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| transcript | Interview I, p. 40, lines 21-22 [same sanitization 5/9/00 NLJ 00-105] | 1/30/78 | A |
| transcript | Interview II, p. 70, lines 19-20 [same sanitization 5/9/00 NLJ 00-105] | 8/18/70 | A |

FILE LOCATION

Robert W. Komer Oral History Interviews

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INTERVIEW II

DATE: August 18, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT KOMER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mr. Komer's office, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

F: Bob, let's talk about what we were talking about at the end last time. We were talking a bit about Libya, and I wanted to get Libya sort of in context as it affected the Middle East crisis--the continuing Middle East crisis.

K: The issue with Libya as long as King Idris was in charge was much more our holding onto Wheelus [Air Force] Base and protecting our oil and gas, which were growing rapidly at that time; then much connection between Libya and the Arab-Israeli problem. Of course, the Six Day War didn't happen until after I had switched over to Viet Nam, so what Libya did in that connection I don't know. They broke relations with us, but that was a pro forma exercise in all likelihood. So, as long as Idris was in charge in a very conservative monarchial government in Libya, it was really a separate account. That has all changed, of course, since the ouster of Idris and the advent of this new revolutionary Arab regime.

We did have, and I was involved in, a question of their wanting to get us out of our base at Wheelus before the termination of the agreement which, as I recall, was December 1971. We had a lot of back-and-forth on that. My position was that we should try and play it smart and string the thing out, and we did. But we agreed, I think, to get out a year earlier, or something like that. That

would all be in the records.

It was not a matter of direct connection with the developing Middle East problem at all.

F: To go back, we talked last time also about your other involvements in the Middle East and Near East. Was there ever any serious discussion of giving up the Turkish bases as a quid pro quo for Khrushchev getting out of Cuba?

K: Judging purely from the published sources, there apparently was at the time of the Cuban missile crisis.

F: But it never involved you?

K: I was not involved at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. However, subsequent to the missile crisis, the President did say, "Now, doggone, I want those missiles out of Turkey." Not the bases, but the Jupiter missiles, I think--Jupiter or Thor that we had in Turkey. Kennedy put real heat on on that, and they were moved out shortly thereafter.

F: When you said the President, you meant President Kennedy.

K: President Kennedy, in that case.

F: Was the idea that they were, one, an irritation, and two, maybe ineffective?

K: Ineffective, yes. They were soft missiles. They were on open sites. They weren't in silos. The reason we gave for justifying the pullout was because we were moving Polaris subs into the Mediterranean, and we told the Turks that they--the Polaris subs--would provide a much better, more flexible, protective, retaliatory capability than those highly exposed obsolescent Thors.

Now, this went down fairly well with the Turks, and my involvement at that time was primarily advising President Kennedy and Mac Bundy

that we should delay the withdrawal of the missiles--not questioning that we should withdraw them--but delay the withdrawal of the missiles until the first Polaris sub actually appeared in the Med, thus making it credible to the very hard-headed Turks.

I had some success with this, as I recall. The Middle East people in State were arguing the same way, but it was a very close thing. I think we pulled those missiles out about six months after the Cuban missile crisis.

F: So it never really became an issue with the Turks?

K: It never really became an issue with the Turks. You know, they were unhappy about it, but it did not become a major issue.

Now that was not the Turkish bases and, as I recall, at no time during President Johnson's tenure did the question of Turkish bases come up as a problem raised by the Turks. It came up in his last years--and I had already gone on to be a Vietnamese--in connection with our desire to save on gold flow and defense budgets. It eventuated in a thing called the Red Cost Program put up by DOD, and I presume approved by the President at some point, to reduce our bases in Turkey primarily at our initiative as a means of saving money and helping our balance of payments.

F: Do you get fairly strong pressure from the Turkish economic sector to hold bases just for the money that it puts into the country?

K: On the contrary. The Turks did not make that point very forcefully, and I was surprised that they didn't when I was ambassador in Turkey. In my view the Turks missed a trick in acquiescing as quickly as they did in our base reductions.

F: Just overlooked it, didn't think along those lines.

K: They didn't think along those lines, Joe. It was more rising Turkish nationalism making the Turks just as happy for political reasons to see us cut down our presence. I think they failed to take into account strategic reasons.

I might add that I think, from my experience in Turkey and with Turkey, that we have made a mistake in drawing down our presence in the Mediterranean area so fast at a time when the Middle East crisis has been brewing up. You know, you could almost draw a curve of the heating up of the Middle East crisis and draw an intersecting curve of the decline in the U.S. military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean--or in the Mediterranean as a whole.

F: You think then a slightly more noticeable hand would have maybe been a stabilizer?

K: Yes. I just got in at the tail of that process when the decisions had already been made. So, being an activist, I expedited the policy.

F: Where were you at the time of the assassination of President Kennedy?

K: I was in Washington in my office, the Executive Office Building.

F: What sort of effect did that have on your operation?

K: On my operations? Very little.

F: You had known the Vice President-now President so you didn't have to be pretty much fitted in to the system?

K: I was one of the few even junior members of the New Frontier who really had gotten to know the Vice President and had developed a relationship with him. I remember that it was in December sometime that he asked--let me see, it was Ralph Dungan and myself and one other fellow to come over and have a swim in the pool and have lunch with him. I remember the occasion extremely well because I lost my

glasses in the pool, having a race I guess with Carl Kaysen or somebody--I think it was Kaysen who was the third one--and not being able to find them when the President said, "Okay, let's go up and have lunch."

The other thing that made it a notable occasion was that we went and had lunch in the second floor family dining room. And Ralph Dungan said to me after the lunch--it was a very friendly affair. He was very close to Kennedy, as you know. He worked for Kennedy before he was President. Ralph said to me, "You know, in all the time that Kennedy was President I was never on the second floor of the White House in the family quarters, and here President Johnson has invited me up the very first time I've had lunch with him."

F: Did you find your glasses incidentally?

K: Yes, just in time.

F: By the pool?

K: Yes. I'm practically blind, and I did find them on the bottom of the pool.

F: This is trivial, and yet has something to do with something I guess. Did the President actually swim about and exercise himself, or did he mainly just paddle around and kill time in the pool?

K: He was exercising, but it was more like paddling around than swimming a lot.

F: Did he talk?

K: Yes. It was clear that this was something he wanted to do, because none of us had dreamed of swimming then. He found it clearly very relaxing. Yes, we talked in the locker room; we talked in the pool;

we talked in the locker room again; and then we talked extensively around the luncheon table.

F: What was the substance of the talk at the luncheon table, do you remember?

K: I don't recall. It wasn't social, but there was no great issue. He was getting around to letting us know--the main point that he wanted to get across was that he wanted all of us to know that he regarded us as a part of his team, and wanted us to stay.

F: Did you ever consider quitting?

K: Never.

F: Were there a lot of incipient 1st of December resignations that didn't take place? Was there a lot of talk on the part of Kennedy people?

K: Yes, there was a lot of talk, and I always attributed it to the delayed shock of the assassination. You know, the contrast in personalities was so great. The sense of loss on the part of the Kennedy men was so strong that I always thought they tried to write down LBJ rather more than they should have.

Now I had the advantage of them since I had spent that trip with the Vice President. I had seen him since, and my own view of Lyndon Johnson was quite different from theirs, so I never had any hesitations about staying on. I've always regarded myself as a professional. I would have stayed on for the Nixon Administration if they had chosen to regard me as a professional instead of a Johnson appointee.

F: Right. Did you have much occasion to see the President over the next several months, or did you pretty well feed through--

K: I imagine as frequently as anybody who wasn't in the immediate personal

entourage. The President did give me access sort of right away.

I remember one very amusing incident that might be worthwhile as an insight as to how a new President comes along and worries about the role he's going to have to play. Almost the first major action that I had to take for President Johnson was a letter to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. He was either king or still Crown Prince, but at any rate he was running the show.

Now the letters to the Saudis were a special art form. They are very conservative and old hat, and they like to communicate in the old Arabic form, a very formal, flowery type of letter with about four pages of introduction, one page of substance, and then another four pages of flowery epilogues--so the meat is 'way in the middle. I'd had many problems with President Kennedy on this peculiar form of correspondence because we had to do a lot of hand-holding at the presidential level with the Saudis.

So this letter was one of the sort of standard presidential exchanges. I got the letter from State--I had been in consultation with them and put a little note on it pointing out quite clearly this special problem we had with the Saudis. And it was a nine page letter with only a page, or maybe even a couple of paragraphs, worth of substance. It was not a very important matter. But I sent it in, saying in effect, "This is what it's all about. President Kennedy got us started on doing things the Saudi way. I suggest we continue to show continuity and to show that you're just as much up on Arab protocol as Kennedy was. Sign here."

Well, the letter never came back. After a week I called Juanita Roberts and said, "Say, where's that Saudi letter? That's

not so important that it needs to be held up this long."

She said, "Gee, Bob, I don't know. The President still has it. It hasn't come back."

Well, I called up four times about that letter. Juanita was getting rather desperate. She said to me she couldn't find the thing. I was getting ready to send in another one. She said, "Maybe the President has it over in the Mansion," or something like that.

As luck would have it, after about three weeks there arrived on my desk the letter signed but with a complete file. The President had been quite nonplussed by this nine pages. He didn't know what he was signing. He only had this little note on the front of it from Bob Komer summarizing the contents and saying, "It's mostly a lot of flowery garbage."

What he had done is sent it around to his kitchen cabinet. He sent it to Abe Fortas; he sent it to Clark Clifford; he sent it to Dean Acheson; I forget who the others were he sent it to. Their comments were all there in the file--of course a file I was never supposed to have seen, but it came back to me. And in each case the adviser he had sent it to had written a little note saying, "Mr. President, I don't understand any more about this than you do. It sounds like a lot of garbage to me, but Komer seems to know what he's saying, and it does seem to be on the single point of substance that he mentioned for you in the covering note. We recommend you go ahead and sign."

Well, after the President had shot this around--you know, it was sort of a minor league issue--he had been satisfied that I wasn't trying to sneak one over on him or maybe the State Department, or

something like that, it came back signed with this whole file. Of course, I extracted the letter from the file and sent it off to State to be delivered, and sent the file back to Juanita Roberts, or hand-carried it back, saying, "This obviously isn't for me."

But that was a fascinating insight to the way LBJ was operating during the transition. And as I thought about it, I could understand. This was a very peculiar sort of letter, you know--and nine pages long. For all he knew, I could have been selling the keys to the kingdom, and he wanted to check it out. But, of course, all of the people he checked it out with didn't know any more about it than he did, and they all read it, and they all arrived at the same conclusion. "Well, it's okay."

F: I know that the State Department and the White House go to great lengths to see that the proper food is served when you have a visitor from abroad, to see that the proper customs are observed; and when you write, to see that the right phraseology is used, the right approach to things. Is there such a thing as an American style which we would adopt as our own, or is this a matter of catering, or do the other countries then when they write us try to be a little more brisk and businesslike in what we look on as the American fashion?

K: Joe, it works both ways.

F: You know Lyndon Johnson ordinarily won't read anything over two paragraphs long.

K: That's right. And that was another reason why this nine-page thing threw him. But, by and large, the State Department always is careful of the sensitivities of the other fellow, the White House staff much more sensitive to the sensitivities of the President. So in the

Kennedy period and also in the Johnson period we tried consciously to put things in the presidential style for presidential issuance or signature.

I continued my practice during the Kennedy years of extensively rewriting what State sent over. It wasn't so much that it was couched in language designed to make the French feel that it was a Frenchman communicating with him, etc. It was more that they were always couched in bureaucratese. And I didn't think that a President --I know Mac Bundy felt strongly on this, so did everybody on the White House staff--we just didn't think that the President should correspond or give speeches that were not in presidential idiom, that every President should have his style, and a letter should sound as though it were coming from Lyndon Johnson, not sound as though it were just a communication from the U.S. Government. So Presidential correspondence was something special. The other fellow, the Shah of Iran, Indira Gandhi, Faisal in Saudi Arabia, was always going to read that letter with the thought, "Did it really come from the President, did he write it!" Or was it just a routine thing that he signed? So we tried to give a personal flavor to it.

Now in LBJ's case, that meant a good deal more candor and writing it in a more free and open style when it came over from the State Department, whose interest was primarily in the substance--and which wrote in that peculiar form that I've never been able to comprehend.

F: Did the fact that Lyndon Johnson had some relationship with the oil industry, particularly his coming from a state that was heavily interested in petroleum, make any difference in the attitudes of

the Middle East towards him that you could discern?

