INTERVIEW III

INTERVIEWEE: CHESTER COOPER

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

DATE: August 7, 1969

PLACE: Mr. Cooper's office in Arlington, Virginia

Tape 1 of 1

M: It might be useful just to get a negative on that [Chester] Ronning thing; you said you were not involved directly in that in spite of your connection with the Canadian--

C: No, I was interested in it obviously, first of all because of the Canadian interest. Secondly, because I had known Ronning from the Laos talks in Geneva and knew that he had a considerable amount of experience and contacts out there, and thirdly because of the negotiations. But the fact was I did not see Ronning before or after he was there, and basically my knowledge of it was in terms of picking up the pieces.

M: You might be able to comment on one of the things that has been raised: the degree to which it angered the Canadians; you had a lot of friends among the Canadians. Did it make them very angry that we didn't follow Ronning's initiative to its conclusion?

C: Yes. In fact the Canadians generally have been--if we can divert for a moment on the Canadians--they have been rather patient and long-suffering and not altogether pleased about our relationships with them in connection with Viet Nam. The Ronning mission and our failure to follow up--and basically with Bill Bundy's rather deprecatory remarks about the Ronning mission and its results--troubled them. The fact that they had earlier gone to a considerable amount of trouble to work out the Seaborn mission, and it was done in a way that was probably not quite legit from their point of view, of using their ambassadors for in a sense American intelligence

agencts, was a little troublesome. The relationships between [Lester B.] Pearson and Johnson were not very good on Viet Nam. Pearson did a rather, I think a rather mischievous or--

M: This was his public statement while he was here?

C: Yes. Before he got to Washington he made a statement about Viet Nam, on his way to see the President. And it wasn't--I mean Pearson is a very decent man--and that's why I was searching for the right adjective. He wasn't consciously trying to trouble the President, but it was a rather rash thing that he said.

M: Yes, undiplomatic at least.

C: Undiplomatic. And then the fact that we never really followed up on a Paul Martin initiative. He told Rusk at Brussels in '67--let's see, it was related to the ICC and the DMZ, some initiative that he was ready to--

M: Paul Martin was involved in the Ronning thing too, to a certain extent.

C: Yes, he was, that's right. But in mid-'67, I think, Paul Martin saw Rusk in Brussels. And as I remember it he made fairly a forthcoming gesture about the use the Canadians could be in connection with using the ICC to restore the integrity of the DMZ. He later made a specific proposal about this. But we, to the extent that I can recall it, took months and months, many months, before we really specifically came back to Martin with an acknowledgment of his idea, although after Martin's suggestion, public suggestion, about mid-April of '67--this was to restore the integrity of the DMZ--we in a sense made another suggestion which was to not only take the Martin idea but to extend the DMZ or the demilitarized aspect of the DMZ by, oh, about ten miles on each side. It was a beginning of a de-escalation. The problem there was that on the very day that we did this, we bombed the hell out of Haiphong, a new target in Haiphong. And while

announced this publicly and then even before that saw representatives of the Russian and British Embassies--the two cochairmen--and told them we were very serious about this--which we were; at least Harriman and I were, and we'd gotten an okay to make this proposal--

M: Okay through the State Department?

C: Through the State Department and through the White House. They agreed that we could--none of these kinds of proposals could be made publicly without the White House. So that we did announce this publicly having first told the two representatives--the two cochairmen--to go back to their capitals and urge Hanoi to give us a forthcoming response on the--on the very day we announced this, a few hours afterward, there was this large bombing attack on Haiphong.

M: Was this coincidence?

C: Well, it was impossible to head it off. I damn near broke a gut trying to turn off that thing, but I couldn't get anybody to move on it. So what happened was the next day, as I recall, the New York Times had two announcements on its front page. One, the American initiative about extending the DMZ in an effort to de-escalate the thing, and the other that we'd bombed a new target.

M: Side by side.

C: Side by side. Well, this didn't make the Canadians feel much better, and then finally, we can dispose of the Canadians at this point I think, but finally in connection with the DMZ idea, which seemed to me at least to be a very good first cut at trying to de-escalate, there was the proposition that the ICC should move into the DMZ as a peace-keeping force, and that this would require a more robust ICC and different terms of reference and more people and so forth, but nonetheless it seemed to be perhaps a good

way, as a perfectly straightforward operation, to begin the process of disengaging. The JCS went through some calculations as to how much of a peace-keeping force would be required in the DMZ in order to effectively control that area, and I think they came up with some figure of about fifteen to twenty thousand, which was much higher than any of us expected. Maybe they were right--maybe they were wrong, but it was a hell of a lot higher than we expected. But in the meantime I got the Canadians to get going on some staff work as to how they would restructure the ICC if they were called upon to meet these new kinds of arrangements. And they did, they spent a fair amount of time on that thing. They had a lot of ex-ICC, Canadian ICC fellows,back in Ottawa at that point; and they did do a lot of work, but nothing was ever done about it and they were a little disillusioned about that too. So the Canadians generally, I think, regarded themselves as being somewhat neglected at least and perhaps even shabbily treated.

M: You say you have written on this 1967 period where we stopped last time. You had described, in case you might not recall, your first trip to London, Paris, and back to London and back to the United States and had just started about your second trip at the time that Kosygin was supposed to arrive in London. Had you seen, when you went back over there, any kind of draft of what became President Johnson's letter to Ho Chi Minh?

C: Yes, I did. I saw, as well as I can recall, at least two drafts of that letter. And this is quite critical.

M: This is <u>the</u> critical point as far as my investigation is concerned.

C: Yes. I saw at least two drafts of that letter before I left. Now it's important to note that at least so far as I know the President himself had not seen any of these drafts.

M: Where did you see these drafts?

C: I saw these drafts at the State Department. And my own feeling is that what happened was that perhaps Rostow, with Rusk's okay and McNamara's okay, or perhaps one of the others with Rostow's, initiated the idea of a direct communication between the President and Ho. And my own feeling is that the President said, "Well, I'm not going to say yes or no. Let me see a draft of what you have in mind, and then let's see about the timing, and then I'll make up my mind whether I want to do it or not." So I have a feeling that there was enough of an approval to go ahead with the drafting but no commitment from the President as to whether he'd agree with the draft as prepared or whether he'd be interested in sending such a letter at all, as of the time I left.

M: Now you left--this is February 2-3 [1967]?

