it was very negative, but that taking into account all of the factors we could then foresee in what was I think only a few months, four, six at the most, nothing was going to happen which would make it irretrievable. That what would make it irretrievable would be just going on doing what we were doing, and that if we had a major, bold program to save Vietnam, it would be in the nick of time after the election but would be--

G: Johnson was asking, if I interpret you right, "Do I have to do anything before the election?"

C: Before the election. And you remember he was whacking away at [Barry] Goldwater on the ground Goldwater would put our boys into combat, and some pretty dirty political TV shots were involved. So that's what he was asking. Now, I say I don't know if that's in the public record anyplace; it may well be. But I'm sure I wrote a little paper on it, and the thrust of it was, "No, you don't have to, but be aware that if you don't do anything between now and then, you're going to have your back to the wall." And I think that probably was correct.

The other thing, though, that I remember that I think shows--I might have mentioned it--a lot about Johnson [is that] as I say, I think in a way he just sort of incorporated wholesale the attitudes

that he inherited intact from the Kennedys but didn't for a long time question [them] in any depth. It was revealed, I suspect, shortly after the election, though it could have been a little earlier when he asked for this memo. At any rate, sometime there, I think at the latter part of 1964, he had a meeting at the White House which I attended and a lot of people attended; I was probably there just supporting McCone. But I have one of those vivid impressions of going around the table the way he sometimes made them do, saying what they thought was happening in Vietnam and how bad it was. And it was bad at the time he was doing it. And everybody kept explaining it, but once or twice somebody--and I think, if I remember, [it was] somebody from the Pentagon--stressed the fact that this war is all redeemable if we put our backs into it, but it's going down the drain. And the real question--and this guy put it in a very skillful, precise way, though I can't remember those precise words--the real question is if we do what is necessary to win this war by building up the South Vietnamese army and government and making it a more attractive system, doing what we called nation-building in those days, and stop the North Vietnamese, will the process stretch out so long that the American public will not support it emotionally and financially?

Well, that kind of kept coming up, you could see that. And as I say, it made me remember that evening seminar. We discussed all those same things, and the general attitude was, yes, all these things are manageable in their own way if you'll put the effort into it, <u>but</u> do

the American people want to put the effort into it? That was the [question].

G: And that's a political decision.

C: And I remember that when that surfaced clearly after kind of being skirted about--that's not the sort of thing you usually say in a White House meeting, but I think some military person finally pretty well said it--Johnson fired up and in his usual profane way said something [like], "Listen, you sons of bitches, don't tell me what the American people will stand for. That's my responsibility. I want to know whether we can win this war or not. Can we do what we have to do?" Nail the old coonskin to the barn door, as he used to say sometimes. "It's my job to assess the public opinion and get the congressional support." Well, I always remember that statement, because I rather applauded him at the time. I thought, yes, he's right, it is his job. But in later years I came to feel that he put his thumb right on it: it was his job and he didn't do it. He didn't want to make the emergency appeals, the tough statements that would enable him to say, "This is a vital, strategic matter for the United States and we've got to sacrifice to do it." As you know, he used to say, "We can have guns and butter both. It isn't necessary--"

I'm sure a lot of the troubles came because the Pentagon always wanted to mobilize some forces. I remember Jack Kennedy called some reserves in over Berlin, and the Pentagon I think felt, "Gee, if we're going in this deep, we really ought to have some new troops called up and then we'll get some more money and we can handle things better."

But Johnson never wanted to go onto an emergency basis, and in a sense he was right, you didn't have to, to do most of the things he approved doing, but he stretched the whole thing out so damn long and left the feeling this was a minor problem that ought to be able to be handled fairly easily. And if it wasn't handled fairly easily, probably we shouldn't be messing with it in the first place. It was just the wrong psychological framework for dealing with what turned out to be one of the decisive wars of the twentieth century in my opinion.

So I go back to the feeling that Johnson's personality and his ways of doing things were critical in that whole process, that his ways were those of a congressman who was accustomed to dealing in broad generalities and then building a voting base on any kind of system you could. You know, you threaten somebody and you build a new highway in somebody else's constituency and generally you keep the support. And he was a master at that, as everybody knows. He did it on the domestic programs initially and then when he got to dealing with Vietnam he kept doing it. He kept saying, "We're fighting for freedom and we'll never let our friends down," and he felt strongly about all those things. It wasn't that he was double-crossing people; it was that, in my view, he kept deluding himself that it would all be easier than it was. He never wanted to bite the bullet of going downtown and telling his congressional cronies, "I'm sorry, you guys, I got you into a situation here where you've got to do some unpopular things, we've got to do them."