K: I cannot recall any indication that this was so. And your question leads to another logical one. During my entire time as the White House Middle Eastern--'61 until early '66--there was no time when I felt or was conscious of any pressure from the oil industry, either on me or on the President, about Middle Eastern matters. Now, naturally I didn't deal with quota matters or commercial matters or economic --well, I did economic matters--but there was no visible influence on our Middle East policy by the oil industry in general, contrary to many popular misconceptions.

F: You arrived at your decisions on the basis of just ordinary intelligence --maybe extraordinary intelligence but--?

K: The oil companies were frequently sending in information and I was in touch with a number of their Washington representatives like young Chris Herter or Kim Roosevelt, but at no time any attempt to deliberately influence U.S. policy.

F: Is there an excessive tenderness toward the Middle East because of the great reservoirs of oil? Is there a feeling that we need them worse than they need us? Are they in a position, in other words, to blackmail us?

K: To an extent, and of course this happened in the aftermath of the '67 War, although our position is consistently less sensitive than that of Western Europe. Basically we don't import a hell of a lot of Middle East oil. Most of it goes to Western Europe. Now insofar as the security of Western Europe is a matter of great concern to us under NATO, etc, we're quite worried about the Middle East as a major oil source. So that is the main problem there.

Now, interestingly enough, the bulk of the producing companies in the Middle East are American, so we have a natural lively concern about the profit picture, about expropriation and things like that. But from a strategic point of view we never felt we were in a vise to my knowledge.

F: Was Cyprus part of your problem?

K: It was indeed.

F: Do you want to tell us a little bit about that? I'm aware of the general picture, particularly in '64, that Mr. Johnson inherited.

K: He did indeed. He inherited one hell of a mess on Cyprus. Now, of course, his chief Cyprus desk officer was George Ball until George left, and the President did an awful lot of dealing direct with George Ball on Cyprus matters, especially on the '64 crisis which was when Dean Acheson was brought in as a backstairs mediator.

F: Did the fact that you and Ralph Bunche strategically located in the United Nations act as an advantage to us other than Bunche's sort of personal attributes, or did he disassociate himself pretty effectively from the White House?

K: He did. He was extremely meticulous and careful, and I cannot recall a time during my entire six years of dealing with Middle East business that Ralph Bunche was directly involved in communication with the White House, communication with me, communication with--

F: He was never an advocate, in other words?

K: Never an advocate, no. He was really on the sidelines, and I think quite consciously tried to extricate himself from being a Middle East expert.

Now, let's go back to Cyprus because that was a touchy one, and

the President has come under considerable criticism in times past, especially from the Turks, for the extremely tough letter he wrote them in June of 1964--the famous Johnson letter. Oh boy, did that come back to roost with me when I got to Turkey! Fortunately, the letter was written by George Ball and Dean Rusk and not by Bob Komer! In fact, it was an emergency, and I must say the President's response times in that emergency were very good, both in '64 and when he sent Cy Vance out in '67.

If anyone ever writes anything about Lyndon Johnson and crisis management, I think that Cyprus should rank high as a case study. His handling of it was in my judgment very good, and twice he turned off a war between the Greeks and Turks. I think anybody would grant that. His technique was a) to get the best man he possibly could, in terms of stature and drive, to serve as the field mediator, negotiator, bringer-together, etc. In '64 it was Dean Acheson, in '67 it was Cy Vance--both of them quite close to the President. But he took major personal initiatives in both cases.

You may remember that right after we had turned off the Turks in June of '64 he invited both Papandreou and Inonu, the Greek and Turkish heads of government, to come. In typical LBJ style, he wanted to get them both there together in the Oval Office and put his arms around them and make them come up with a deal. They weren't eager, so Papandreou came for two days, and then immediately afterwards Inonu came for two days. It was quite an exercise.

I was involved in all of those things, and sat in on most of the meetings. But the chief action officer, as I say, was George Ball.

Now, it's funny. the Cyprus crisis started less than a month

after the President took office. It really started in December '63, so he has had that problem on his plate throughout his entire term. And, of course, it's still going on, although it has simmered down considerably. However, I, for one, would not be surprised if we had another flareup, because the capacity of the Cypriots for causing trouble is infinite, and the matter has still not been resolved.

F: Was it ever seriously feared that one or the other countries, Greece or Turkey, would pull off an invasion?

K: Yes, on both occasions. Both the '64 and '67 crisis--

F: These were not newspaper bugaboos, then?

K: Not at all. The Turks were getting on the ships. We had good intelligence as to what they were doing. As a matter of fact, we didn't need any intelligence. They told us they were going to move in both cases, and it was an eleventh hour shot to stop them. And in both cases direct presidential intervention was involved on a major scale. You know, we keep talking about Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis, which was I believe a brilliant exercise in crisis diplomacy, but Johnson in these two Cyprus crises is also very impressive.

F: Where did the idea originate for the tough letter to the Turks? Did it originate with the President, or did it come out of State, or out of your operation?

K: I'm not too clear on that. I think it came from State. I think that it was a George Ball proposal. Let me just look over my notes here and see.

The crucial day was the 4th of June. We had advice from Hare in Ankara that Inonu had told him that they were going to invade.

So on that day the President told Ross to tell Hare to intervene with Inonu in the strongest terms.

F: Hare was our ambassador--

K: Hare was our ambassador in Ankara, a very good man. Later in the day I think the President probably had this idea himself, he said, "Let's get Lemnitzer down there, Saceur, to go to Ankara and impress the Turks," who were always very conscious of their NATO tie.

Now I think that it was Rusk and State who recommended that even this was not enough, and we'd better send a direct presidential letter on an emergency basis. They did not decide that, as I recall, until the late afternoon of the 4th of June. And they had that draft over by about 9:30 or 10 o'clock that night. The reason I know is that Mac Bundy called me and asked me to stand by, then called me over and showed me the draft.

I thought the draft was too strong on two points; that by all odds the most important of which was our saying that if the Turks invaded and got into a fight with the Greeks and the Russians then intervened, we did not see how, under those circumstances, our NATO guarantees could be called into play. In other words, if you get yourself in a mess and the Russians intervene, fellows, you can't depend on us. I thought that that was much too strong, was raising issues involving much more Turkish security than was involved in the Cyprus crisis, and that the letter was strong enough. And it was strong without that.

I remember Bundy telling me, "Now, look, Ball and Rusk have written this letter. I'm only going to get one crack at the President. We're meeting around 10 o'clock. Give me your alternative wording,

and give me your arguments, and I'll present them to the President, but I'm not going to fight, bleed, and die on these two clauses."

Well, I was not at the meeting. It was Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy, around 10 or 11 o'clock at night, and they sent the letter off pronto. But apparently Mac did not make my point vigorously enough, and so it was left in--

F: You said there were two points.

K: Well, the second point I do not recall. I should. It just slips my mind now.

F: As far as you know, the President didn't hesitate on this.

K: He didn't hesitate at all. Maybe he made the letter even stronger.

At any rate the Turks blew up! He stopped the Turks, and that's the important thing. But the Turks really blew a fuse at this point. And there are still long articles every couple of months in one newspaper or another in Turkey criticizing LBJ for this letter, and focusing on this one point in particular.

F: But you're rather of the opinion it took a rather forthright statement to halt the Turks?

K: Nothing succeeds like success, and it worked. Now whether we employed overkill or not--in my professional judgment we employed a little more overkill than was needed, but I'm not one to cavil over a thing like that in an emergency. The big thing is we got it turned off. Now, the Turks don't appreciate it naturally, since they were the fall guys, but it was the price we had to pay.

F: Did the Greeks in general approve of this?

K: The Greeks, of course, were very happy about our turning off the Turkish invasion. You see, the trouble is the Greeks and the Greek Cypriots

have the upper hand in Cyprus, so Turkey's only hole card was to threaten to intervene. And that was the one thing we couldn't stand for because to have a war between two of our NATO allies, both totally equipped by us, using our equipment to fight each other at the expense of the defense of the NATO southeast flank against the bloc, and with the likelihood that who would have to intervene to stop the fighting? We would. Well, that was just too horrendous a picture to contemplate.

F: Did the Russians have sufficient discernible influence that they could act as a goad in this, or were they pretty much out of it?

K: They were pretty much out of it. The Russians never played a major role in influencing the Greeks or Turks, both of whom by the way were bidding for their support. The Russians did play a very mischievous role in supporting Makarios. And at one time of course Makarios was going to get SAM-3 missiles for air defense against the Turkish Air Force, which was coming over and attacking him every time he tried to knock off a Turkish village. These were being provided through Nasser as a cutout, and this caused a great deal of flap.

F: On those visits by Papandreou and Inonu, did President Johnson seem to communicate with the two gentlemen, or was it a standoff in your understanding of the situation?

K: I was there, I guess, for all but the most private meetings, which I think the President held alone with these two gentlemen. He had a habit of doing that. My impression was that he found Papandreou a good deal more slippery and more lawyer-like in his arguments than he did Inonu; that he had greater sympathy for Inonu, who was a straightforward, bluff fellow, than he did for Papandreou, who was the more slick politician--besides which, Papandreou was very talkative,

and Inonu not.

F: You mean he forced Lyndon Johnson to listen?

K: He kept talking, at any rate.

F: Was there any essential difference between working with Bundy and working with Rostow?

K: I didn't work with Rostow as intimately, of course, as I did with Bundy simply because I was Bundy's interim successor as Special Assistant for National Security, acting of course. And I had been Mac's senior deputy. Then for that brief period between the end of February and the 26th of April I was the Acting, in between Bundy and Rostow. But, of course, the President then called me up and told me he wanted me to take over the other war in Viet Nam to be managed from the White House by me as a special assistant to him. So I then acquired an independent dukedom, so to speak.

Now I worked closely with Walt Rostow during that entire year, May '66 through April '67, before I went full-time to Viet Nam. But our responsibilities were coordinate rather than my working for him the way I had worked for Mac Bundy.

Yes, there were distinct differences between Rostow's and Bundy's styles of operation. But of course I had been hired sort of by both of them at the beginning of 1961, and my relations with both were very good so I just accommodated myself to a different style. Walt, much more talkative than Mac, and in many respects much less incisive than Mac, ran much more relaxed meetings than Mac, and many more of them, but both in their way, very talented guys.

F: The becoming a Special Assistant was then to really shift the duties?

K: It was.

F: Were you active in the establishment of the NATO Ministers Conference in Europe in '65?

K: Not at all. That was always handled by the Europeans in the White House staff. As a Middle Easterner, even though I had two NATO countries--Greece and Turkey--I rarely got involved.

F: Why do you think you were shifted to Viet Nam when the Middle East in which you have a rather profound knowledge is a continuing crisis?

K: I think you'd have to ask Lyndon Johnson that question, but I would hazard that at the time--April 1966--Viet Nam looked like a hell of a lot more of a crisis than the Middle East. The Middle East I think really didn't get up speed until early '67, and then peaked in the June War. Was it June or September of '67 that the Six Day War--?

F: The Six Day War was in June.

K: Yes. At any rate, the Middle East did not look like a terribly volatile area at the time I was shifted to Vietnamese duties.

Now this had a history. Back in late 1965 and then at the Honolulu conference in February of '66, the President, McNamara, Bundy, Rusk, were all strong for developing more than a military response in Viet Nam. There was great talk of the other war. I think the phrase was coined in Honolulu in February '66 that we needed to get the pacification program going. LBJ himself, as he was consistently with me, placed great emphasis on the need for helping the people as well as for destroying the Viet Cong. He wanted rural electrification programs in Viet Nam; he kept pressing for a whole series of developmental initiatives.

Well, out of all of this came a decision that there should be a

senior man appointed full-time to handle what was called the other war in Viet Nam. The issue then became one of whether he should be located in the White House or in State as a special assistant to Rusk. Rusk and his people argued vigorously for putting it in State, that this was a logical State Department type of responsibility. Both McNamara and Bundy, to my knowledge, argued vigorously that this could not be that kind of staff job; that they'd better put in an operator with clout, and that the only place a man could have clout enough to pull together this thing called the "other war" and to get it moving was by operating directly out of the White House as one of the President's men. They won that argument, and the President decided it would be in the White House.

Then, I presume, he looked around to see who, and I suspect that both Bundy and McNamara recommended me. I know Bundy did, although Bundy at that time was recommending me as his successor in the Bundy job. As a matter of fact, right up to the day he left he was trying to get the President to decide that, and I was utterly unsurprised that the President did not decide.

F: Did you have a number of talks with the President on your prospective role in Viet Nam?

K: Only one. He called me into his office and said, "Bob, I'm going to put you in charge of the other war in Viet Nam."

F: Was it just you and he?

K: Just the two of us. I remember the very next thing he said. "And I'm going to pay you top dollar." I wondered what the hell he meant. He could see that I was a little puzzled. He said, "I'm going to make you a full Special Assistant to me." My part in that conversation

was to say, "Yes, sir!" I didn't give it a second thought. I did point out that all my experience was in the Middle East, and I was a tabula rasa on Southeast Asia. Except for Indonesia, I'd never done any business there.