C: I think I arrived in London--

M: You went to London February 3 according to public record.

C: When did Kosygin arrive?

M: He was supposed to arrive on the 6th I believe, although I don't have that written down. I think that's right.

C: So I saw this within a day or two--the second draft--within a day or two before I left because I was trying to catch up on all the materials. Now the letter--the draft--had in it a generalized description of Phase A-Phase B.

M: It did have at that point?

C: Yes. I was told that I could tell Wilson, but only Wilson, that there was a possibility that the President might make such a communication to Ho and that the President himself had not decided either way but that this was a possible--that such a letter was being considered and the President had indicated that he would think seriously about sending such a letter.

Now it's important to indicate why it was I was sent to London. I wasn't sent there originally to stay there through the Kosygin talks. I was sent there originally as part of the arrangement that had been made a few weeks before that the British would be informed of everything that was relevant so that they could proceed with some sense of confidence in any negotiations and initiatives they wanted to undertake. So I spent the first couple of days while I was there reviewing with Wilson and Brown and some other members of the foreign office and Wilson's immediate staff the developments that had taken place since my last visit. I brought them up to date on the talks in Moscow; I told Wilson privately about the possibility of a letter; I discussed again some of the aftermath of the Marigold activity.

M: You'd only been there a couple of weeks earlier.

C: Right. So basically it was a question of catching up. And then Wilson asked [David K. E.] Bruce if I could stay there through the talks. Bruce sent a telegram back to Washington, and Washington agreed that I could do that, that I should do it. Wilson said that what he would like to do would be for me to really stand by at any moment day and night so that he could be in touch with me or inform me, so that I could keep Washington informed. Now it's important to note that Wilson and Brown were both a little disappointed with the composition of Kosygin's delegation when they first were aware of it. For various reasons Gromyko wasn't coming, and indeed there were very few people in the delegation who seemed to have any connection at all with the matters that Wilson and Brown both most wanted to discuss. As I remember it, and it's easily checked, there were two or three members from their foreign office, the Soviet Foreign Ministry, who were specialists on European problems; and there were a couple

who were specialists on trade problems--

M: As opposed to some on Vietnamese?

C: As opposed to Far East hands. There was one fellow apparently who--with reasons which nobody could understand unless he was a cover for something else--as I remember was a specialist on Mongolian problems. And that was as close as any of the people in Kosygin's entourage came to having any association with Asia. So it was quite clear, or seemed quite clear to Wilson and Brown, that Kosygin probably wouldn't want to address Viet Nam. The other thing that troubled them was that Kosygin said that he wanted to, when they offered him the possibility of doing anything he wanted in terms of his program in England--Kosygin specifically asked if he could speak to or visit a factory of some kind and go to Scotland. And this seemed to them to be another evidence of Kosygin's disinterest of anything very substantive and more of a kind of good-will, cultural, propaganda, trade kind of visit. Their whole attitude changed after Kosygin arrived, and I got a very excited call--I think Kosygin came in on a Monday, as I remember it. I watched the convoy of cars driving toward Claridges something around noon on Monday; and later that afternoon, very late that afternoon, Wilson called me and I dashed over to see him. And he and Brown and others were very excited because it was quite clear that Kosygin was anxious to talk about Asia, and in particular China, but most particularly Viet Nam, because much of the conversation, even in the car on the way back from the airport, was Viet Nam, and some references to the problems that the Russians were having with the Chinese.

Now it's important also in terms of the setting to note that shortly before the Kosygin arrival, I think it was about the 28th of January actually, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Trinh, made for the first time an official

reference to the possibility of American-North Vietnamese talks, and he set as his terms that bombing had to stop unconditionally and completely; and that after that happened talks could start.

M: We went through this; that was where we ended.

C: Well, I don't know whether we mentioned the fact that, I'll just mention very briefly the fact that for a day or two the Russians didn't give this much of a play, but pretty much on the eve of Kosygin's departure they gave it a big play. And it was quite clear that on the basis of that this was the kind of thing that Kosygin would quite likely push when he got to England. Well, in point of fact, on the first day, Tuesday, as Wilson described it later, Kosygin made much of the Trinh "offer," as he described it it was a serious offer, a tremendous breakthrough. And Kosygin suggested that he and Wilson could probably do no better in terms of moving the negotiations possibilities forward than jointly endorsing Trinh's statement; and that this was the position that Kosygin put on the table. On that day, Tuesday, Wilson made two counter-suggestions to Kosygin but as I understand it didn't press them very hard. He just put them on the table for consideration; and that was the reconvening of the Geneva Conference, which incidentally the British wanted very badly, and also he mentioned the Phase A-Phase B formula as a way of decelerating the war. Then, according to Wilson, with whom I met right after that meeting for a long period, he took the position with Kosygin on the Trinh formula that he didn't quite know what Kosygin meant by "endorsing" the Trinh formula because he wasn't at all sure himself what it meant. And I remember Wilson saying that he said to Ksoygin, "What am I supposed to tell my friend, the President? That I am aware of the Trinh formula and that my friends, the Russians, say that I should take the Trinh formula seriously?

Or should I tell the President, the Russians tell me that Trinh is serious about this? Or should I tell the President that although Trinh said the talks 'could' start the Russians had given their personal assurance the talks 'would' start, that there was much more in this than one could read out of Trinh?" What he said he said to Kosygin, "What exactly do you think I should say when you ask me to endorse this? For example, would your Mr. Kosygin permit me to say that you have told me that you would provide your personal assurances that if the bombing stopped talks would start, and that this is your understanding of the North Vietnamese position?" Well, apparently Kosygin was a little uncomfortable about giving such personal assurances and said that he wouldn't provide such personal assurances but that he felt nonetheless that Wilson should endorse the thing. And the session pretty much broke up with the agreement that each of them would think about it more seriously over the next day or so. Wilson also reported that on Tuesday Kosygin confessed that they didn't have all that much pressure that they could apply on Hanoi, that they could use influence but that the difference between "could" and "would" would have to pretty much depend upon what Trinh said and that he, Kosygin, could not make Trinh say "would" if Trinh in fact said "could"; and that they were having problems with the Chinese in this connection, too, and that the North Vietnamese were being pretty much whip-sawed by the Chinese on this. So all this was reported to Washington, and the arrangement was that the next day, Wednesday, would be devoted to European and trade talk.