I can see Reagan doing that; he's beginning to do it a little bit right now. But Johnson didn't do it. And yet he knew it was his responsibility and I think if he's to be criticized it is for taking that responsibility on himself and telling all of us NSC types to stay the hell out of it, that domestic opinion was his bag, and then eventually letting it get so strong against what he was doing that he himself lost his nerve and gave up. I still think essentially the withdrawal from Vietnam was a misfortune in that it came from Johnson being persuaded that he would probably be so unpopular that he couldn't be re-elected, so he wouldn't run. And since he wasn't going to run, he'd just turn it over to somebody else and let them get out of it as well as they could, that he had misjudged it. I think it was a guilt feeling on his part there in 1968 that wound the whole thing down.

G: Let's move back to the summer of 1964 now, which of course is an interesting period if for no other reason than in August we got the Gulf of Tonkin [incident]. Were you asked what the North Vietnamese were thinking about when they sent those PT boats out there?

C: No, but I volunteered some opinions. This is one where--and I've spoken about this from time to time to people working on the problem--I got very worried during the flow of intelligence that we were possibly misinterpreting some of the messages. It all happened so fast that I've never got a chance and I don't think any of us ever got a chance to say very much about it.

But it was only a few days after the incident that the PFIAB [President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board] had a meeting and interviewed a lot of people, and as they always did, they wanted to know all about the current crisis, flap, whatever it was. It wasn't too clear why they got into these things, but they always did. I remember being called over to the OEOB [Old Executive Office Building] and being given quite a going-over as to what I thought had happened. So they asked all the questions and of course I was trying to be as loyal and reassuring as I could, because what in effect had happened is that somebody from the Pentagon, I suppose it was [Robert] McNamara, had taken over raw SIGINT, in effect, and [had] shown the President what they thought was evidence of a second attack on a naval vessel. And it was just what Johnson was looking for. I've read very detailed accounts by people who had gone into it much more than I was able to at that time, but it fitted what I remember from that time of how they just were dying to get those air attacks off and did finally send them off with a pretty fuzzy understanding of what had really happened. Well, I told the PFIAB, I'm quite sure, what I believed from then on, and later when I was in the State Department's INR [Intelligence and Research], I looked up the file to see if the State Department handling had anything different and found they had the same misgivings I did, really. I guess it was Roger Hilsman.

At any rate, the crucial point was that, as you remember, there was a PT boat episode on one night and some boats were damaged and there were some casualties. Then either the next night or two nights

later, I forget which, the Turner Joy I think it was, they'd sent another ship up and it was patrolling in the same area; it was the area where they had been collecting SIGINT at the time of the South Vietnamese PT boat attacks on the shore station. When the North Vietnamese boats attacked or--yes, I'm sure they attacked, at least made a firing pass at one of our destroyers--they got hit, I don't know, probably by aircraft, and there was a whole flood of reporting about what essentially are after-action reports. Many of those after-action reports were coming in to Washington still at the same time that we began to get reports of a second engagement. And as far as I can tell, the second alleged attack by North Vietnamese PT boats on our destroyers was inaccurate, it was a mistake. Undoubtedly, there were PT boats there, undoubtedly they were running around, and you can't blame anybody for being nervous. But all the after-action reports I ever saw going on up into the seventies--as I say, I looked it up later to see if I had misread it--either were based on very flimsy sightings of torpedo wakes or something by inexperienced sailors who had no other evidence that they saw anything except phosphorescence or something, or the receipt of messages the date/time groups of which made it very hard to tell what the hell was going on, but which sounded like there had been another engagement right then. And there was some firing, [but] as far as I can tell, that second night nobody got hit with anything and no boats came very close to the destroyers.

But I felt confident that the date/time groups were such that we couldn't have gotten back that fast, and therefore guessed what I later pretty well confirmed: practically all the ones that sounded like there was an intent to attack and perhaps some casualties due to the exchange of fire took place on the first night and nothing of that sort took place on the second night, though I am sure the President and McNamara and everybody reading them thought they were talking about something that was going on right at that moment.

G: Was this the unimpeachable intelligence source that McNamara testified to?

C: Yes.

G: That "one of our ships had been lost", when in fact a destroyer had been attacked two days before.

C: Yes, that's it. There's been a good bit of public writing on this so I think it's nothing secret anymore, but I tried to tip them off--the way I put it to the PFIAB was that I thought the intelligence circumstances of the second attack were really quite obscure, and I wouldn't want to guarantee that there had been a second attack. But I said, "Something happened the first night, so if you're saying, 'Was there an attack on an American vessel in international waters?' the answer is yes." The presupposition on which the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was extracted was correct, but I was trying to say to them don't push it too far because it's probably just a technicality. And I never heard any more about it from them. I don't know whether they reported it to the President. I doubt if they did.

G: There was another incident in September.

C: This was all in August, wasn't it? Yes.

G: Yes, but there was a third incident in September and a board of inquiry.