But the President's answer to that, as I recall, was: "I've got a lot of experts on Viet Nam, and they don't seem to be doing so well. Maybe we'd better get another kind of guy!"

But I had no hesitation. Viet Nam was even then, obviously, our number one priority. I was a professional, and if the President wanted me to go to Viet Nam or serve in the White House on Viet Nam, I saw only one answer. And I'd give him the same answer today, even though I'm a sadder and wiser man.

F: Now you were named in late-March of '66 as special assistant to LBJ. You had been a Deputy Special Assistant before that?

K: No, I think that it was not late March. Wasn't it late April?

F: My notes say March 23 that the appointment was announced.

K: It was just before the Indira Gandhi visit. You may well be right. I always thought it was late-April.

F: Then in May you conferred with LBJ on Viet Nam with McNamara and with Lodge, with AID Director Bell, Bundy, Rostow, all present. What was the gist of that?

K: I don't recall what the gist of that particular meeting was. Let me say--you know, you asked me whether I had many meetings with the President as a prospective Viet Nam hand,as I say I had only one--but from then on I was involved in most of the meetings that were held on Viet Nam, especially of course any of the big ones. And I saw the President really quite frequently, I would say once or twice a

week on Viet Nam matters--sometimes alone, sometimes with two or three others, sometimes in large sessions like the one you just described.

I also went to Viet Nam seven times in the one year before I--

F: I was going to ask. Did he think that you ought to get out there with some frequency, or did he think you could run it out of Washington better?

K: He did not raise that question initially, but I decided right off the bat that I could not manage the "other war" from 11,000 miles away without spending a lot of time in the field. The one thing the President did say to me was, "You'd better go over and see Bob McNamara right away, because he's your strongest supporter, and he's the guy who will have to give you the most help. So you'd better go talk right away to Bob McNamara." And I immediately called up and went right over to see Bob McNamara, then went to see Dean Rusk.

But it was McNamara to whom I expressed the thought. Because, you see, my first meeting with the President was out of the blue! I hadn't a clue that he was going to put me in charge of the "other war" in Viet Nam. Bundy had mentioned once, maybe two months before, that they were considering some kind of a job like this but had never hinted that I might be the guy or what the job might look like.

F: Until you came along the so-called "other war" then was run by the civilian agencies such as AID--?

K: AID had a chunk; CIA had a chunk.

F: No coordination, really.

K: No coordination. The State Department is always supposed to coordinate

these things, and indeed it had a group called the Viet Nam Coordination Committee run by a Deputy Assistant Secretary, Len Unger. But like all committees run by the State Department it was just a message information exchange and idea exchange center. And that was obviously not good enough.

Anyway, I had had no time to think through what the job was going to involve. So basically it was while I was in a car going over to the Pentagon to call on Bob McNamara that very same day I talked with the President that I sort of began thinking about what I should do. That was where I decided I'd better plan to spend a lot of time in Viet Nam.

F: You really didn't know personnel out there either, did you?

K: Didn't know anybody. It so happened that it turned out that there were a number of people out there whom I had known in times past, including some guys I had to fire.

But let me make two important points. The first thing I said to Bob McNamara was, "I don't know what the job is all about, Bob, but I do know that it's very difficult to run it from back here. I'd better spend as much time out there as I can."

He said, "Bob, you are 100 percent correct. I would like to go to Viet Nam at least a half dozen times a year if my other affairs would permit, and I think it is so important that you spend a lot of time out there that I'll give you a tanker to go out any time you need one."

And I remember thinking this was the first time I'd ever had a tanker of my own. I had a tanker of my own with Averell Harriman when the President sent me to Israel in 1965, but that was different

matter.

The second thing was the President told me to write my own ticket, which would be issued as a NSAM. So in the car I scribbled down--as a matter of fact I went right back to my office--

F: Issued as a what?

K: National Security Action Memorandum. NSAM. It was actually NSAM 362. In fact I've got a copy which would have the date on it--it is March. It was just before Indira Gandhi's visit.

That was the other thing the President said to me. He said, "Now, I want you to drop totally all of your Middle East business. I don't want you to have anything more to do with the Middle East. You spend twenty hours a day on Viet Nam."

I said, "Mr. President, Indira Gandhi is coming the day after tomorrow, and I've been handling the whole thing for you."

He said, "Didn't you hear what I told you?"

So later that afternoon, late that afternoon when I was back at my office the first thing I get is a call from the President saying, "What about this Indira Gandhi meeting? What about this and what about that!" He had completely forgotten he'd just told me to drop it like a hot potato. So I didn't remind him of the fact and I spent the next six days, I think, on the Indira Gandhi session.

Now, the President said, "You write your own ticket, and we'll issue it as a NSAM." I hastily dictated to my secretary one page, and when I went to see McNamara I took it along with me and showed it to him. I put in there that I was to supervise the Washington management of the "other war" in Viet Nam.

By the way, it was very difficult to define the "other war" in

Viet Nam. It has never really been satisfactorily defined. So I worked up my own definition. After all, nobody else knew what it was either.

McNamara said, "You are absolutely right to insist that you supervise instead of coordinate. You've got to be a manager." In fact, I think he added in another word "manage and supervise."

And I said, "But Bob, that's a little redundant."

He said, "It doesn't hurt at all to emphasize that point." I forget whether somebody took it out later on the grounds that it was redundant.

But I had, as a result of that NSAM, a unique position, Joe, on the White House staff. A Special Assistant is a staff officer to the President. The President makes the decisions and executes them through the staff frequently, when he doesn't handle it directly. But in my case he signed what is tantamount to an Executive Order which said that I would, in effect, by delegation of authority from him "manage and supervise." And I think I'm the only Special Assistant in history who ever had a charter that called on me personally as his delegee to manage and supervise the "other war." And let me tell you, I went out and did it--or tried to do it--with varying success.

F: Did you get the feeling from that talk on prospects and then the subsequent talk that he equated this war with the military war? That he thought they were of equal importance, or nearly?

K: Yes. In fact he said so.

F: Did he have a grasp of the Mekong possibilities, or did you feed him that?

K: No. He had long since gone through--the Mekong proposals, I believe

were in '64 and '65.

F: I heard him talking about it later, but I didn't know where he got his information.

K: We had already gone through that phase. Of course since my function was exclusively Viet Nam--and South Viet Nam at that--the Mekong business was a sort of dead letter by then since the enemy had made no effort to pick it up where it laid on the table. There was that famous Baltimore speech that had carried that a step further and gotten no reaction whatsoever.

Now. The President saw--and this is simply indicative of how early in the game it was--the political war, the "other war," the developmental war, as equal in importance with the military war. But he did not stress to me, nor did McNamara or anyone else, that the "other war" had to be quasi-military in character. I ended up doing a lot of military business, because I quickly came to realize that the "other war" in the middle of a shooting conflict had to focus on what has come to be known as pacification--and that pacification in turn, which is the attempt to damp down the rural insurgency and destroy the Viet Cong population base, that population control and pacification in turn was as much a military as a political-economic matter in the initial phases. So I began to get heavily involved in such things as police programs in Viet Nam, as paramilitary forces in Viet Nam, the Regional and Popular Forces in Viet Nam, etc. I quickly discovered that I was doing at least as much business with the Defense Department as I was with State, AID, or CIA.

F: Was there a line of demarcation between the military and the various civilian agencies that were there?

K: No. It was very fuzzy, and that was one of the basic problems in the field. You are on to what I regard as an extremely important problem area. The "other war"--it was all one war, as Abrams used to say, but it was being run by all sorts of different agencies. There was no unified management of the whole war--

F: You had a dozen or more quarterbacks, huh?

K: Exactly. And that made it very difficult. The only guy fully in charge was the President, and that is not the optimum way to do things.

F: Did the President grasp the problem?

K: Yes. I must say that I had no sense whatsoever during my entire year in Washington, or for that matter during the nineteen months I then spent in Viet Nam, that I didn't have Lyndon Baines Johnson fully behind me. In fact, without him fully behind me and my acute consciousness of that fact--that I was his guy and he was backing me up--I couldn't have done a lot of the things that I did. I might say that I feel very strongly, though perhaps parochially, that one of the brightest things we ever did in Viet Nam finally was to mount a major pacification effort.

Now, you were on this fascinating problem of divided management. I quickly just moved in on all of the problem areas that I thought were quasi-legitimately mine. And I ran into problems only on two fronts. One was a certain amount of--and I wouldn't call it friction --but a certain questioning on Walt Rostow's part as to where his mandate ended and mine began. But we easily worked that out. What was a little harder was that as I got involved in Viet Nam and went out there and saw the way the war was going, I realized that the military and "other wars" were completely intertwined. So I began

to get interested to advise the President on various military things.

When I came back from Viet Nam for example, I'd write a trip report, and I would talk about how Westmoreland was fighting his war as well as how Lodge and Porter were fighting theirs. And I occasionally came a cropper with Bob McNamara, especially when I began talking about unified command in Viet Nam. It seemed to me that we were not fully utilizing the Vietnamese and that the way to get the most out of the Vietnamese was to put the Americans in charge and have a joint command like we had had in Korea.

I came back and mentioned this a couple of times in two famous memos to the President and I got a real blast from Bob McNamara, who said, "Look, I'm giving you 100 percent support on your part of the war. What are you doing getting involved in mine?" He then proceeded to say that he himself had considered this actively in '65, I believe it was, and had concluded that it was not viable, mainly because of Westmoreland's objections. And Westy had some good objections, because I discussed it with Westy on a couple of occasions. But McNamara was the only guy who delimited my job.

Now I stayed out of the higher political policy. I stayed out of the negotiation process. I thought that was State's business. I stayed out of the high level political guidance being given to our attempted negotiators and to the Ambassador. But I got heavily involved in political development in Viet Nam because that was part of pacification to a considerable extent.

F: By the time you got there Ky is, in one sense, running the show.

K: Ky was in as Prime Minister and running the show.

Now, I concluded really in late August 1966, after I had only

been involved with Viet Nam for about four months, after my second or third trip--I forget which--that we needed single management of what I called by that time pacification in Viet Nam.

F: Is that your term?

K: No.

F: It just developed?

K: No, it's a word the French have used ever since the 19th century. The French used it for certain of their programs in Viet Nam. We then picked it up and used it at the time of Diem. It was then thought to be a little colonialist in its implication so we invented new terms like rural construction and revolutionary development. And when I got back out there I said, "To hell with all that jazzy terminology. We're going to call it pacification again." This was over Bunker's and Westmoreland's objections. And I made a mistake. Frankly, we should have called it [inaudible] a new title, but I was so tired by that time of our using words as an excuse for non-performance that I said, "The only term that everybody understands is pacification, and we'll call it pacification." The guy who agreed with me was Thieu. So between Thieu and myself, we kept it pacification. It was probably a mistake, though.

F: Did Thieu and Ky understand what you were doing, and was there any variance of opinion between the two as to the value?

K: Yes. There were some variances. Thieu was always much more pacification-minded than Ky. When Thieu became President and won out in the power struggle with Ky in the September 1967 election,

Thieu rapidly took charge of the Viet Nam pacification program, which is always--

F: He became a real ally.

K: He became not only a real ally but the guy in charge of the program in Viet Nam.

F: Ky saw it always as a military problem?

K: Ky saw it more as a military problem. It so happened that Thieu had been chief-of-staff of the pacification command under Diem 'way back in '61 or '62, or something like that. Thieu is the most pacification-minded of all the top Vietnamese generals. It's surprising. But he took hold and he was the greatest supporter and instigator of pacification programs.

F: I'd like your assay on one thing. It's just an opinion. But Ky is much more the flamboyant, swashbuckling type. How do you explain the fact that Thieu stays in command?

K: Thieu outmaneuvered him.

F: Just a little shrewder, huh?

K: Yes, a little shrewder. I think the Vietnamese had more respect for Thieu than for Ky, including the military. Now Ky had his passionate admirers among the senior military, but I think they thought he'd run away with the show more than Thieu would. I think they thought Thieu was more manageable, and they proved to be wrong. Thieu outmaneuvered the generals, too. But Ky was not just flamboyant, Ky was also a little unstable. I think that also argued against him.

But let me go back and finish this point about the unification of pacification management because this was a matter of presidential decision. In August '66 I came back from Viet Nam and went over to

see McNaughton and McNamara and proposed that we had to pull together the entire U.S. pacification efforts, civil and military, in Viet Nam under a single manager, that because the military had about 85 percent of the action and the civilians only 15, second, that it was a military war that was going on, and third, because the civilians can't manage a paper bag, by and large, that it should be under military management.

McNamara said he couldn't agree more, that he had indeed himself proposed this in '64 or '65, and that he would join in this recommendation.