M: Give it a day--

C: Give a day to think about these things. I forwarded all of this to Washington and they urged me to urge Wilson at the next meeting, which as I recall would be Thursday morning, that Wilson slough off the Trinh thing

and really try to get off the Geneva hang-up, because Washington felt it was a nonstarter, and to press the Phase A-Phase B idea.

M: Did they say what kind of time frame on the Phase A-Phase B?

C: No, it was just reference Phase A-Phase B. The time frame was understood. I had the Phase A-Phase B formula with me in London.

M: It was understood as you described it before as a couple of--"some time, e.g. a couple of weeks?"

C: Right. No less than a week, no more than two weeks. That was the framework, and in fact that was the framework that was shoved into the thing later. Well, that was on Wednesday, the answer I got back to press Phase A-Phase B.

M: And that was consistent with the drafts you had seen of the President's prospective letter before you left?

C: That's right. Only he was not--the draft as I recall it was much more qualitative, but it--the tone was like the draft. On Wednesday I got another telegram, too, which said, "Look, the Vietnamese are really pouring down toward the DMZ, the North Vietnamese are pouring down toward the DMZ," and that I should make a special effort to get Wilson to tell Kosygin that this was not something that would lend any confidence on the part of the Americans what the North Vietnamese were likely to do in the event of a bombing cessation. In fact it was a kind of a warning to Kosygin, hopefully one that he would pass on to the North Vietnamese. Okay, that was Wednesday. I met on Wednesday with Wilson before he saw Kosygin, pointed out the problems of the troops coming down, Wilson said he would warn Kosygin about them. And also in my discussions with the foreign office people I pointed out that for the next day Washington felt that the Trinh thing was a nonstarter, that Geneva, if they felt strongly

about it, okay, but we didn't think much of it. In fact most of the foreign office people didn't think much of Geneva either, because it was quite clear that the Russians weren't really interested.

M: And it would also involve the Chinese.

C: And it would also involve the Chinese. There really wasn't very much promise on the Geneva track, but Wilson and Brown wanted Geneva very badly because they would be co-chairmen.

M: Surely, that's their show.

C: Right. And to press for Phase A-Phase B, and that was all right. Wednesday night I was dining at a friend's house and I'd barely started dinner before I got a call from Brown; and he was highly agitated, and he told me that--and because this is what it is, I will describe some of these things in greater detail than I have ever described them--he told me to dash over to his flat in Carleton Gardens, his official flat, but to make damned sure that I brought with me a bottle of Scotch and a bottle of bourbon and to get over there as fast as I could. He had some very interesting and exciting news to tell me. So I got in the cab and went to--I was dining with some English friends and they didn't have any Scotch or bourbon-so I dashed over to the closest American Embassy guy I knew there, and went in there and he still doesn't know why I borrowed two bottles of whiskey from him. And then I dashed over to Carleton Gardens.

When I got in, I walked into Paul Brown's flat, all hell was breaking loose. Paul Gore Booth was there, and he was the Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, and two or three other people from the foreign office. And Brown was shrieking and hollering and just raising hell. When I walked in, I started to back out and Brown said, "No, sit down." Whereupon, I apparently got into a terrible argument between Brown and the foreign

office people because Brown felt offended as a result of an incident that took place after an official British reception for Kosygin. When the cars drew up to take the British back from--I think the reception was at Lancaster House, their official entertainment place--when the cars drew up to take the British officials back the first car was one in which the Prime Minister got into, the second car Brown started to get in but Michael Pallister, who was the foreign office chap who had been assigned as sort of the special assistant, almost a sort of a Henry Kissinger, to Wilson (he actually had the same position under MacMillan), apparently brushed Brown aside and got in the second car so that he could follow the Prime Minister, and Brown had to take the third car. This absolutely outraged Brown, and he was just berating these foreign office fellows, swearing that Pallister had insulted him, that he would see to it that Pallister's career would be finished, and it was just awful, it was just terrible. And this went on for quite awhile. I didn't stay in that room--

M: That was an embarrassing position for you.

C: Terrible. As soon as I got the gist of what was going on I walked out and Mrs. Brown, a very patient woman, took me in the kitchen. And we went in the kitchen and had a cup of tea in the kitchen.

M: You, with two bottles under your arm.

C: Yes. We stayed in the kitchen and she was obviously, this whole thing was apparently quite painful to her; it was painful for me, too. But I had known her before--and so anyway we stayed there until the conversation seemed to die down in the other room. I then went back into the room, and apparently Brown had gotten all of this off his chest and was ready to discuss the real problem of the evening which was why these other fellows

were there anyway. And this was related to a Guildhall speech that Kosygin had made that afternoon in which he said, or implied, or Brown read into the speech, something to the effect that the Russians and the British as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference could, with a certain amount of skill and good will and so forth, resolve the Viet Nam difficulties. Brown read into this, and he was much more firm about it than any of the foreign office fellows who didn't see it that way, nor did I. But Brown read into this in a sense a signal on the part of Kosygin that they were ready to move ahead on the Geneva track. And he wanted to discuss this and phrase a proposition for the next morning's discussion that would be very forthcoming so far as the British were concerned on the Geneva business. So once again I went back to the Embassy, and I reported this to Washington; and on Thursday morning once again I got the feeling, "Well, we don't think there's anything to it, we don't think that Kosygin is that interested, but obviously we can't prevent the British from raising this, if they think there's something to it. But it's the Phase A-Phase B one that we want them to push." And so I got that across to the British. On Thursday, I think the meeting was in the morning and lasted until about 2 or so--

M: Wilson and Kosygin meeting?

C: Yes, right. Because I met with--I don't think I met with Brown--I met with Paul Gore Booth and Burke Trend, who was the Secretary to the Cabinet, and a few others and apparently what went on in that Thursday meeting, according to these chaps, was that Kosygin had apparently forgotten the Trinh formula. He paid a bit of lip service to it, but it was very pro forma. And he asked the British--"All right, I made my proposal Tuesday, now what do you think we should do?" And the British made quite a point of the Geneva thing, and Kosygin didn't bite on that at all, much to

Wilson's and Brown's disappointment, but not to the surprise of the other high-ranking foreign office guys who were there. And then Wilson went through the Phase A-Phase B one. Then, according to people who were there, Kosygin bit on that and he said, "Say it again, and say it more slowly." And it seemed to them that this was the first time that Kosygin had really heard, or had really absorbed, the Phase A-Phase B thing. Now this was quite surprising--

M: You mentioned the notification through two channels to the Russians.

