INTERVIEWEE: JOHN A. McCONE

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

August 19, 1970

F: This is an interview with Mr. John A. McCone in his office in Los Angeles, California, on August 19, 1970. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Mr. McCone, you have served both the Republicans and the Democrats quite well and faithfully--everyone from Truman forward as President. I wonder how you first came into contact with Lyndon Johnson.

M: My first contact with Lyndon Johnson was in 1950 or 1951 when I was Under Secretary of the Air Force during the Truman Administration. At that time, I don't recall exactly the position that Senator Johnson--

F: I'll refresh you on that. He was a new Senator; he had been elected in November '48. Then, after '50 when Ernest McFarland was defeated, he was named Minority Leader to his great surprise. But he was quite junior.

M: What date was he Minority Leader?

F: He became Minority Leader with the Congress of '51.

M: It seems to me that he was on the Armed Services Committee--

F: Yes, he was.

M: --and I had a good deal of contact with them because, if you'll recall, the Korean war broke out on the 24th of June, 1950. We had a very substantial build-up of the military establishment, and I, as Under Secretary of the Air Force, had primary responsibility for procurement. This involved the placing of a vast number of very large orders, and the reactivation of World War II plants that had been shut down--and various actions. Of course, we were in very close consultation with the Senate

Armed Services Committee at that time. I think that Senator Johnson at that time was the chairman of the Preparedness Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee.

F: That's right.

M: And therefore he was the focal point of our contact. I had known him before--in the period of 1947 and '48--when I was a member, first, of the President's Air Policy Commission, and then served as a special assistant to Secretary Forrestal before the National Defense Act of 1947 provided for a Deputy Secretary of Defense. I occupied that post as Secretary Forrestal's special assistant or deputy without what you might call legislative authorization. I knew Johnson during that period, but only socially. I had very little contact with him.

F: Did you have any idea in those early days that he was going to be more than just another Congressman?

M: Well, I didn't know. Any time you're in contact with President Johnson, you're impressed with his personality and his vision and his persuasiveness. I hadn't made any predictions as to where he was going. Of course, his election to the Senate was something less than a landslide, although we always in Washington referred to it as his landslide victory. I think he won by eighty-eight votes, something such as that. So during that period of '50 and '51 I had very close relationship with him officially.

I left the government and returned to private life, but I was frequently in touch with Senator Johnson socially when I would go to Washington. I'd go see him quite often.

Then of course in '57 I returned as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. At that time he was the Senate Majority Leader. While my contacts were with the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy--of which Senator

Anderson was the chairman first, and then followed by Congressman [Chet] Holifield--nevertheless on legislation of importance to the Atomic Energy Commission, I would frequently call on Senator Johnson to explain the position of the Commission. I always found him intently interested in the mission of the Atomic Energy Commission, and he was a great help in some of our problems, although at that time, and through the years that I was chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, our relationship with the Joint Committee was such that it wasn't necessary to go very far outside of the Joint Committee itself on matters of importance to the Commission because both the Joint Committee and the Commission at that time were seeing eye-to-eye on problems.

F: Along that line did you have much difficulty settling the Commission down after Lewis Strauss' departure? I know that Mr. Strauss created furors where he went.

M: Well, there were differences between Mr. Strauss as chairman of the Commission and one or two of the commissioners themselves. And there were deep differences between Mr. Strauss and several members of the Joint Committee, most particularly Senator Anderson and Congressman Holifield. Those were resolved shortly after I took office, and for the years that I was chairman of the Commission we had a very satisfactory relationship. Out of it came my warm and lasting personal friendship between myself and Senator Anderson, Holifield, Senator Jackson, and John Pastore and Wallace Bennett, and all of them. We had a very, very close working relationship.

F: You hadn't gone back to Washington when Sputnik was launched, but you immediately went to Washington to advise President Eisenhower that we should be aggressive about meeting the challenge of Sputnik rather than

trying to ignore it.

M: Yes, my position started early on. When I was Under Secretary of the Air Force, I urged a massive program of development of missiles. I'd almost forgotten the communications I had with President Truman until I was reminded of them in Arthur Krock's book. He had written a column or two about my position in 1951 and '52.

This again came to the surface right after Sputnik. Then again I urged a greater effort and a greater concentration of authority in this field of missiles that relates so intimately to the whole space program. I did talk to President Eisenhower on two occasions prior to the time I became chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission on this matter. I know that he took some actions which subsequently resulted in the creation of NASA, on the one hand, and a concentration of authority in Department of Defense, on the other.