We mutually agreed that he would present it to the other cabinet level and to the President so that it wouldn't look as though I were getting out too far ahead.

Bob did so, as a careful plan. The President told him and myself personally that he agreed with us, but the civilian agencies were very unhappy, especially State. The idea that civilians, including State Department people, should be under soldiers--that had never happened in our history. And they were not about to agree to it now.

The upshot of this discussion which took place in September '66, mostly, was the President saying, in effect, we would consolidate only the civilian agencies. We would pull all of them together under Porter in Saigon in a thing called OKO but that he would give them only three to six months to prove that they were right, and if they did not cut the mustard in three to six months he was going to go for the Komer-McNamara solution.

We kept prodding them to set the thing up, to get the show on the road. They never even set it up until December. Then at the Guam conference in March 1967 the President announced that, by God,

he was going to consolidate everything under the military. He announced that he was going to send Komer out there to run the thing that Komer had set up!

So that one threw me too. You know, the guy who builds a better mousetrap is usually called to be the first one to stick his finger in it. So somehow in designing all these reorganizations, I had never taken adequately into account that I might be the fall guy who was going to execute them.

Then again Lyndon Johnson called me in before the Guam conference and said, "I'm going to send you out there. I want you to run it. You set it up. You run it as Westmoreland's deputy." And once again, though I had a lot of reservations and concerns, by this time I knew something more about it, I said, "Yes, sir."

F: Now where did this leave Bunker?

K: Bunker was still the Number One guy in charge, senior to Westmoreland, who was COMUS, MACV. We had to run this by Bunker. We did discuss it with him. I carried the can on convincing him that single management was necessary. The President then held off the final okay until Bunker had gotten to Saigon in April, had looked over the situation, and had decided that the recommendations I had made and that had really been foreshadowed at the Guam conference, were what we should do. So Bunker wired back the okay.

Then a new NSAM was issued, that I again wrote, assigning me to Saigon as deputy to Westmoreland and putting the whole management of pacification under Westmoreland. Then Bunker issued a thing in Saigon doing it out there and repeating the same drill. The one was a classified document. Bunker, as number one guy, was the one who

made the public announcement that had really been decided earlier by the President.

F: This gets a little confusing to the outsider. You have Eugene Locke, you have Ellsworth Bunker, and eventually you get Robert Komer, all with some degree of ambassadorial functions and titles.

K: All three of us had ambassadorial rank, yes.

F: Are there degrees of ambassadorship, or did each one have his own field of duty--?

K: There is the Ambassador. That's Bunker. I was an ambassador, which is like being a general, but I was not the Ambassador. He ranks everybody, including all the generals. His alter ego is the deputy ambassador, a rather unique thing that was set up in '64, I think, when Max Taylor went out as Ambassador and had Alex Johnson, now the Under Secretary, as his Deputy Ambassador.

F: He's not really an executive officer though--

K: No, no. Not at all, he's an alter ego. He is the number two guy who acts for the Ambassador in his absence.

Now, when my new job--Gene Locke was sent out to be the alter ego to Bunker. I've always had it in mind that what the President thought was, "Here, Ellsworth Bunker is 72 years old; he might get a heart attack tomorrow. I've got to have my guy out there ready to take over."

F: You don't send a stranger into a situation like that.

K: You can't send a stranger in. So Gene Locke was put there. Do you know Gene?

F: I know his wife.

K: She's a dear.

F: Adele.

K: Yes. Now when I was sent out, even though a senior civilian, I was put in the military chain of command as a deputy to Westmoreland. So I reported to Westmoreland who in turn reported to Bunker. But they gave me the rank of ambassador to emphasize that this was a major job and that I ranked as a four-star general along with Abrams, who was the military deputy. So the lines were very clear. Pacification was my business working for Westmoreland and, through him, for Bunker. Gene Locke's business was to be the alter ego to Bunker.

F: Being an ambassador did not reduce your White House clout?

K: Let me put it this way. When I went out there I told Bunker and I told Westmoreland that I was coming out to work for them; that I was not Lyndon Johnson's company spy in Viet Nam; that I did not retain any ties to the White House; that my organizational loyalty was to Westy, through Westy to Bunker, through Bunker to Lyndon Johnson.

Now the President did tell me when I went out--he said, "You know, if you have any problems, the door is open." And he also encouraged me to communicate with him about any problems that I was concerned about. I did not use that offer to any extent whatsoever. Now when I came back, or when the President sent me out a private request through Walt Rostow, usually, "the President would like to have your view on such-and-such a matter," I always sent it back. But I did not try to retain a White House tie, except in one respect. And I did not communicate directly with the President except when I was back there and saw him a couple of times every time I was back and gave him my reports. He asked questions and I

answered them. But it was always at his initiative.

F: Physically, where did you office back in Washington?

K: In the Executive Office Building.

F: So that you were handy.

K: Yes. I was right across the street. I had the office that Herb Klein has now, right on the corner across from Blair House, a very nice place. I rather enjoyed it.

My job in Viet Nam--and here again a presidential innovation--was unique. I believe I am the only ambassador in U.S. history who has served in the direct chain of command under a general. Now, Bob Murphy was Political Adviser to Eisenhower in North Africa and Italy. There have been other things like that. But I do not believe we ever had an ambassador who served as a direct subordinate of a military commander. It was unique, and it was the President who approved it.

F: No one in the military chain of command ever pulled that Stalin story on you--how many legions does he have?

K: Well, they said when I went out there that I would be a pigeon among the cats and that the military would eat me for breakfast. Well, I think most of the generals would agree that I ate more of them than they ate of me.

F: Did Westmoreland understand and accept your role?

K: Beautifully. My relationship with Westy--I don't know what the President said to Westy in Guam or afterwards, but I could not have asked for a more cordial and effective working relationship than I had with Westmoreland. Abe was the other deputy--

F: You, in a sense, were co-equal.

K: We were co-equal. Just as my dealings with Bunker were with Bunker rather than with Locke--or with Bunker rather than Berger when Berger replaced Locke--so, too, in MACV my dealings were with Westy, not Abe. So while Abe and I were co-equal deputies, our relationship was very good.

Abe's style is quite different, and his concept of how organizations should work is much more conventional than Westy's. So when Westy left in June of '68 and Abe took over as COMUS, MACV and I then became Abe's deputy, I did not feel that I had the same degree of close rapport with Abe that I had with Westy. After all, I was Westmoreland's guy by that time. But it was an effective working relationship, nonetheless.

F: Early in your Viet Nam adventure--and in a sense it was that--you made a trip out there with Cy Vance and with Bill Moyers.

K: Correct.

F: Was Bill already beginning to feel that he was the policy maker by this time?

K: Yes, most emphatically--and a pretty good one too. I always felt that Bill Moyers was the brightest guy and most effective guy that LBJ brought into the White House. I thought Bill really had it. I found Bill a constant source of advice and counsel. Bill was one of the few guys who was willing to go in to the President with unwelcome ideas when someone like myself needed help. You know, you always have the problem, and I don't want to be derogatory of other White House advisers, but you always have the problem of who has the kind of clout with the President that he's willing to spend, and Bill always was. I think the President respected him for that.

I never understood how and why the President let Bill go. I am not a great guy for gossip, and I never spent a lot of time in the corridors talking about personalities et cetera. But Bill had real influence with the President. When I felt that I needed a hand with the President, or with others, I found Bill a very good source to go to. Walt Rostow, I might add, was the same way. Walt was always willing to lend a helping hand, and I tried to return the courtesy.

But I had the distinct impression--I talked with Bill a lot, there's no question that he was unhappy with being the Press Secretary even though he had turned it into a lot more than that. There was no doubt that he was looking for more substantive fields to conquer, and he did describe to me a couple of his initiatives. He tried to get the President--at one time said he'd be perfectly willing to go to Viet Nam. That was sort of the badge of honor, I remember. Everybody had to volunteer to go to Viet Nam. Bundy volunteered to go out there, McNamara volunteered, Rusk volunteered--all of them, I'm sure, knowing the President wouldn't send them. It might have been smart if the President had sent Bundy or McNamara to Viet Nam. So they ended up sending me.

But let me go further a bit on this business of the Washington and Viet Nam management of that tragic conflict, because I feel this is one of the areas where we fell down. We did not set up the kind of dynamic civilian management and get the kind of dynamic civilian managers that would have made our performance out there just much better. This was a source, I know, of great frustration to the President and his top advisers.

F: What was the problem? Working within the bureaucracy and with what you had--?

K: Joe, it's something I'm writing about now. It's the great difficulty of getting things done by the bureaucracy, especially when you're confronted with an exceedingly atypical situation which requires exceedingly atypical responses.

Notice how I've suggested earlier that the things they did with me were real managerial innovations, and that when I got involved, then I went on to a whole series of other managerial innovations. I was the one who proposed and designed single management of pacification in Viet Nam and put it under the military so that the civilians could run it, by the way. You know, it was an interesting device. We were very unsatisfied with the military performance in support of pacification which, as I said earlier, is as much military as it is civilian. Well, the only way to get the military was to put the civilians under them, and then put a civilian in as a four-star general to run the pacification show. I commanded troops. I had many more military under me, about six to one, than I did civilians. And I acted like a commander.

F: You could deploy and move people where they were needed.

K: I did deploy and move people. And I wrote their efficiency reports. I knew the tricks of the trade, which is one reason why Westy and I and Abe got along so well.

But I made many other suggestions. We have no War Cabinet. This is another important point. I pointed out to the President in a couple of memoranda that to my amazement I was the only even semi-senior official in the U.S. Government above the level of office

director who was working full-time on Viet Nam. I said, "There is not another official in the government at the rank of even Deputy Assistant Secretary, or general, or admiral, in the Pentagon, State, CIA, or any place else who is working full time on Viet Nam. Mr. President, I am your only full-time Viet Nam hand, and I think that's a hell of a way to run a war that's already costing us over $20 billion dollars and where we've got upwards of 500,000 men."

I learned the hard way in my White House experience that it seldom is enough to pose a problem, however accurate you are. You must always, if you're going to serve a President, or anybody, wisely, propose solutions along with the problem. So I recommended to him what I called the non-group, a sort of sub-cabinet level war cabinet, which would be composed of--you have to seize a psychological moment for a proposition like that and I proposed it at the time when Nick Katzenbach moved over from Attorney General to Under Secretary of State. I said we needed an impartial chairman who was not already committed to one position or another. Nick would be ideal and that we should set up a completely secret so-called non-group which would meet once or twice a week with Nick as Chairman, Walt Rostow, Cy Vance, and myself--No uniformed military, no other hangers-on. We would just be a little group that would deal with the major issues in Viet Nam and would recommend operational and policy decisions to the top echelon.

Now, you know the War Cabinet really was Dean Rusk, Bob McNamara, Walt Rostow, and the President meeting at the Tuesday lunches. Now when the Tuesday lunch took up Viet Nam, I was there more often than not, so I was co-opted. I was like the commandant of the Marine Corps.

When my business was up, or Viet Nam was up, I was invited to lunch. That was the War Cabinet, but it did not have a secretariat; it did not have a staff; it did not have structure; and did have any group of top level planners and policy makers reporting to it.

I tried to fill that gap with the non-group. The President thought it was a good idea, told me to go sell it to Katzenbach and Bob McNamara. With anything on Viet Nam up to the time I left, the first thing the President asked me was, "Is McNamara with us?"

There was little question in my mind that his senior adviser on operational matters in Viet Nam was named Robert McNamara. Now I see a lot of things in the press these days about Mr. Rusk suggesting bombing this and that, you know, a halt, and my relations with the Secretary were always very good. But on the business I was involved in the number one guy he asked about--and these were generally management decisions and resource decisions, people decisions--it was McNamara, not Rusk.

F: I've picked up the idea of a really overwhelming respect for McNamara's ability on the part of President Johnson.

K: And I hate to see these things coming out that-- I don't know what happened after I left. I know that up to the moment I left for Viet Nam full-time, Bob McNamara was number one on Viet Nam. Now, this didn't have much to do with the negotiations, but they didn't go anywhere--and they aren't going anywhere yet, so that was shadow-boxing.

F: What happened to the non-group?

K: Katzenbach agreed. Bob McNamara said he thought it was a fine idea. We set up the group. We had one or two meetings, and then Nick got involved in one thing or another as Under Secretary, and I was the

guy who had to call up and badger him to have meetings. Walt joined me in this. The non-group met more or less sporadically, maybe a half-dozen times. I just proposed this in September or October '66--forget when Nick came onboard--and then I left of course a few months later. But it was continued and later expanded to include Buz Wheeler and Dick Helms. But I gather it never really flew. I regretted that, because here was an attempt with the President's clear support to sort of help unify the strategic direction of the war.