C: Right, exactly. And Wilson had mentioned it again on Monday. But apparently either it took the repetition of this to get Kosygin to get a sense of what it was, or whatever. But anyway, for whatever reason, he said, "I want to hear more about this." Wilson explained it to him again very slowly, and then Kosygin said, "I want you to give it to me in writing. This is very interesting. Give it to me in writing, and don't forget that I'll want it before I leave for Scotland tomorrow night!" So the chore was set for me and--

M: Where were you during this meeting--were you on hand for conferences during the actual meeting?

C: No. In no case except for the last day at Checquers was I actually there.

M: That was in Lady Mary Grey's powder room.

C: Right. Nobody ran out from the meeting to ask me, but I was within minutes of Downing Street or sometimes even sitting in the back room of Downing Street waiting for the meeting to get over, in which case I'd be briefed. And that's what happened on Thursday. Then on Thursday afternoon I and a chap from the foreign office, working together with Paul Gore Booth, write out the Phase A-Phase B thing.

M: In very great detail?

C: In great detail. And the difference really with the draft I had before me was that it was in more precise detail in the sense that we wanted to make sure that there were no loose ends. Let me see if I can remember a couple of things that we stressed. The time period that we had, as I remember, was, "After a period of time, paren, for example, no less than a week but no more than two weeks--I think that was the formula--between A and B. But we made things like--we spelled out the business of the prior agreement in some detail: the United States had to be assured well before all of this happened that Phase B would in fact follow Phase A.

M: Phase B still called for mutual--

C: Phase B still called for a mutual standdown of reinforcements, right. And that took, because of dotting all the "i's" and crossing all the "t's," that took probably a couple of hours on Thursday afternoon. I went back to the Embassy and sent that out to Washington telling them of the events of the day, of Kosygin's interest in having this in writing, of the need to give it to Kosygin before he left for Scotland the next night. Now as I remember it, I sent that to Washington about 5 or 6 London time which would have been fairly early in the afternoon--

M: Noon here, or a little after.

C: One other thing. On Thursday, as I remember it, I did get a telegram from Washington saying that the President had okayed a letter to Kosygin--

M: To Kosygin?

C: I'm sorry, to Ho.

M: That is February 8th if I'm keeping my days straight.

C: I think that'd be about right, then. That the President had okayed and sent a letter to Ho.

M: You didn't get a copy--

C: I didn't get the copy of the letter. So that was Thursday. Although I didn't expect any--perhaps it would have been strange if I'd gotten an answer to my telegram on Thursday night; nonetheless it could have happened because Washington had a good hunk of the full afternoon to react to it. But I certainly did expect something on Friday morning. In point of fact I didn't expect very much. I thought this was so consistent with the formula that I basically expected a kind of terse okay or go-ahead or whatever. But Friday morning there was no response which meant apparently to me either they hadn't gotten to it Thursday afternoon or early Thursday evening in Washington or possibly that it was such a pro forma thing that they didn't even fell it was necessary to respond. I did get a message saying, "You better see Wilson and tell him that these troops are still coming down, and we're damned worried about it." And I did get over, and I told Wilson on Friday morning that I hadn't gotten any response from Washington on the message about Phase A-Phase B, but they did want him to make sure that Kosygin registered once again on this flow of troops and material. In point of fact, nothing happened all day Friday. If I didn't get it in the morning take--telegram take--I didn't expect it for awhile anyway because I would get in about 8:00 in the morning and that was 3:00 in the morning Washington time so unless they'd worked on it the previous day I wouldn't be getting anything in until something around noon or 2 o'clock. Butin point of fact, I got nothing for a good hunk of the day, until well into the evening--well, until late that night as a matter of fact.

M: Kosygin leaving some time around dark as I recall--7 o'clock?

C: Kosygin was leaving--the train was leaving at 11:00. But there was some urgency, I mean there was some restlessness. Wilson was restless about it,

apparently in some exchange earlier in the day Kosygin asked Wilson or one member of his entourage asked somebody, "Do you have that thing for me yet?" But nothing--nothing came in. In the meantime--but I was feeling fairly relaxed because I couldn't believe there was anything wrong with this. And I decided, since Wilson was going off to the Russian reception at about 7:00 that night and after that Kosygin was leaving for Scotland, I decided to take up the offer I had had from an old British friend to go to the dress rehearsal of "Fiddler on the Roof" Friday night. Her daughter was in it, and she had called and asked if I'd like to go and I'd been holding it off for awhile; but everything seemed so relaxed and I had been at that point working at a fairly brisk pace all week so I decided I would go.

M: Wilson had the draft proposal in his possession?

C: He had the draft proposal in his possession. Later that afternoon, it must have been about 5:00 I talked to Wilson; I said that there was nothing in, that I could only assume Washington didn't think it was important enough, because by then they'd had all Thursday afternoon, all Friday morning; but nonetheless, I would wait around until he was ready to leave for the reception and would be in touch with him if something came in. Well, 7 o'clock came and went. Wilson left for the reception. Still nothing from Washington. And I went to the theater--well, I went off; I got a bite, and I guess I got to the theater about eightish. I left word at the Embassy that I would be at the theater, and I left word with the doorman that I was inside the theater, and I left word with the ushers where I was. And I suppose--the thing was delayed in starting--but anyway, I guess the first act must have been going about twenty minutes or so. Anyway, it seemed to me pretty close to 9 o'clock, I got a tap on

the shoulder. There was a phone call, and the usher took me backstage where the only phone was and the doorman who was at the stage door was just jumping up and down with excitement--between the dress rehearsal and the phone call not only from Washington, but, "From the White House," he kept screaming. It was a great event in his life but not in mine. And there was this damned telephone right in the middle of the backstage area with all these kids running back and forth from one wing to the other, the orchestra banging away beneath me and there on the other end of thephone was Walt Rostow who wanted to know where the hell I was. I couldn't possibly describe where I was. Then he asked me how far I was from a secure telephone, and I allowed as how that I was pretty goddamned far from a secure telephone. So finally he told me to get right back to the Embassy, and that a message would be coming in. I got back to the Embassy, that must have been about 9:30 I guess, and the message that came in said that there was a complete revision of the proposition, for me to inform Wilson, and get him and Brown at Downing Street, and for me to get over to Downing Street and the revision would be coming over very soon. I got to Downing Street I guess at about, well, shortly before 10:00 I guess, and there was Wilson and Brown and the message came in over the hot teletype. And in essence, the--you know I couldn't believe it when I saw it, I just couldn't believe it--because in essence it completely turned the formula around. First of all, it virtually eliminated the--it <u>did</u> eliminate the time difference between A and B; and secondly, instead of making--and it turned the two phases around. In a sense it said, "When the President is assured that infiltration has stopped, bombing will stop." And that was just a complete--

M: It didn't say anything about <u>our</u> stand-down of reinforcements?