C: Oh, did they have an inquiry?

G: The navy did. I don't know if you were involved in that at all.

C: No, I wasn't. Was that after the Tonkin Gulf Resolution?

G: Yes. It would have been September 18, I think.

C: No, I don't remember that one. If I knew about it, I've forgotten it.

G: It just sort of went away.

C: The same kind of thing, they thought there was an engagement and there was not? I'm right, am I not, the first engagement was unmistakable though it was no big scale?

G: [inaudible] pictures.

C: But then when that second approach by torpedo boats was accompanied by this flash report that a torpedo had been fired which later turned out to be a visual sighting by one seaman who didn't have any way to confirm it and nothing transpired afterward. It didn't make any sense, you know, that one torpedo would have been fired and gone astray and that was all, so he probably didn't really see one, which is easy enough at night in the Gulf. I'm almost sure that the release of the bombers to attack, which led up then to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, was based on erroneous intelligence. And I always felt worried about it although, as I said, I put it, "Well, if you just want to know was there an attack on our ships, yes, there was. But

if, as most people said, 'Jesus, you might think they would do it once sort of in mistake or in anger or something, but if they did it twice they're looking for trouble,' I don't think you can say that."

G: Where would you go to find proof if you were trying to prove or disprove this second incident?

C: This now? Oh, I would go to the INR files. Somebody, perhaps Hilsman, had pulled out all of that SIGINT traffic and put it in a big file, and I pulled it out and looked at it much later, because somebody sent us a book for clearance and everybody wanted to say it was a phony because it pretty much argued the case that this had been a miscarriage of information. So I read that whole file again and I could see even then it would take me six weeks to sort out all those date/time groups and come to the right conclusion. But I could see that they were all screwed up, and whoever had put the file together had made a note which indicated it looked as if most of the damaging evidence about the second night referred to the aftereffects of the first attack. But I think if you have the time to sift through that file carefully it was all there. Now, the other place to go would be NSA, and I couldn't figure it all out because I didn't have all the meanings of all the letters and numbers and things in the messages. You know, I was a navy cryptanalyst for a year at the beginning of the war, and I knew enough about those messages to know that you've got to be awfully careful how you use them. And I'm pretty sure that file was definitive that there was no persuasive evidence of an attack the second night.

So I think that was a case, again, not criminal in my view, but a case where policy makers wanted an intelligence result that in the confusion of the use of raw material and very rapid transmission of information in the White House, practically everybody jumped to the wrong conclusion. And by the time a little more analytical process had taken place it was too late to make any difference: the President had stuck his neck out publicly, the planes had been launched, and the Congress had passed this resolution. And Johnson never tired of carrying that resolution around; I've seen him pull it out of his pocket a dozen times.

G: He called it the [J. William] Fulbright Resolution.

C: Yes. And it was very valuable and, as I say, it's really a Shakespearean or Greek tragedy kind of play. You could deal with it as a tragic flaw in a heroic action. It may be that what Johnson wanted to do was the right thing. It may be that if the retaliation hadn't taken place, something worse would have happened in the war out there, all kinds of possibilities. But as a technical intelligence job, the intelligence people were not given the time to do a good job. That's the way I felt.

G: At the time, before you had gone to INR and [inaudible], what kind of doubts did you have? You said that you told the PFIAB that you knew there was an incident, that it was in international waters, and if you want to retaliate it seems to me you've got a basis. . . .

C: Yes. You've got a legal basis for doing it, but that I think the evidence about the second attack is fuzzy and inconclusive.

G: But it was the second attack that precipitated this. Had there not been a second attack, no planes would have flown and all that.

C: That's right, that's right. That's why, and I don't know how emphatic I was, but I was clear in my own mind at that time, which of course was after the U.S. retaliatory attack took place, though not nearly so clear as I was later, that it was hard to say that any of those messages that we had at the time related to a second attack. Now, I saw much less SIGINT of course at the time. The DDI gets only a sampling of stuff and I mainly heard what my guys were saying when they were putting together the current daily bulletins and things. But I remember I formed a negative opinion that if I were asked to stand up and say did a second attack take place, I would say I cannot prove that it did, though I knew how important it was in their thinking. And I managed, I'm sure, to get that quietly in the record without upsetting the policy applecart, which I didn't feel I was being asked to do.

G: This seems to me would have caused you to hold your breath a few times as the years passed. When McNamara was called to testify before the Fulbright Committee, for example.