You know, a President can't spend full-time on Viet Nam. A Secretary of Defense can't spend full-time on Viet Nam. But I think that they both should have done more to make sure that full-time attention was being paid to Viet Nam by others than Bob Komer.

Now. I later insisted that Bill Gaud in AID set up a full-time Viet Nam bureau with an Assistant Secretary running it, who Bill agreed to let me name, so that at least AID had an Assistant Secretary level guy working full-time on Viet Nam. Then DOD set up a guy in the R&D business at a deputy assistant secretary level. So there were three eventually. But it never amounted to much.

The one thing the President didn't do for me that he told me he would was that when I left for Viet Nam I had one major request--that my deputy in the White House as Special Assistant for the "other war," Ambassador Bill Leonhart, be given my title and keep my little staff there. I wanted to have a rear echelon in Washington looking out for me and pacification and the "other war" the same way my predecessors in Saigon had had me there for a year. And, boy, it made a difference! I wanted to have a home base, and a home base

in the White House. It had worked so successfully when I was there, I wanted to try and perpetuate it.

The President agreed that he would appoint Leonhart Special Assistant in my place, and actually an announcement of kind went out that I was going and he was taking my job. But for some reason the President never really confirmed Leonhart in that job, and my little staff there, which had worked so effectively, sort of atrophied. Leonhart couldn't get in to see the President. Rostow preempted him. Dean Rusk tried to get this settled two or three times and then tried to get Leonhart relieved and close up the office because he wasn't doing anything. And the President would neither promote Leonhart nor let him get out.

I think it was Walt who told me that LBJ said, "Look, I don't know that fellow. I know I promised Bob Komer, but I don't know that guy. I don't know what he can do, and I'm not going to make him a special assistant on my personal staff. I'm not going to put him on my personal staff when I don't even know him." I can understand that, but he should have fished or cut bait. It wasn't terribly important, as it turned out. I didn't need all that much of a home base.

Following up on the implication of your question, how much White House clout did I retain after I went to Viet Nam, and I answered your question a little disingenuously by saying I never attempted to use it. But when I went to Viet Nam power went with me insofar as I had any. And everybody in Viet Nam from Bunker and Westy on down always thought of me as the President's man, so I had a hell of a lot of clout in the mind of the guy getting clouted. They all

thought that I was LBJ's guy, and I certainly did nothing to disillusion them on that score.

F: Yes, it might be useful sometimes.

K: I want to tell you, and I'm sure the President and Walt Rostow would concur, that I never went around end. I was working out there for them, and that was indispensable to doing the job I was tagged to do in the field--make pacification go. I couldn't make it go if I was constantly at loggerheads with my two bosses out there, Bunker and Westy, because they didn't trust me if they thought I was out there as somebody else's guy, even though the somebody else was their boss. That's no way to run a railroad.

F: Was Bunker's age any barrier in his success?

K: Not in my judgment. A younger and more active man might have done things more dynamically, but I am constantly impressed--and I just saw him less than a month ago--you know, I've just returned from Viet Nam, two weeks out there--I am constantly amazed at Ellsworth Bunker's youthful vigor and energy. He was a first-class appointment, and I think he has done a first-class job.

Now, one reason why he doesn't do better, in my judgment, is because he does not have as good people around him as he deserves. I, in a sense, was one of Bunker's protegés. I first met him in 1961. We got him involved in the Indonesia, the West Irian crisis, as our backstairs negotiator, and I was involved in that. We then got him involved in the Yemen crisis as our backstairs negotiator, and I was involved in that. Since India was my account, he was one of the kitchen cabinet advisers who talked to me about India and Pak problems. So I knew him quite well, and I was just delighted when he was

appointed ambassador. And when I was asked, I strongly recommended him.

But when I was in Viet Nam Bunker and I had a very close--indeed, you could call it intimate--relationship. He insisted on it. I was happy to have it. I never hesitated,when I had problems, to go to him. And that was the one thing that Westy did allow me to do, and that Abrams later did not like. It was a rather strange arrangement we had--where, as a senior civilian in the military, I had direct access to the Ambassador.

F: You were, in one sense, going over his head--

K: Going right over his head. Bunker insisted on that, and Westy had to agree with it.

The other interesting aspect of this relationship was that I had a seat on the so-called mission council, which was the American war cabinet in Saigon. I was the only guy who was the subordinate to somebody else who was on the thing, because I was Westmoreland's deputy. Of course Locke was there, and he was Bunker's deputy, so there was one other. But MACV had only two seats, even though MACV had 90-percent of the assets. So I of course sat there, and I reported on and dealt with pacification matters sitting next to Westmoreland, who dealt with military matters and with the big unit war.

F: What is MACV?

K: Military Assistance Command-Viet Nam. You know, the acronym for that great big military headquarters.

F: What success do you think you had with pacification? I mean, is this a fluid sort of thing, to use a cliché, like nailing jello to a

wall--it squeezes away from you, or can you get something and hold it?

K: I've devoted a lot of thought to that, Joe, because it was a strictly wartime expedient. It had been tried experimentally many other times in Viet Nam, as well as elsewhere, and had never been terribly successful--except in Malaya in post-war period. But while it was an inefficient, wasteful, sloppy, wartime program, I think that it probably was the greatest single success we've had in Viet Nam. With all of its weaknesses and flaws, my considered judgment is that the biggest mistake we made in pacification was that we didn't do a lot more of it a lot earlier. It may even, had we started a program on this scale and of this sort early enough, have forestalled the need for U.S. intervention in 1965.

Now that's a big historical "if." I've advanced this thesis before, and some very competent colleagues have come back and said, "Look, you never could have done it. You never could have duplicated the program in 1960, shall we say. In the first place, you still had Nho Dinh Diem, who wasn't paying any attention to what the Americans were telling him. In the second place, you didn't have all of the American resources and in the third place, you didn't have Lyndon Johnson as your patron." And you didn't have Ellsworth Bunker, and Westmoreland, for that matter.

So, it's true that it's hard to make a statement like that, but then it's not impossible either.

F: You have the very strong feeling that it was a necessary movement.

K: Oh yes. I think that a pacification-type program on a major scale was indispensible to the achievement of U.S aims in Viet Nam and that it was tragic that it did not get going seriously on a major

scale and sustained basis until I got to Viet Nam in May 1967.

F: Did the military brass appreciate this sort of lacuna in its operation?

K: Most of the military brass did, Westmoreland, in particular. But, the military did their thing. I feel that the tragedy in Viet Nam is not that we failed to understand what was needed, but that though recognizing what was needed, we let the great bureaucracies --military and civilian--go on and do their own thing. Everybody and nobody was responsible for pacification until I came along, so as a result nobody was in charge. And it was the same thing on the Vietnamese side. We put pacification on the map for the first time on a major scale.

Now, I don't think we did anything new conceptually. The theory and practice of pacification had been worked out in experiments and studies and everything else for years--going all the way back to the French experience in the late '40's and early '50's. What we did was to make it work on a major scale.

F: Did you develop a sort of tried and true formula, or was each area its own problem?

K: No, we were quite pragmatic and flexible. We adjusted our priorities to what we thought were the needs of the time. We did emphasize some areas more than others, but, for example, the emphases in the pacification program today in August 1970, which is a direct descendant of the same program that I started in '67--as everybody told me when I was out there a couple of weeks ago--has some significantly different emphases. For example, we're emphasizing political and economic development today much more than we were in '67 because you had to

take care of security first.

No, we tried to tailor a program to the problem, both functionally and in terms of areas. Pacification up in I Corps, where it was an NVA war, was a lot different than what we attempted down in IV Corps in the Delta, for example.

F: Was pacification in one sense an imposed program, or did the Vietnamese at the local level understand what you were up to and cooperate?

K: As far as the people were concerned, the rural population who are the ultimate target of pacification, it was more an imposed program by the GVN and the Americans. As far as GVN officialdom was concerned, it was a joint program.

You see, another thing, Joe, that makes me more than a little proud of what we did in pacification is that we kept it a Vietnamized program from the start.

F: And the Vietnamese saw what you were trying to do?

K: Yes. The Vietnamese ran every single operating program. Pacification was and is 99 percent pure Vietnamese in its staffing.

Now, we did an awful lot of advising, managing, prodding, cajoling, and where necessary, pressuring from behind the scenes. We were the bankers. We provided the bulk of the logistics support. We were the shadow management. Most of the new initiatives in pacification, most of the program design, the management techniques, were ours, but transferred by us to the Vietnamese. I think that pacification stands as a model of U.S.-Vietnamese rapport. And my point is, why the hell couldn't we do in the military field what we did in pacification!

By the way, I'll add again, perhaps the last big point, that

pacification is probably the most cost-effective major program we ran in Viet Nam because it was cheap as hell. It didn't involve a lot of airplanes and a lot of bombs. It didn't involve a lot of artillery. It didn't involve a lot of fancy equipment. The total dollar cost to the United States for the pacification program in its peak year was well under 1 billion dollars out of a 28 billion dollar war, if you will. And by the way, to get up to a billion dollars, I had to increase what we were doing about fourfold in the course of two years.

F: What did you do in the way of health and education?

K: Oh, a hell of a lot. These were both AID programs.

F: Were they effective, or were they temporary?

K: No. It all depends on what criteria you use.

[End of Tape 1 of 1, Side I, Interview II]

INTERVIEW II continued

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

K: In normal developmental terms, really big programs in both those areas, in terms of the need and the chaotic wartime context in Viet Nam, both programs probably had less pay-off than they should have. As we got into the war casualty business, of course, we had to pump in an awful lot of support for the Vietnamese provincial hospital system. This competed with the military hospital business. Then I had a bright idea, said, "Look, we can't afford two hospital systems. Let's combine the two and have a civil-military hospital system." I had the wit to mention that first to Westy who said that was a glorious idea. So then I called in the medical generals and beat them over the head and we got a combined system, which was an interesting thing.

AID did a lot--

F: Incidentally, let me intrude. Everything in a sense was a little sluggish that way, wasn't it? You really had to outmanuever all--

K: Always, always. Everything ran its own compartment. I think that far more than people realize, Viet Nam was a tragedy of bureaucratic inability to adapt to unconventional situations. Now that's a much larger subject--

F: It is just caught on its own history really.

K: Yes. The school program, also a big one--we built literally thousands of hamlet schools, trained literally thousands of young men and girls as teachers. The literacy rate in Viet Nam has gone up since 1963

at a great clip despite the fact they're in the middle of a war.

But as far as the impact on popular attitudes, as far as helping to win the war is concerned, or helping to achieve pacification --I am just writing a paper for the American Political Science Association on that now--it's moot whether it accomplished a lot. But then it didn't cost very much either.

F: I recall that you had a conversation with Ky in which you urged that he not preempt all fine minds and bodies for the military machine.

K: Oh God, yes! That was a constant preoccupation of mine.

F: This isn't a single instance then?

K: It is not. As a matter of fact, the high point in that came in a whole series of controversies I had with Thieu rather than Ky at the time when general mobilization was declared right after Tet in 1968. I was arguing vigorously that they should defer the key technical personnel in the rural areas. They were drafting the few agricultural engineers; they were drafting the few medical experts; they were drafting the few public works engineers.

F: Just depleting themselves, huh?

K: Right. And they had only a very thin layer of talent, and all these guys were being grabbed up and put in the army, sometimes as private soldiers. And so I was arguing--this is a classic argument, you know. Do you draft everybody in the name of equity, or do you have a whole series of special deferments in the name of efficiency? The Vietnameses at first had a very loose and inefficient draft system, full of corruption and evasion, et cetera. So after Tet 1968, they just decided they were going to draft everybody.

I had constant problems with that. I was the leader of the

American group that was trying to get them to be more sensible, because of course it was pacification programs that were being shafted when all these guys got drafted. All of our refugee specialists were going into the army, and I made the point, "Well, we'll just have to get some new guys and train them all over again. That'll be a two year loss of lead time. It's ridiculous."

The war minister in Nguyen Van Vinh was a particularly tough nut to crack, and I kept going over his head to Thieu. In fact, I complained about this so much in Vietnamese cabinet meetings that Thieu once sent me a personal emissary to say, "Mr. Komer, the President wishes that you would stop raising the question of draft deferments in official meetings with his cabinet. If you want to keep after him on this problem, and he understands what you're after, he would be very grateful if you would speak to him privately but not embarrass him in the presence of his staff." Well, I shut up instantly.

F: Under what circumstances were you invited to cabinet meetings?

K: That's another very interesting thing. In the immediate aftermath of Tet, Westy had the bright idea, which he immediately mentioned to me and I thought we ought to push right away--this was while Tet was still going on--for a massive urban recovery effort. After all, Tet had involved a complete shift in enemy strategy. They hit 34 cities and busted up about 20. We had about--the best guess --750,000 new urban refuges. We didn't know what to do about it. And Westy said, "You know, the GVN will never be able to handle this on its own. What I suggest is some kind of a joint organization, Bob, and you're the logical guy to head it."