C: No, no. Well, and that, "Some time after that, in exchange for this, our reinforcements stop." But that was kind of tossed in the package later.

M: You get kind of a Phase A, B, C--them doing the A and us doing the B, C.

C: Exactly. That's right. I couldn't believe it, called Rostow, Rostow--I was sore as hell--Rostow said, "Well," he said, "These guys are pouring down, we kept telling you they're pouring down. We're scared they're going to take--we don't know what they're going to be doing, and so the whole thing is out, and this is the way it has got to be." I said, "Well, Jesus, how can you do this! You kept telling me to press the Phase A-Phase B, that is what Wilson was doing, the only Phase A-Phase B I knew was the one that was current." And they said, "Well, we don't give a Goddamn about you, and we don't give a Goddamn about Wilson," which presumably from their point of view was right at that moment in time. "You damn well change it." So what we did was to type out on Downing Street stationery the new version with a little introductory note by Wilson saying, "I've just been informed that the position I gave you at the--? I should have mentioned before that when Wilson was at the reception Kosygin took him aside and said, "Where is it? I'm leaving in a couple of hours." And Wilson took the thing and gave it to him. So Wilson then had to say, "What I gave you was in fact not the case. This is the new official American version." And then the problem was to get it to Kosygin before he left. We called Claridges, and he had already left and was on his way to the station. We rounded one of Wilson's guys to get in the car and get to the station and finally found Kosygin as he was boarding the train and shouldered through the thousands of people watching this procedure, the cops, the security guards, Kosygin's own security guards, gave him the envelope, came back up about 11:15--

M: And didn't retrieve the other one?

C: Didn't retrieve the other one, but--

M: So Kosygin had both to compare right there--

C: Right. Kosygin had both. He got back, and I can't say that things were very happy at Downing Street or that I felt very good about it. I must say, it was just awful.

M: Did Rostow say anything during that telephone conversation about what you had given Wilson not being consistent with the President's letter?

C: No, this came--

M: That was not used as a rationale?

C: No, it came Saturday morning as a rationale, but didn't come Friday night. The fact of the matter was that the meeting on Friday, whenever it took place--I haven't been able to reconstruct it, except that I was able to find out that everybody was doing something not very important up until they finally got together late Friday afternoon on this thing, having had about twenty-four hours to do something about it. And that the people at that meeting for some reason included no Viet Nam experts really, in the sense that Bill Bundy wasn't there, really nobody was there who knew what Phase A-Phase B really was or who had the documents. All they had was my thing which most of those rich and great men apparently thought was something I had dreamt up de novo, without any reference to anything they'd ever addressed before.

M: Rostow, too?

C: Rostow, too. Therefore they were addressing my draft as something that was kind of invented apparently in London, instead of being something that had been developed and manicured for about five months. Anyway, the scene on Friday night after this was just awful, just terrible. And this too, I've

never really told anybody, nor am I going to write about it, but Wilson and Brown just went at each other, it was just terrible. Brown accused Wilson of being too premature; and that time and time again during these discussions Wilson didn't inform Brown as to what was going on; Brown on at least three occasions that night resigned as Foreign Minister. And on one of those occasions, Wilson told Brown, "Look, let's straighten this out right now." And he took Brown and me--because he said he wanted me to hear this in case it were ever necessary to explain anywhere why Brown was out--took Brown and me into a private office, and he thrashed it out with Brown. And in point of fact Brown didn't resign, and I don't think he intended to resign, he was just sore--

M: They were all mad at Washington, but they were showing it by being mad at each other?

C: They were all mad at Washington; they were mad at each other; they were angry at me; and I was angry at them; and I was angry at Washington--more angry at Washington than anybody. It was a pretty rough night. I guess it was about 2 o'clock in the morning before I finally left there. Okay, so that was Black Friday.

On Saturday morning I got a long telegram from Washington explaining the rationale. The rationale was so contrived--it referred to the details of the President's letter, but we weren't aware of the details. They said, "You should have"--well, "this is consistent with the President's letter." Well, we still didn't really know what the hell the President's letter was. And it pointed out that after all, Brown, Wilson, and I, too, should have been aware about those two warnings about the troops coming down. And it was a very tortured ex post facto rationalization and apparently was drafted by Bill Bundy, who was attempting to pick up the pieces, not having been at

the meeting on Friday night.

M: Why would he not have been in the meeting?

C: He was away. Well, this made me all the more angry, frankly. I really was in pretty bad shape.

M: You still hadn't seen the President's letter at this point.

C: No. I didn't really see the President's letter until I got back. They paraphrased it in this thing, but I really didn't see the letter.

M: My question was, really how different was it in fact from the draft that you'd seen when you left?

C: In point of fact it was consistent, but I don't think it was the same--one of the things I'm trying to do is to find out. Because when I got back I saw the President's letter, but I couldn't lay my hands on that telegram of instructions, and I was so sore when I got back anyway that it took me a couple of weeks to settle down; and that was salted away. But one of the things I would like to do with a bit of research is to compare the President's letter with that telegram I got. I know they were generally consistent in the sense there was no time period, but I'm not quite sure that it was otherwise that consistent. On Saturday I spent a fair amount of time picking up the pieces and had a long session with Bruce who was outraged as I was. Bruce, at this point, hadn't been in the picture at all really. There was at some point, and I'm not quite sure when in this, Bruce's daughter was reported missing in an airplane, and I know that he had to go back on Monday to the States to see what he could do about it. In fact she never was found. But I'm not quite sure whether this developed on the Friday and he wasn't able to do anything about it and was sticking close to home--but anyway it wasn't until Saturday he really got engaged. Anyway, Saturday I spent a fair amount of time trying to pick up the pieces, sorting