C: Yes. Well, I of course never had a lot of confidence in Bob McNamara's judgment about intelligence. I think, like many policy makers, he was too persuaded of his own ability to analyze things correctly and he didn't feel that intelligence officers were very likely to tell him anything he didn't already know. Now, this is a congenital disease among high-level policy makers. They've heard it

all and they know that the technicians tend to quibble and make reservations and so on, and there may be good reasons for their attitude. But it does not surprise me that McNamara went off half-cocked and that the President took the ball and ran with it. As I say, I don't have even a particularly moral feeling about that. I just think it's regrettable that you can't slow people down a little bit in order to take a second look. Like a cutting physician, you know, [if] your surgeon wants to operate, I would nearly always want a second opinion. But if he says, "Well, the guy's going to die on the table," you'd have to let somebody make that decision. As I say, at the time what I was aware of was a negative, it was that I could not convince myself from what I had seen that the second attack actually involved any firing that struck any destroyers or caused them to do any damage to the attacking vessel. But then you're always operating, even as a deputy director, on a selected bunch of traffic and I couldn't go back and screen it all out either. So I wouldn't have been willing to say that it didn't take place at that time, so I took what was probably the diplomatic position that if what they were driving at was did an attack take place, yes, but did it take place on two nearly successive nights, I was not at all sure.

And they didn't go much farther than that into it. They were interested in it, but I didn't feel the PFIAB had a slant of any kind. I don't know what their view was. They were always rather mysterious about the way they operated, and the different members of the group always had different opinions. So it was very hard when you were

talking to them to know what conclusion they were looking to draw. My impression was that they had called me in just routinely, and that because this incident had just taken place they asked me to give them a full briefing on it, and I probably had more of the files and more of the data at hand than anybody else who had briefed them. So I gave them a pretty thorough rundown, but no very clear conclusion probably emerged from it that I know. It was only later that I got, as I say, [to] feeling uneasy about this rush to take action, and frankly I didn't have a lot of confidence that any of them, either McNamara or Johnson, would not act with insufficient intelligence if he felt that what he was doing was right and he wanted to do it. They wanted to have intelligence support, but they were not very demanding. They would be perfectly happy to go off with something that met their criteria and wouldn't necessarily meet mine. I think that's pretty likely.

I don't know, I've argued with such people over the years about it, and some of them I had great respect for. I remember arguing with Chip [Charles] Bohlen once about U-2s when I went to the White House in early 1961 or 1962--I don't know, being a historian I get hesitant every time I start to mention a date because I know how often you remember them wrong. At any rate, I went to the White House, with Allen Dulles' approval in the early 1960s when I was in Taiwan still, to get a U-2 program set up against China after they were called off in Russia. I said, "You know, there's going to be a narrow window here when we can take a lot of pictures in China before they can shoot

the plane down, and we need it, we don't know anything about China, practically. Let's do it." It was very useful, I think. But I had to carry that ball personally up to the President; nobody else wanted to do it. The arguments leading up to it led me to have a scrap with Chip Bohlen who was arguing that the U-2 had caused all this trouble in Russia, hence God knows it would cause trouble elsewhere. And I remember sitting in the corner of the White House while we were debating those things, him saying to me, "You know, there's just an awful lot of intelligence that you guys can get, such as photography, that I'm happy to have if it's free, but I'd rather do without it than have any additional international trouble over it. Because fundamentally, you know, we old diplomats, old foreign service officers, have to depend on our intuition and judgment about situations, and the evidence the intelligence people give us seldom makes much difference."

G: He was saying this when?

C: It was 1961 or 1962.

G: Well, it must have been before the Cuban missile crisis.

C: Yes, it was. No, I always felt the Cuban missile crisis vindicated the old bird, but it was in the doghouse from May 1960 when what's his name [Gary Francis Powers] was shot down until [then]. And it didn't fly for a while and then they put it back on in Cuba and China. Right away I started urging it to be used in China, and there was a lot of resistance, probably from State. As I say, I remember being told up and down the line, "Look, we're for you, but we aren't going to carry the ball. If you want to carry this ball, come back and do it your-

self." (Laughter) So I went on right up and ended up talking to Jack Kennedy himself about it, who said, "Yes, that's a good idea. Go ahead and do it." You know, that's the way these things happen. But that was the time at which I had that fight with Chip. It was a fight, but I just said, "Jesus, that's a narrow-minded goddamn attitude." He said, "Well, you know, my experience is that fundamentally what we know from our background and our judgment of the people we are talking to is what really determines the policy we will take, and all the detail you add to it, we like it. I'm not running down your profession, but don't cause us any trouble to get it because I would rather do without it than to have [trouble]."

G: You were making unnecessary waves for the diplomats?

C: That's right, that's right. Well, you see, he had been there with Eisenhower at the May [1960] showdown with Khrushchev, and it must have been pretty unpleasant.

G: Yes, apparently it was. Ike was furious.

C: Yes. Well, Khrushchev was impossible. He was posturing all the time, you know, but that's what happened.

Okay, well, you got any more? I'm running out of steam. I think probably those are the most useful comments I have.

G: Well, I have more, but I never press past a--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

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