Westy and I immediately went down and talked to Bunker. He thought it was a great idea, and then we immediately headed over to talk to Thieu. It's amazing how quick reaction.

F: Was Thieu pretty accessible?

K: In those days, yes. I never had any trouble getting to see Thieu. I had a very good rapport with him.

But, we went over, Thieu thought it was a great idea. I fleshed out the proposal. Westy had the initial idea, but he and Bunker said, "Okay, you're the guy we need--somebody with some drive, etc.--to set up a Joint Recovery Committee, with Vice President Ky as chairman; with myself in effect as vice chairman, senior U.S. representative. We would set up a full-time working staff right down in the presidential place with General Tang as the Vietnamese guy and my deputy, General Forsythe, as the chief American. We'd set up a staff, and we would handle the emergency recovery problems as a joint operation country-wide.

Well, Thieu thought that was a great idea; called in Ky, Ky agreed, and it went along.

Well, very quickly the meetings of the central recovery committee, or the Joint Recovery Council--I forget what it was called--became Vietnamese cabinet meetings because all the big issues got taken up there. And I sat there as a member, ex officio sort of, of the Vietnamese cabinet. I was the only U.S. official there except for my assistant, who I brought along with me.

F: So you heard them arguing--

K: I heard them arguing among themselves. Sometimes they'd do it in Vietnamese and I would have one of the ministers translate for me, or bring along my own translator. Or, more frequently after Prime

Minister Huong took over, a very sensitive man, he would speak in French, and I would speak in French. And the Ungua-French we used was French. I was the only senior U.S. official, for some strange reason who spoke French at the time I was there.

So I actually sat in on their meetings. And they would have these things. They'd come up with some knotty problem, "What are we going to do about this?" And I would speak up on their problems --these weren't just recovery problems--I'd speak up, say, "I hope you'll forgive me, but when we dealt with this kind of problem in the United States government, what we would do was set up the following kind of organization, or have the following kind of legislation submitted and passed" all sorts of issues.

F: Were they pretty receptive to your--?

K: Quite receptive. It was amazing to me how well we managed to relate to our Vietnamese colleagues, and how well I managed to get along with them. It surprises me sometimes, because I'm not always the most congenial of people.

But we were "in like Flynn" with the Vietnamese. We had a backstairs relationship with the President and Prime Minister. We had our staff down in their offices! We handled things with them under the table. I sent President Thieu and the Prime Minister, especially when Diem became Prime Minister--his English was very good and he was very close to us--I sent him copies of all of our reports. I sent him reports on whom I thought he ought to fire, who I thought he ought to hire. I would intervene always behind the scenes on who ought to be the next cabinet minister for refugees, or who ought to be Minister of Economy. We got a whole series of province

chiefs removed.

Thieu, in effect, used us as his eyes and ears. He knew he was getting dispassionate reports from the Americans. He and Diem didn't trust their own machine, not that their own machine wasn't loyal, but that their own machine was gilding the lily. So they used increasingly the American reports on what was going on in the country and who was good and who was bad, because they knew that we didn't have any family ties. We weren't tied in to corruption, etc.

F: You didn't have to protect someone.

K: We didn't have to protect someone. That was how, in this central recovery committee set of meetings, which went on for three or four months, that I was involved in all this draft stuff--and everything else too, I might add.

F: Was corruption a real factor?

K: Oh yes.

F: What could you do about it? This gets sensitive. You're involving people of great reputation in some instances.

K: I probably did as much about it as any American who ever served in Viet Nam. But a large part of it was just too deep and too pervasive to get after unless you wanted to really dismantle the machine.

F: Today, you'd have to just scrap it and start over.

K: That's right. There's a war going on. How much can you afford to destabilize everything when everything is destabilized so much already. In other words, a massive anticorruption campaign might have brought the government machine, already weak, to a screeching halt. As some people used to say, better a smart crook than an honest idiot! And I have to admit that, practically in war-time,

that's not too bad a rule.

Now in the cases of flagrant corruption that we got onto, we went after the guys. I got the first province chief sacked, Colonel Wong of Binh Dinh, in November by going to Ky on it at a dinner party and saying, "This guy's an absolute crook and unless you get rid of him, we're not going to go anywhere in the most populous province of Viet Nam."

But Joe, we're getting sort of off of the President. This was the phase where I was--

F: But this is part of the President's problem too.

K: Oh yes.

F: How did both CIA and military intelligence slip up on Tet?

K: I just felt that we could not believe that the enemy was going to make such a radical shift in his strategy and tactics--and he did.

F: We just didn't believe what we saw because it didn't seem reasonable.

K: There wasn't much--their security was very good. We had plenty of reports that the enemy was about to mount an offensive. There was no doubt that the enemy winter-spring offensive was coming around that time.

F: That was almost an annual prediction.

K: That is correct. You know, the kind of evidence we got--very little evidence that they were going to hit during the Tet holiday. They had accepted the proposals for truce, or made their own proposals for truce.

The two things that we failed on were a) that they were going to run it on the Tet holiday, which you know is sort of Christmas, New Year's, 4th of July, and everything else rolled into one--

F: Nobody works then.

K: Nobody works, which is why they did it. Incidentally, it had been done once before in Vietnamese history and with equal success. The second thing we didn't believe was that they would attack the cities. The Maoist concept of rural based insurgency is that you operate in the countryside. You gradually conquer the countryside and strangle the cities. Only at the end of the war do you knock off the remnants of the rotten imperialists in the cities. Nobody had in mind, and there was very little evidence that they were going to attack 34 cities and ignore the countryside, which they did. They just passed right through the countryside, left it there, and attacked the cities. Then, of course, we pulled in all our troops to defend the towns, thus abandoning a large chunk of the countryside, which led various critics to conclude prematurely that pacification was dead, we had lost the countryside--oh God! Ridiculous!!

F: What was the mood around headquarters at the time of the Tet offensive? Was it desperation? Consternation?

K: No. Consternation first, and second, great nervousness in the first week as to the extent of the damage. By the end of the first week we had kicked the enemy out of all but two towns--Hue and Phan Thiet. By the end of the second week the enemy had been kicked out of everything but Hue. He held on to the Citadel area until the 26th of February, of course--almost a month. But by the end of the first it was pretty clear that the enemy offensive had failed, that he had taken a massive shellacking. So the curve of confidence rose steadily from then on. But the first week everybody was nervous, partly because we couldn't find out what the hell was going on.

F: Did the CIA run a semi-independent operation in Viet Nam, or did Bunker run a pretty tight control on it?

K: Oh, Bunker controlled it. But you can run a semi-independent CIA operation and still have it under the tight policy control of the Ambassador, because operation means execution. But the CIA was focused mostly on political intelligence. And on running a set of pacification and quasi-pacification programs, they came under my control. By and large, of all the U.S. agencies, they were the most effective performers.

F: And you always knew under which shell the CIA nut was placed?

K: I did, but not much farther down--and Bunker did. Bunker knew about some things I didn't know about, although I was very close to his next CIA man. I was very close to the key people out there. I knew half of them.

Incidentally, I picked my successor from CIA, who I thought was the best man in the United States to succeed me.

F: Who was that?

K: Bill Colby, now Ambassador Colby, the head of CORDS, my old job. Bill was a very senior official in CIA. I got in great trouble as a result of the President on that one, because I came back in January, I think it was--I forget whether it was my trip back in late-November or the trip in late-January or early-February. It was one of those two, but I think it was maybe November.

Anyway, I reported to the President. I gave him a pretty upbeat view of the way I thought things were going better--and I still insist to this day they were and that that was the reason the enemy launched the Tet offensive: that he knew we were getting better and he'd better do something.

F: About like (inaudible).

K: Amen! I think the best proof that we were winning the war was that

the enemy thought so too, and launched his Ardennes offensive, which turned out to be very successful--brilliantly executed, by the way --a complete flop in Viet Nam and a complete success in the United States.

But I was back and I gave the President a report and he said, "Now, what do you need, what can I do for you?"

"Mr. President I'm in good shape. I think you've done very well by me. I got the money I need. I got the troops I need. I got the people I need. By and large, I'm fine."

He said, "Listen, it can't all be good. You've got to want something! What are you back here for?"

I said, "Well, there are two or three operational problems that I'm working on back there, but I don't want to bring you into them."

"Come on," he said. "Certainly I can help, I want to help."

So I said, "Well, I'm trying to get a guy to be my deputy out of CIA. I've just got my idea on the guy. I haven't talked to anybody about it. I haven't talked to Dick Helms about it, but I'm expecting I'm going to have a little difficulty."

The next thing I know he picks up the telephone and calls Rostow and says, "Walt, call Helms and tell him that Komer wants some guy" and then he turns to me, "what's his name?"

I said, "Bill Colby, Mr. President."

"Yes, some guy named Colby. And tell Helms that I said he'd better give him to him."

Son-of-a-gun! I knew what was going to happen! And the President had mousetrapped me. I wasn't ready to call him in. I

would not have been afraid to call him in to arbitrate if I hadn't been able to do business with Helms. But that's a dirty way for the Director of CIA to have to find out that Komer is after one of his best people--and Colby was very senior. For someone to call up and say you can't even argue about it, the President has already decided the issue--Helms blew a fuse and called me up and immediately read me the riot act.

The minute I got back to my office from the President's office, where I was hanging my hat across the street, "The Director has called." And so I called him and man, he let me have it!

Well, he finally gave him to me, because he couldn't not.

F: He had no alternative.

K: But I was really embarrassed by that. But, you know, you push the right button, even by mistake, and you sure as hell get Coca Cola!

Incidentally, I'm one of the few guys--one of the few lessons I remembered from the Harvard Business School, where I went right after the Second War, was a lecture by this guy, Doriot (?), there, who has been so successful. He said: "The trouble with all top managers is that they think they're God and are going to live forever. Nonw of these big wheel managers ever prepares systematically for the succession after they retire or conk off. They always assume they're going to live forever. So the smart manager prepares the executive succession."

Well, I'd caught a rare tropical disease in Viet Nam, and I was out running all over the countryside in all of these insecure areas. So I figured it might be smart, a) to have a successor picked,

because I wasn't going to run this program and build it up and then find that some numbskull bureaucrat took it over. Second, I wanted to train my own guy so that he would know what the hell was going on. And I picked the man I thought was best. By the way, he has done an A-1 job.

F: How did you happen to leave?

K: I'll tell you that in just a second.

But I picked Colby. Colby was out there from February to November when I left. Colby took over. Bunker, Abe at that time, all agreed that he was an ideal successor. He already knew the drill. He took over without a wave being created, and has carried on the program since. So I was very pleased, and at least I remembered one sensible management principle.

I left because the President invited me to go to Turkey.

F: Do you think he decided you'd had enough of Viet Nam?

K: Yes. Once again, a whole train of circumstance. The Assistant Secretary for the Middle East, Luke Battle had left in June or July to take a really lush job with the COMSAT Corporation. Because it was very late in the administration and no political appointee was going to be appointed, they brought home our ambassadar from Turkey, Pete Hart, to be the ad interim Assistant Secretary, another very good choice. And that left the spot in Turkey open. I had gone to Turkey with the President. He knew that I was a great Turcophile. He sent a message to Bunker, saying, "Look, I'd like to appoint Bob Komer to Turkey."

F: There wasn't any sort of buildup on your part that you were going? This was a relative surprise?

K: No. There had been no buildup on my part of going. My relations with Abe were not as close as with Westy. It was easy to see that I was heading into harder times as Abe began to control the thing more. I expressed my interest in Turkey, but it was a complete surprise when the President had Rostow call Bunker and say he wanted to do this. I wasn't even there. Bunker called me in and said, "You know, you ought to do this."

I said, "Gee, I sort of hate to leave, but that's a great thing to do. However, it's a little late. How am I going to get confirmed!"

He said, "Oh, don't worry about that! Go off and run your own show. You've been out here working for me, working for Westy, working for Abrams--what the hell, go off and be a big wheel on your own right." So I went off.

F: This is getting ahead of the story--

K: Do you know what happened?

F: No.

K: There the President did do me dirty, entirely inadvertently. I presume my nomination would have gone up in the last days before the election. But who was up there ahead of me! Abe Fortas! You remember the accusation was "cronyism." A President, who had already declared he wasn't going to run again putting in his own guy for Chief Justice, etc., etc., etc. And bingo! When the President withdrew the Fortas appointment, of course he said, "I'm not going to send up any other things before the election. That's sort of silly." So my nomination never went up. That's why I never got confirmed before the election. Of course, after the election it was in the lap of Mr. Nixon.