out this telegram, etc. And they told me to send copies of the telegram to Brown and Wilson, incoming telegram explaining this, so I did. And on Saturday night it was arranged that Brown, Wilson, and some of the Foreign Office fellows, some of Wilson's staff guys, and myself should meet again at Downing Street to prepare for the final meeting at Checquers on Sunday. Bruce said he'd come, and I was delighted; Bruce and I went out to a small Italian restaurant for dinner and Bruce was all--he's a great man--I was angry and just fuming and banging the table and swearing. Bruce was angry but in a much more civilized way--but just as angry. At any rate we got to Downing Street Saturday night and Brown and Wilson were even more angry with the explanation and the passage of time than they were Friday night when there was strictly a question of operating on the basis of a sharpened emergency. It was just a sense of hopelessness and despair about all of this, and again the great tensions between Brown and Wilson, and between us and the British and mostly the references to Rostow were really pretty uncomplimentary, a considerable amount of the use of the word "betrayal" being kicked around, it was a very nasty thing. I had sat in on one such other session in my life and that was during the Suez crisis when I was in London. And it looked to me as if Anglo-American--

M: They rated that along with our Suez--

C: Yes. It looked to me--American-British relations were about as low an ebb as they had been since the Suez. But at any rate after about an hour and a half or so of stewing, it was clear that the thing to do was to pull up our socks and try and salvage what we could on Sunday. And I remember saying, "What the hell, don't make such a great stink about this, Kosygin's a realistic guy, a sophisticated guy, he must know that you have difficult allies. He does. You told him twice that the Americans were very worried

about this stuff coming down, there's plenty of reason why a pragmatic guy would take this kind of thing in his stride. And it's conceivable that the issue won't be raised. Let's not make this the tail that wagged the dog." Bruce then made some even more useful and relevant remarks, and we got down to the business of trying to develop some approaches to the next day's meeting. We didn't have any specific ideas. There were no new ideas developed. It was basically a question of form and substance, arrangements, and so forth. And if they could get out of this with a communique that seemed to be okay, fine--maybe try to get the Geneva thing back on the track. And then Wilson suggested that--maybe it was suggested earlier in the day--I gues it was--that I go out to Checquers and be available to him; on this occasion to have the direct link to Washington and they'd keep me directly informed and I'd give Washington a play-by-play account of what was going on. I did know that earlier because one of the things I did on Saturday was to work out arrangements with Washington as to how I could communicate with them from Checquers, and get arrangements for the telephone lines, and so forth. Well, at any rate that was all on Saturday. On Sunday I was taken out to Checquers about 11:00. Before I left I got another call saying, "We really are very worried about this," that, I forget, the equivalent of two divisions and a very substantial number of supplies had come down and I had gotten actually a--

M: Now that was during the Tet pause?

C: All during the TET pause.

M: The whole business--

C: Right. And I'd got a fair amount of quantitative information at this point that they had developed on how much had come down. The fact of the matter was that Tet officially ended some time on Sunday, I forget when, but the

agreement was they would not resume bombing until--anyway this had been a prior deal with the British, which I'd worked out in January--that they would not bomb until Kosygin had left. That they would not embarrass Kosygin and the Russians. So that although Tet was officially over they were to keep the pause going another twenty-four hours after Kosygin left for Moscow the following day. So basically the events at Checquers were taking place on borrowed time in the sense that the official bombing pause was already over. Anyway, I got to Checquers about noon I guess and Wilson was there and seemed to be much more relaxed. They'd played golf that morning, and he was in fairly good humor. Brown wasn't there yet, there were a few other people there, and we kicked around--tied up some of the loose ends. For reasons that I can't remember now, or maybe I never knew, Wilson didn't want Brown there very early. Brown was scheduled to come--I think that Kosygin was due at about 2:30 in the afternoon and Brown wasn't supposed to get there until shortly before. In point of fact, Brown was late. And from my room up in the garret at Checquers I could look over the courtyard, I just looked down about four floors. And I could check--it was easy--to see who was coming and who wasn't; and my God, I was looking at my watch and worrying about my old friend George and he wasn't there, and he wasn't there, and he wasn't there. And he was late, about a half-hour late, but luckily Kosygin was late too, so in fact Brown did arrive before Kosygin, but it wasn't his fault that he did. He was just lucky. The meeting got off to something of a late start.

M: Did Kosygin know you were around?

C: Yes, I think by then he did. Luckily we were able to keep the thing out of the press. Some reporters I knew saw me there, or saw me running back and forth. I begged one guy who wanted to write a story about it not to say

anything. I think it was the Life guy. And no one in our Embassy knew, except for Keiser(?) who was not aware, not cut in on the telegrams, and Bruce, who was. But aside from that, though I knew a lot of the people in the Embassy, there was no acknowledgment of my presence in London. And we were quite successful in keeping it out of the press. But I think by the time Sunday came around Kosygin was aware--not necessarily that there was somebody upstairs--but that there was a close contact between Wilson and Washington. The meeting got off to a slow start, as I say, about 3 o'clock; and every once in awhile somebody from Wilson's group would come up and give me a reading of what was going on and have a drink or whatever, and it was all very relaxed. At one point--they first got the European stuff out of the way and that was easy, and then the Russians tabled their version of a communique. And one of the guys from the party came up and brought up the communique and we reworked it--this chap and I. And I sent that to Washington, and it got a quick okay as I remember.

M: Telephone conversation, you were on the telephone?