F: There was some outcry from Ankara university students--

K: That wasn't the university students. That was a little group of extreme leftists, who said, "Komer, 'the butcher of Viet Nam.' Komer, 'the pacifier,' is coming to pacify the Turks, and we don't think we need to be pacified like the Vietnamese. Komer is a spy." But that was kid stuff.

Let me say that the fact that I was attacked by the extremists --and they were relatively few in number--made me exceedingly popular with the great bulk of the Turks because it violated the Turkish canon of hospitality. And sort of the fact that I was under attack by the extreme made me much more credible, made me much more of a personality to the great center, which was interesting.

What do you have as to why I left?

F: I don't have anything. Just the fact that you did leave.

K: I thought maybe the President told you something he didn't tell me.

F: No. Your Turkish day was relatively serene, I presume.

K: Not serene, it was very active.

F: How so?

K: Well, there was a hell of a lot of policy business to be done. I had felt for a long time that our policy toward Turkey ought to be more adroit and supple; that we ought to disengage from some of the more unproductive aspects of the American presence in order to protect the more productive ones; and that our relationship had been deteriorating really since the Cyprus crisis in '64.

F: The Turks didn't hold Cyprus against you?

K: No, they didn't. Thank God! The only one I ever discussed it with was Inonu because I knew damned well that old Inonu would remember

I had been right there in the White House at those meetings with Lyndon Johnson, and he sure did. And he said, "I've met you before."

I said, "Well, Mr. Prime Minister, that was when then-Vice President Johnson came here in August of '62."

He said, "No, no, no. I met you later than that." There I had to admit it. Then he spent the whole session--Inonu was very nice to me all the time he was the leader of the opposition, but of course the George Washington--the James Madison of his country--Ataturk--

But Inonu spent a whole two hours rehashing the Cyprus crisis, and it was exceedingly uncomfortable. Boy, he had me on the hot seat. But he was blaming others, not me. Blaming the President, among others.

F: What did you get done in the time you were there?

K: I got the withdrawal of U.S. troops started--and dependents. I got the great bulk of the renegotiation of our security agreements with the Turks finished, and it was a source of regret to me that I did the dirty work to get the whole major exercise negotiated. It was really an important and difficult negotiation. I got them practically signed, sealed, and delivered and then left, and my successor had the pleasure of on his arrival signing this major new thing--

F: All the ceremony.

K: No, it was supposed to symbolize the change in our relationship to one of more equal partnership, etc., etc. And I had laid on the publicity campaign personally and worked it out with the foreign minister and everything else. But I'll give myself credit for this. I did recommend that it be held over for my successor. Why the hell should the guy who was leaving get the credit! The new guy who's

coming is the one who needs it.

F: He needs all the good will he can get.

K: Certainly. But that hurt a bit.

F: There was never any likelihood that Nixon would hold you over?

K: I've never gotten to the bottom of that, Joe. I am assured by my good friends in State--guys like Bill Macomber, who is now the Under Secretary for Administration; Bill Bundy--that they fought for me; that they pointed out to the new crew that I was a professional, that it was incidental that I was a Democrat.

Incidentally, Lyndon Johnson never asked me my politics or discussed politics with me during the entire time I served him. I mean, for all he knew--

F: He just took you and used your services.

K: Precisely. I happened to be a Democrat. I happened to be a Johnson Democrat. My wife happened to have been rather active in Virginia Democratic politics of a liberal variety and in the Women's National Democratic Club. But not me! I mean, Hubert knew her as a politician, but certainly not me. I don't think anybody, because I wasn't in that business. Nor did I ever cross that line.

But I am told by high sources who shall remain nameless that the Nixon people did the same thing that the Kennedy-Johnson people did in '61. They just went down the list of Johnson political appointees and crossed them all off, and I was on the list. You know, new people coming in don't know the names and numbers of the players. I remember the same thing happening with Kennedy in '61 when I tried to save three ambassadors, and said, "A, those are very good men. B, those are places where a politico will never go. So

you're going to kick out those three guys, and you're going to have to send three more foreign service types there, and they'll just have to learn the job all over again." I used to fight hard on that. So I think I was scratched simply for political reasons because I was known far and wide as a Johnson man. And nobody there was knowledgeable enough to remember that Komer was a professional; he was in the agency; then he was in the NSC; then he was in the White House as a professional.

F: I want to go back--you're very patient--

K: You're lucky. This is largely circumstance, again! My wife has her painting class, so she doesn't want me home so early.

F: We never followed through on that visit of Indira Gandhi, and you are, after all, our man from India.

K: That's right. As Johnson said, "that damned Indian. Komer, why are you and Mac Bundy and the other Indians always giving me such a hard time on Pakistan!"

F: I've got two things here. One is the relationship of one head of state with another, and of course the problems of the wheat shipments and the lack of proper understanding of the delay in shipments, and something of the problem with Chester Bowles. Then we also had the deterioration of the relationships that had been very warm with Ayub Khan in Pakistan. So it's your ball now.

K: That's a big collection of problems on which my memory at this late date doesn't serve me too well.

I got the impression that the President and Indira didn't strike it off too warmly.

F: What kind of woman is she?

K: In my judgment she's a bit of a cold fish, a bit womanish, coquettish. She seems to have turned into a very skilled politician.

F: I've noticed she has outflanked a few people.

K: Yes. She was showing no signs of that back when she took over after Shastri's death. I think the President found her a bit evasive, as the President no doubt has found most Indians he has dealt with over this period. I did, too. And there wasn't a great deal of business transacted in that session. This was in the aftermath, of course, of the Chinese thing in '62, and the Indians wanted more aid. That was always a big issue with the Indians. The President was playing it rather cautiously. She did ask for a lot of wheat.

As I recall, the great Indian famine was not yet over by that time. They were worried about another crop year. These things tend to happen in cycles, and when you get one bad one you frequently get two or three.

F: Seven lean and seven fat.

K: Yes. But I'd have to refer to my notes, Joe, really to--that's why I wanted to have Montague lock the thing up, and I don't have my combination. This shouldn't be classified anyway. That's just damned hell Saunders. Everybody overclassifies everything.

Now, on Ayub, I do remember that, because the President and I always used to have sort of a standing argument. As a matter of fact when I first met him--I was told to go on this Middle East trip with him. I had only met him one day before over in that glorious big office he had in the Senate for about an hour, sitting in a meeting where he was torturing my friends from the State Department who were trying to brief him on the trip.

Well he immediately and shrewdly set up an adversary proceeding, somehow instinctively picked on the right questions at that meeting with the State guys. Poor Phil Talbot was all--you know that great big long table there in his office? One of the biggest conference--it looks like Mussolini's office in the Palazzo Venezia, and about as ornate. 'Way down on one end of the long table were cowering two or three State guys, with Phil Talbot, the Assistant Secretary. Up at this end, all alone, is Lyndon Johnson. So I was ushered in and presented to him as the White House expert on the Middle East who Kennedy had said he would give to Johnson. Johnson had asked for Mac Bundy. He said: "I'm not going to go on one of these damned trips if I'm at the mercy of that cookie-pushing State Department. I want <u>your</u> foreign affairs guy to go with me and clue me, because the advice I get from them is terrible."

So Kennedy said, "You don't want Bundy. Bundy doesn't know anything about the Middle East. That's handled by Bob Komer, who is our Middle East guy, and I deal directly with him. I'll give you Bob Komer, but no point in giving you Bundy."

Well, LBJ probably thought he was being snookered--who the hell is Komer! But he said okay.

So anyway at this meeting I was ushered in by, I guess, Juanita Roberts or somebody, and I shook hands with him and he waved me to a chair right by him. Well, I'm up here at this end of the table with him, and 'way down there are those guys.

He sort of unerringly waited for the psychological moment. He asked some question about Cyprus, I think it was, and they gave him the standard State position that they knew damned well I'd

disagree with vigorously. What did he do! He turns to me and says, "Now, Mr. Komer, what do you think about that?"

I said, "As my friends down there at the other end of the table know, Mr. President, I don't agree with them on this thing. I think they're full of baloney. I think we're going to hell in a hack in Cyprus, and we ought to do something."

Well, he just sat back and beamed. You know, he had managed to catch them out and create a controversy! So he was very nice to me after that at this meeting and kept asking me questions, and I was very uncomfortable.

But we get on Air Force One. We take off from Andrews. And the first thing, as soon as the wheels are up and we're reached altitude somebody comes back and says--I'd never met any of LBJ's people either--some guy comes back and says: "The Vice President would like to see you up in the forward cabin."

I go up there. He says, "Komer sit down."

I sit down. He says, "Like a drink?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, there's one thing I've never been able to understand. "Why is it that Jack Kennedy"--I forget what he called him, but it was a familiar--"and you India lovers in the State Department are so Goddamned ornery to my friend Ayub?"

Oh boy, he let me have it between the eyes!

Well, he couldn't have picked a worse subject, because I had been dedicated to the proposition that the Paks had taken us for a ride and that we were putting our money on the wrong horse in the subcontinent. There are only a hundred million Paks, and there

are 500,000,000 Indians. And the big boys in the subcontinent, whom we can depend on against China, are the Indians, not the Paks, as has been amply proven by recent history. This was something on which my nerves were raw because I had been fighting this fight with the Pentagon, with the State Department, our embassy in Pakistan, and everybody else.

So I thought, "Boy I'd better fish or cut bait. This guy's really going to the jugular." I think the next thing he said was, "I've always liked the Pakistanis. That fellow Ayub is a real human being, and that little guy Shastri and Nehru, and who's that other fuzzy haired bird?"

I said, "Krishna Menon?"

"Yeah," he said, "that Communist!"

Well, I let him have it. I said, "Mr. President, I like the Paks better than the Indians myself. I have always gotten along much more famously with the Pakistanis than with the Indians. They're more our kind of guys. They're Muslims not Hindus. They're much less Oriental on the surface, etc., etc. But, let me tell you! We call them on the basis of our national interest. And on the basis of our national interest, great big old India is a much better bet than little bitty old Pakistan. And the Paks are taking us to the cleaners! We've been giving them military and economic aid for ten years to build them up against Russia and China, and they are exclusively interested in taking this stuff and using it against India."

And he said, "Well, but don't they have a case? Didn't the Indians sort of shaft them over Kashmir?"

I said, "Who shafted whom over Kashmir has been debated for twenty years, and will probably be debated for the next twenty. But I don't think it's in the U.S. national interest to get in the middle of that, because it's like the Arab-Israel thing, it ain't going to be solved in a long, long time, maybe not in our lifetime."

Then I went on and gave him in detail the history of how Ayub had been taking us to the showers by being buddy-buddy with us. Ayub conned us out of about 3 billion bucks worth of stuff, and he has never done a Goddamned thing for us except give us some real estate for one very important intelligence installation, which he then proceeded to kick us out of later. I never would have let him get away with that. I'd have told him, "You kick us out of that, and the bill next year for U.S. aid is this, brother--zero!" And he would have rethought the problem.

Anyway, we had about a half-hour, and I did all the talking. The President sat there and he had one or two light scotches, and he just let me run on. And at the end of it he said, "Well, Bob" --and I remember this because it was the first time he had called me Bob--



"you've got a pretty argument there, I've got to admit." And then he got up and I left.

The trip just was a whole series of fascinating episodes. He and I got along famously, I don't know whether I told you last time, on the Turkish thing--

F: Yes.

K: And that was the beginning of my relationship with LBJ. It started on the Pak-Indian thing.

F: Really what happened with Pakistan was just a surfacing of what had been latent all the time.

K: Latent all the time. It was a relationship based on a misunderstanding, deliberate on the Pakistani part, because they were conning us.

F: They did city-slick us.

K: Credulous they city-slicked us. And credulous on our part. And then the unfolding of events changed things around.

I might add that although the President was always very nice to Ayub, although he used to repeat frequently his views about the Paks and how we were mistreating the Paks on policy and on decisions, he was down the line on what he thought was sensible. And since down the line on what he thought was sensible generally was the same side I was on,I want to tell you that regardless of his feelings in the matter his decisions were very cool, calm, and collected. And he did pursue a pro-Indian policy. In fact he finally hung Ayub on several aid affairs.

F: Did you ever have any responsibility for Central or South African Affairs?

K: Yes. I was the White House African, I'm sorry to say, during most of this period, too. At Christmas 1961, I think it was--or was it Christmas '62, it's funny how you forget these things! You know, any facts that I could pull out of the file I never bothered to remember. But at any rate, Christmas '61 or '62 I went on four days vacation. I came back and discovered my desk was littered with action papers on Pakistan from Bundy. I called up and said, "What the hell! Somebody's misrouting all this stuff to me. What are you sending it to me for?"

He said, "You'd better come over. I want to talk to you."

And he said, "Bob, you're now the White House African instead of being the White House Middle Easterner." The African guy had gotten himself a job as political consul in London and had sneaked out, and I was just given these as extra duties. So I was the Africa guy, too.

F: Did that carry over at all into the Johnson Administration?

K: Yes, right on through. We had a very able young black named Rick Aldridge (?) or something like that. Gee, Rick was good, whom I stole from the State Department as my assistant on these matters. Yes, I handled that right on through to Viet Nam, including all the God-awful visits by all those minor league potentates to the White House!

Ulric Haynes

F: I wondered about that. I looked over a list one time of all the heads of state that Johnson had received, and wondered how many of them he could place on the map; and, two, if he met them on the streets the next day if he'd recognize them. It must have been at times a faceless group.

K: I am sure he would recognize them when he met them on the street the next day because he has got a good feel for that, and of course he had private discussions with them, etc.

F: You briefed him on each one, I assume.

K: My technique was not to overbrief him. This was--one of the main jobs of the White House Staff, is not to get things to the President but to keep things from the President.

F: But on somebody coming in from Chad--

K: Oh, God, the State Department would send over two volumes of briefing

books! Now, you said Lyndon Johnson is not going to read any more than two paragraphs. He read plenty more than two paragraphs when he had to, but this was a case when he didn't have to. We would take those two big volumes signed by Dean Rusk, and would reduce them to two pages with all the main points right there loud and clear, my philosophy being if he got the main points loud and clear and made those, that would make the visit infinitely more valuable than whether he knew where Chad was on the map. And who cared! So this was one of our main things, was to keep him from being overburdened by these damned State visits--the same thing we did for Kennedy.

F: I judge he never shortchanged these boys, though.

K: No. I was amazed. He gave them all the treatment. He wined them and he dined them, which was what most of them were over for--because they wanted to press his flesh, not he theirs. And he was remarkably forthcoming about it all, much more so than I would have thought he would be.

F: Do you think he enjoyed it?

K: I don't think he got much of a kick out of it--three-quarters of them. Some of them he liked. You know, LBJ, in my view, had a very strange likes and dislikes. And here we get back to India.

One of the guys he liked was that slippery Indian Brahman, B.K. Nehru, Indira Gandhi's cousin, and the Indian ambassador--as effete a charmer as you have ever seen. And B.K. Nehru--the President really liked him. He was calling him in during the food famine in private visits, having him in at night, keeping him for dinner, etc. You know, this is once every couple of weeks, and then only in the crisis period. But he liked B.K. Nehru.

Simultaneously, he would call me up--"Goddamn it! Who leaked all this stuff about my holding up food in India! How in the hell did it get in the papers that I am playing dominoes with the starving millions of the Punjab!"

And I would say invariably, "Mr. President, I can't give you whole evidence, but I will just tell you where it's coming from. It's coming from your friend"--and I always accented "your friend"--"B.K. Nehru. That guy holds press conferences and backgrounders every time. If you tell him something tonight, he's going to tell it with his slant to the New York Times tomorrow." That always, by the way, shut LBJ up. He couldn't keep the old fire in his voice after I told him.

But I can remember, I think, four or five occasions in which he was giving me hell. Not me, you know, but he wanted to talk to somebody, and I was the guy. "What the hell! Who's leaking!"

I call it "the President's disease"--the adversary relationship the Presidents developed with the media. Kennedy was just as violent on it as LBJ, and we all know about Ike and Harry Truman.

But he liked B.K. Nehru. I always thought B.K. was sort of a shit.

F: Did he hold up food shipments to India for political purposes?

K: No.

F: How did he get such bad press on this?

K: For reasons of state. He got such a bad press largely because of B.K. Nehru, who was constantly feeding it out that he was holding it up. He didn't mind it being held up. He minded having the finger pointed at Lyndon Johnson. And that's what B.K. was doing, because B.K.'s job was to get LBJ to sign on the dotted line. And my job was

to handle the President's desire to fight a delaying action.

Now, you say politics--not politics in the conventional American sense. The President was playing foreign policy politics. First, he wanted to be damned sure that there was a famine, and that we had proved our case. Second, he glommed on to a proposal that I think I made to him--I've got it in the notes there--that we were just going to have one Indian food crisis after another unless the Indians got serious and did something about their agricultural production.

India had, from '47 on, in a series of five-year plans, like most underdeveloped countries, stressed industry at the expense of the agricultural sector. All the new investment, all the U.S. aid went into industry.

Meanwhile, the Indians were counting on Uncle Sugar with PL-480 to save them from the consequences of their folly. Now, in the days when we had these great surpluses, [there was] no problem! But as the President was well aware--because he had forgotten more about agriculture than I know--these great surpluses were declining. We were getting to the point where we were having to pay the U.S. taxpayers' dollar to buy the damned wheat--the subsidies, you know, to keep up the production were going out the window.

Now, the President decided that we'd better use these wheat shipments--we had them for once in a sellers' market; they needed it--that we should hold this off and use it as a lever to get them to promote a green revolution. Orville Freeman had a great deal to do with selling him on this idea, too. So he sued the food shipments for reasons of state to force India to shift its priorities and put

a really big investment into agricultural production, and especially fertilizer production, which was critical. And let me tell you, it worked! We did force the Indians to shift their priorities.

F: Where do you put the pressure in a case like this? Does Chester Bowles do it over in India, or--?

K: Chester was screaming bloody murder that we were--we had to tell Chester what the drill was, but we didn't tell him the full picture, let me tell you, because Chet Bowles is perfectly capable of talking to Indira and letting it slip. And once they know our strategy, we're up the crick. They suspected it plenty. So he was using these stalls as a deliberate means of forcing the Indians to change their development policy. And by and large it succeeded, and as you know, India is pretty close to, if it hasn't achieved, self-sufficiency in grain.

Now long after this '65 thing--I think it was just before I left in '66--I backgrounded Charlie Bartlett on this and Teddy Weintal, and told them the story because Charlie Bartlett had written some nasty columns about President Johnson playing games with starving Indians, etc. I briefed Charlie on this. My case was sufficiently convincing that he wrote a couple of articles, saying what a great thing Johnson had done.

I've given it only in the barest outline. I've grossly oversimplified, but this was a very artful and deliberate act. He was stalling for pretty smart reasons. And he also doled it out, you know, a million tons now and a million-point-two, and then a million-point-four. And he played it back and forth. And I tell you, watching a master politician at work, playing this game, was a

real education to me.

He was educational on another score as well. The bureaucrats kept providing me with information about how long it would take to get the food there, and what the shipping situation was. And of course, they blew the whistle about six months before anything needed to be done. The first time I went in to see the President he said, "Now, Bob, what that fellow Orville Freeman, that Minnesota Lawyer, and those guys in State are telling you is that there may be a famine in the next six months. Well, let's wait a little longer and see. I'm not going to do anything about it now. We've got plenty of time."

Then when it got a little closer I went in to him with a second one, and he started out with me on the shipping situation. He said, "Now, you've got down here, Bob, that Orville Freeman says it will take three months to ship that there wheat from Galveston to Bombay and then distribute it in India. You know, I don't know anything about shipping, but it doesn't sound to me as though it ought to take three months to ship wheat from Galveston to India and distribute it."

Well, I didn't know anything about shipping. I was just using the dope that I had been given. So I said, "Okay, Mr. President, I'll go back and check it out."

Son-of-a-gun! I go back and check it out, and I found the bureaucrats had put in six weeks lead time so that they could get bids up to Cargill and Company and everybody else. And they'd put in a special "Jesus" factor on shipping so they could buy the cheapest tramp shippers that they might buy somewhere over in the

Red Sea. Then they'd sail all the way over to Galveston by way of Singapore!

So I had to go back to the President and say, "Well, Mr. President, we've recalculated this. And instead of taking three months for the shipping, it may only take nine weeks." He wasn't having any.

So he said, "You go back and find out what the absolute minimum is, if we have to really cut it fine."

By God, I went back the second time. I was embarrassed, you know, by this time to go back to the experts. And I found out, son-of-gun, that we could cut that down to about six weeks from portal to portal.

When I finally got this thing cleared out, it was perfectly clear that LBJ in asking these pointed questions without really knowing the facts--he didn't know any more about shipping between Galveston and Bombay than I did but he just had an instinct for the weak points in the case. We went through this game, and by gum, when we were through, he was right!

I learned that you damned well better ask questions of the bureacracy and really force them to the wall. He was using these turndowns to get them to really shake out this problem and get down to the nub, and he was right. I was really embarrassed by it.

One time, I got a little exercised about it and said: "You know, Mr. President, we're really playing a little close to the line with human life."

He said, "Bob, has anybody died in India from starvation yet?"

I said, "No, we haven't had any reports that there have been any actual starvation."

He said, "Well, let me tell you. The minute that you have a report that any Indian is dying from starvation from the lack of U.S. relief you let me know immediately. You call me any hour of the day and night."

Well, son-of-a-gun, let me tell you I never called him, because there was never a single case where the stuff didn't get there on time. They said the grain handling facilities in the Port of Bombay were so lousy it would take two weeks to unload every ship, and, Christ, the Indians brought in three ships and unloaded them in two days. Oh, hell!

It was a great political education, and I had to handle this all with him directly because he was really involved in this thing. He put in a stop order that everything had to be okayed by him. He was going to play it personally. And he did.

As I say, the only mistake I think he made was that he thought he could con B.K. Nehru, and instead B.K. Nehru was conning him.

F: Did you work on the Rhodesian crisis?

K: The early phases, yes.

F: Did this concern the President, or did he look on it as just one more State Department irritation? I mean, the thing is breaking out in a hundred different countries, and he's equally concerned.

K: I had no sense that he got too exercised about Rhodesia.

F: How about apartheid as a policy?

K: He was down the line for the State Department policy, that we could not do business with the Rhodesians, that we'd better worry about our constituency in black Africa, that it was a lot more important than our constituency in Rhodesia. There I had no occasion to

fault his policy. I think frequently he wasn't very taken with the arguments that the black Africans were making, or most of them, and that the Indians and everybody else were making. But as on India-Pakistan, he did not let his personal--I wouldn't call them prejudices--he did not let his personal--well, I wouldn't even call them predilections --his personal feelings, sense, whatever it might be, get in the way of politics. I must say on no significant occasion that I can recall did I ever have reason to feel that the President was letting personal feelings, views, prejudices, interfere with sound foreign policy.

F: You really wouldn't go along with the charge that he was an innocent in foreign affairs?

K: Oh hell! I most certainly would not. Foreign affairs is not all that different. As far as expertise was concerned, he had access to all the expertise he needed. He had expertise coming out of the gazoo. Let me tell you, as a guy who jousted with most of the experts, I'm not very impressed with foreign policy experts in general. A guy with good, sound, political instinct and a feel for the jugular--and nobody ever said that Lyndon Johnson didn't have that--and who's a good horse trader--and nobody ever said he wasn't that--is in business.

Now, the unfortunate thing for these comparisons is that John F. Kennedy was a specialist in foreign affairs. That was one of his major interests.

F: He also had flair.

K: Right. And, second, Dwight Eisenhower had a long international career in the military--in the Philippines, in Europe, World War II,

etc., etc. But compared to most U.S. Presidents, I would say that Lyndon Johnson, from his experience in the Congress, had more foreign affairs background and experience that most of them.

Now, President Johnson was not above acting a little bit the innocent abroad. That was one of his dodges. "What do I know about this," you know! "What are you coming to me with all these fine spun sea lawyer arguments for! I'm just a country boy," sort of thing! He would occasionally pull that one. My own hunch, even then, because I had gotten to know him by that time--he used to do that sometimes on the Middle East trip--was that that was just a cover for the fact that he didn't feel like making up his mind.

It seemed to me one consistent principle of Johnson's conduct of affairs, as I saw it, was he did not want to make decisions before they had to be made. Now the bureaucracy is always pressing the President to make decisions as far ahead as possible in directions they want and so are all the foreign countries. If the Indians see a famine coming down the pike, maybe, a year from then, they're going to start putting pressure on us a year ahead. And I must say I found the President a very artful dodger on decisions that in his judgment didn't need to be made. I cannot offhand recall any occasions when I thought that he made a mistake on that. There probably are some when my sense of timing would have been different than his. But I don't think we ran into any disasters--well, maybe one disaster, on Viet Nam. A lot of decisions should have been made more forehandedly on Viet Nam than they were. I think he would agree in retrospect. I don't know whether he'll ever be able to say so. But, at the other end, on Cyprus, when a decision had to be made in an emergency in a

hurry, he made them. There wasn't any hesitation on his part in that crisis, and I suspect there wasn't much hesitation in the Six Day War.

F: Thank you, Mr. Komer.

[End of Tape 1 of 1, Side 2 and Interview II]

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