C: Yes. Sometimes Ben Read was on the other end of the phone, sometimes Rostow was. There was no problem with the communique, we got that down. Then it seemed that Kosygin himself was in a fairly relaxed mood. He didn't mention the exchange of notes--the change of notes--nor did he raise at all as far as I can recall--I'm pretty sure this is true--the Trinh formula. Only to say, "Well, I guess there's no point in raising the Trinh thing." Well, things seemed to be going reasonably well, and it must have been about 5 o'clock or so, when I got a brainstorm. I had just been sitting there with nothing to do. And it was that it was barely possible that we could pull something out of this in the sense that if Washington was so damned worried about these troops down there that maybe we could exchange

a commitment for a stand-down of all these troops north of the 17th, if we could get Hanoi to say that these troops will stay in place, and in exchange for that we will continue the bombing pause, and during this period in which we can get some elbow room perhaps we can work out something which will lead to something more useful. But let's just keep things status quo until we get a little more elbow room. And so I tried this out on the first guy who came up, who I guess was Burke Trend, and he thought it was worthwhile. So we sort of wrote it down on paper and he took it down to Wilson; and my proposition was, "Look, if you think this is worth trying, I will call Washington and try it out on them, but for God's sake don't mention it to Kosygin until we get a Washington okay." He wrote back and said, "Yes, he thought it was well worth trying, but he would come up and see me at the tea break." And [he said] not to do anything until then. So actually that was about 5 o'clock, and very shortly after that Wilson did come up and Burke Trend came up and they left George Brown downstairs to entertain Kosygin. We kicked this around for a bit, and we agreed that this would be [good], if we could get Washington's okay just to keep the troops in place north of the 17th parallel and keep the bombing pause going for a few days, maybe somebody would have that extra time to see if they could get moving on some sort of a negotiation phase or a talk phase or at least give somebody some time to do something. So Wilson went down, and I called Washington. And the first reaction I got from Washington was from the State Department, I think it was Ben Read. He said, "Gee, this sounds perfectly okay, I can't believe there's anything wrong with this, but in the light of what has gone on in the last forty-eight hours, we've got to make damned sure that we've got an official White House okay." And I wasn't about to do it unless I got an official White

House okay, anyway. And he said he'd send it over to the White House. And that they'd let me know as soon as possible. Well, then I called again in about an hour and a half after that; it was dinner time. I said, "Did you sent it over?" "Yes, I sent it over. They're looking at it." And I guess I made about three more calls--the first one or two to Read at the State Department, and the second two to Rostow; and I got assurances that, "Yes, they're looking at this very carefully, just keep your shirt on. We'll let you know." Well, this is all good and well except time was passing, dinner was over. And I kept getting these notes by guys coming up from Wilson--you know--"Where is it?" And finally, I called Walt again, and I said, "Now, look, they're having cigars, they're having brandy, for God's sake what do you think of this idea." "Well, we're still talking about it, and we'll let you know. See if you can keep everything intact." Finally, about a half-hour later it was quite clear that Kosygin was about to go. I looked down and the headlights were on the cars down in the driveway, and the motorcycles were reving up. And still no word. So I called Rostow and I said, I remember this very clearly, "Look, I'm not kidding you," and I opened the window and leaned out and held the telephone down by its cord, ten feet or whatever so he could hear the Goddamn motorcycles and cars. "They're leaving!" And he said, "Okay, all right, not to worry, just make sure that Wilson tells Kosygin that he may have an important message for him some time later on this evening and that Wilson will communicate this message to Kosygin at Claridges. And meantime you get back to Downing Street, get hold of Bruce, have him be there, and get Wilson and Brown there by something like 11 or 11:30 your time, and stand by for a message." Well, that sounded pretty good, and after Kosygin left we thought we were in the clover. Wilson came up, Brown came up; there was

a lot of hooch. And it was great--we thought we'd really pulled a rabbit out of the hat. Tremendous. And so we in due course got back to Downing Street and Wilson, prior to this had told Kosygin he might be getting a message. And okay, in came the message from Washington. The message from Washington was great in a sense that they agreed that they would do this, but--but--in order for Washington to go through with this deal they insisted that Hanoi by one means or another inform Washington of their agreement to this deal by 10 o'clock the following morning London time. Well, that was impossible.

M: That was less than twelve hours.

C: It gave us less than twelve hours. Wilson had to go to Claridges, he had to talk to Kosygin, Kosygin had to somehow transmit the thing to Hanoi, Hanoi had to meet on it, Hanoi had to somehow get the word to somebody and somebody had to get the word to the British or to Washington. And all this to be done in less than twelve hours was just ridiculous. So I called Rostow and said, "You can't do this, this is impossible. We need more time." Rostow was by no means friendly and said something to the effect that, "We've been giving you guys all the--we've had about enough out of you guys." And finally, as I remember, we squeezed an extra two hours out of them, and this took an awful lot of expenditure of energy; and then Wilson eventually talked to somebody. Incidentally, he said that he talked to Johnson either Friday or Saturday night or both. In my presence, I don't think he talked to Johnson, I think he talked to Rostow. But in his record, he'd like to say he was in communication with Johnson. But he may have been if he talked to him after I left, but I have a feeling when he was talking to the White House he was talking to the White House, but Rostow and not Johnson. Anyway we finally squeezed an extra two hours

out of this, and by then it was 11 o'clock or 11:30, midnight I guess it was, because we had to write it out for him. He dashed over to Claridges, saw Kosygin; Kosygin was very receptive but mildly distressed because he said, "The time! I don't know how I'm going to get this answer." But he said he would try. And later we discovered, on Monday, in point of fact, that a communication to Moscow did go out as soon as Wilson had left from the Russians, a very high priority communication did go out on this message, but still that was about 1 o'clock, and that left eleven hours. Well, Wilson and Brown and Bruce were just terribly upset about this, about the time period, and I think when Wilson was gone Bruce suggested I try again to get some more time and I remember calling again to Rostow, and I got no satisfaction.

M: Any reason given?

C: Yes. What we were talking about was--well, Wilson and Bruce were talking about a week. And I said, "I can promise you from my sense of the White House mood you're not going to get anything like that, anything like that. And if you can get forty-eight hours--"

M: Think in terms of hours, not days.

C: Right. But Rostow said, "Look, in forty-eight hours they can capture all of Laos. The troops are there and we may wake up one morning and find that Laos is gone." So he was doling it out in terms of an hour or two. Well, at any rate, we left Downing Street, Bruce and I, at about 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, and Bruce said he was going back to the Embassy, did I want to go back to the hotel. I said, "No, I'd go back to the Embassy with him," and he said he had to make a phone call. He got back to the Embassy and he called Rusk, and I didn't hear the other end of the conversation but I heard Bruce, and Bruce told me later. Bruce

told Rusk that this was ridiculous, it was absolutely stupid, that their whole performance Friday night was awful, that this was just--the present time scale was impossible to work with and that these people needed more time, much more time. I'm not quite sure whether Bruce did say a week, but it wouldn't surprise me if he did say a week. I think he may have said they needed a week, but at least several days or something like that. And apparently, at least I understand that Rusk told Bruce that he had had it, he was sick and tired of the whole operation, that he didn't want to hear from Bruce again on this at all, that they'd given them everything they were about to give them and that was it. And that was the end of (a) the conversation, and (b) any further relationship between Bruce and Rusk on Viet Nam. So that was the end of that.

On Monday morning the first thing I did was to work out arrangements with the foreign office to try to work out channels so that if we ever got a reply we could get through instantaneously. If they heard from the Russian Embassy or from Moscow or whatever. And then it was simply a question of hanging on the telephone. Kosygin was supposed to have left I think by 11:00, and Wilson was going to take him to the airport. By the time Kosygin was about to go it was quite clear they didn't have any response, and the problem was--for some reason--Kosygin's plane was a slow plane and it took them an hour more to get back to Moscow than it would have if he had had a fast plane; I don't quite know why he didn't have a fast plane. As I remember it, he wouldn't have gotten back to Moscow until about 4 o'clock that afternoon London time, and I was trying to get Washington to relax its deadline until at least later that day so that Kosygin could get back to Moscow, have a couple of hours in Moscow and make some phone calls or whatever, and give him that amount of time. So I called Washington, in fact I

called them again in the morning, and I got the time extended for another couple of hours, I think until 2:00, which really was no help. And I think as I remember it nothing was in by 1 o'clock, and I tried again and I think I got another hour out of them. I think they said they would give me until 3:00, and that was the end. The next call--I then got a call from Washington some time after 3:00 saying it's all over, the bombers are going, and I sent a message to Wilson who was then at the House of Commons describing the thing; and Wilson was very upset about the whole thing and said we were within an inch of getting this and the rug was pulled out from under us.

M: This is the basis of his statement he just made last weekend--

C: That's right. In point of fact, Wilson is wrong. He didn't have peace within his grasp, he was always overly optimistic about it. Brown was somewhat more realistic. But he was right in the sense that given another forty-eight hours at this end of the thing maybe he would have had some elbow room.

M: At least he had an opening still out.

C: That's right. And he was--I don't know his version of this, I'm going to be in London in September, and I plan to see him to check this out, but peace wasn't in his grasp. The possibility of elbow room was in his grasp. The initiative that he talks about was not his initiative. It was, to the extent that I represented the United States government, it was an American initiative that was suggested though I am perfectly ready for him to adopt it for this purpose. But unless--if I hadn't gotten that last minute inspiration he would have walked out of that Checquers thing with just a communique, period. The Friday night thing was very unfortunate, you know, a very bad bit of business all around but even as

of Friday night peace wasn't in his grasp. The only thing that was in his grasp was a continuation of the Phase A-Phase B dialogue which Hanoi had been presented--Lewandowski had presented it, and there's no necessary reason they would have picked it up.

M: That's the end of Phase A-Phase B.

C: Yes, that's it. And so there it is.

M: This tape is running out. Did you leave in the summer, you mentioned the Canadian business with the DMZ.

C: That was in late April.

M: Did you leave before the Henry Kissinger business with the two Frenchmen?

C: No, in fact I was in Paris with them in late August or early September--no, it was in mid-August I was in Paris.

M: You didn't leave until October.

C: I didn't leave until October. Actually I had made another trip, one to Oslo in September to try to work out something. But I went to Paris--met Kissinger, Aubrec and Marcovich in Paris--at a point when Aubrec and Marcovich were given the new breakthrough formula, that is, we would stop bombing if we were sure they would negotiate.

M: What became the San Antonio formula.

C: Right. In fact I worked out that formula with guys in the State Department and gave it to Kissinger and then went to Paris really as Exhibit A that Kissinger really was joined in this with the United States government. And I met with those--and that was that. I went to Oslo in early September--while the Paris track was still going on--because the Norwegian Ambassador to Peking had some indication that he would be well received in Hanoi, and the point was should he go, and if he went what should he say, what should he do. And I went to Oslo to brief him on that.

That never worked out.

M: He didn't go?

C: He didn't go.

M: What about the Kissinger thing, did that have any hope that it would go anywhere?

C: No, it really didn't, although it was a major breakthrough, it never went anywhere. It was turned down by the Vietnamese on the grounds that we were putting conditions on them. We had the no-taking-advantage thing, and they said that's a condition.

M: That's a condition which was important.

C: Right. Though in point of fact it was almost the same damned formula that Trinh had agreed to in May or whenever it was he said talks "will" go through.

M: Then you left. You said earlier some of the conditions under which you had taken that job with Harriman, had you just decided there was no place else to go?

C: Right. Everything seemed to be at a standstill. And there just didn't seem to be any more interest in this. We had been trying for a long time to get the bombing cut back to the 20th parallel, and it looked as if that was going to happen for awhile; and that was washed up. And there just didn't seem to me that between then and the elections the President was determined that he was going to head for a military victory in this.

M: So really, you said you were <u>the</u> staff of the Harriman group, so really the Harriman group comes to an end in a sense.

C: Well, in a sense except for a chap named Davidson, Dan Davidson, picked up from where I left off.

M: What about thereafter, in '68, did you come back into it at any point?

C: Yes, I went to Paris--well, I left with the understanding that I'd come over, that I wouldn't resign, and that I wouldn't make any fuss about it either. And that I would spend about a day a week over there going over the telegrams and sitting in on some of the stuff. I did that for awhile until Harriman went to Paris, and there was no point in doing that. But I was over in Paris on two separate occasions for about a week or so each, one in June--no, in August, no, I'm sorry, once in June and once in September--June and September. On both occasions we thought we had something.

M: I was going to say, that coincides with one of the publicized lulls and the negotiators apparently were advising total halt at that point.

C: That's right. In June it looked as though--there was a lull and we were--

M: But there was this advice?

C: Yes, there was such advice. I drafted it when I was in Paris. That this was a signal and that this was the time to exploit it.

M: And the response here?

C: Negative.

M: Just outright negative?

C: Outright negative, yes. In fact Vance came back in late June--

M: July, I think.

C: Early July then. But one of the propositions that we told them is that this is what we think and you should have Vance come back and present it personally. And they said, "No." But eventually they did permit Vance to come back, but he didn't get anywhere.

M: Still got a negative?

C: Yes.

M: Anything else after that? You've been patient three full sessions, and we certainly appreciate it.

C: No, I think I'm finished.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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By Chester L. Cooper

to the

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