F: You had no personal relationship yourself with Senator Johnson at this time. You know, he took over the chairmanship of the Space Committee.

M: I don't remember whether I did or not. It's a good many years ago. We're talking now about things that happened a long time ago.

F: You are politically a Republican, basically?

M: That's correct.

F: So you took no part in the Democratic filling and hauling coming down to 1960 here in California?

M: No, no part whatsoever.

F: You were, though, quite willing to stay on as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission regardless of who won the election?

M: In 1960?

F: Yes.

M: No, I wasn't--not because of political reasons. If you'll recall, in the last year of President Eisenhower's Administration we were involved in a test moratorium. It was not a test ban agreement. It was a moratorium on testing during which time an attempt would be made to negotiate a test ban agreement. The Atomic Energy Commission--and I particularly--saw some very serious dangers in that moratorium because the means of detection of violations of such a moratorium did not exist. We therefore felt that we, as an open society, would religiously abide by the moratorium understanding. We had no way of being assured that the Soviets would do the same. It was for that reason that I was compelled, and my fellow commissioners without exception were compelled, to warn the President and others in the White House as well as the State Department and the Defense Department that if we stood still and the Soviets secretly took advantage, they could make some important advances which would prove to our ultimate disadvantage. Now my position was public, was well known.

When President Kennedy sent an emissary to me to ask that I remain on as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, I could immediately see that having me as the chairman would in some way limit the freedom of action upon his part. I didn't know what his policies were going to be, but mine were public, and had been stated and restated and discussed at press conferences and so forth. Therefore, I felt that if someone other than I could assume the chairmanship of the Commission it would be probably in President Kennedy's best interest for the reason I mentioned. I therefore took it upon myself to survey the field, and I recommended three men to the President rather than to refuse myself, stating that any one of the three could in my opinion fill the job admirably. I'm happy

to say that one of them was Dr. [Glenn T.] Seaborg, whom he chose, and he has been chairman ever since.

F: This marked a departure in that this was the first time we ever had a career scientist as head of AEC, right?

M: Yes, he was a career scientist, but he was an administrator. He was chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, so he was a man of far broader experience from an administrative standpoint than you find in most career scientists whose principal interest is in their laboratory.

F: Now in the first week of January in the new Administration in 1961, you resigned as chairman. I presume you planned to return to civilian life and stay there?

M: I left on January 20 with the Eisenhower Administration, and returned to private life and intended to stay.

F: How did you happen to come back in then as Director of the CIA in September?

M: Well, the story there was this. Between the time I left in January and the time I went back, several requests were made by members of the Joint Committee that I sit down with the President and discuss the test moratorium which was continuing, because the Joint Committee shared my views and the Commission's views--the alarm and the concern. I refused to do that for the reason that I said that President Kennedy was fairly familiar with my views, and a meeting which would be known to the press could not possibly bring any constructive result. He couldn't accept my views, and I wasn't ready to change my views. Therefore, about all that would come of such a meeting would be just to report to the press that we had a nice meeting but disagreed on a very important subject. So I felt, and I learned from others who discussed a meeting with him that he

felt the same way and for exactly the same reason.

However, in the first few days of September 1961 the Soviets broke the moratorium by exploding a hydrogen bomb or two. Then he sent for me. He asked me to prepare a brief report on the consequences of the testing, indicating that he had a divergence of opinion between the AEC, on the one hand, and the State Department on the other as to the course of action that the United States should take. I spent about two weeks preparing such a report. When I called on him to submit it, it was then that he approached me and asked me to become Director of Central Intelligence.

F: You had at this time a discredited agency, in one sense, with the Bay of Pigs problem?

M: Yes. It had come under very serious public criticism--more so I think than it deserved, although I think it was entitled to its full share of criticism. I think President Kennedy expressed the situation very accurately when he said, "There is room in this matter for criticism for everybody. The CIA must not be asked to accept all of the criticism." This was a very broad position for the President to take. He took it.

The organization, CIA, was suffering from the criticism. Morale was pretty well shattered. It was somewhat similar to the morale in the AEC when I took over after the years of difficulty with the Joint Committee because of the problems between Lewis Strauss and the members of the committee I've mentioned. So my first problem was to try and rebuild a confidence. It wasn't very hard to do because that's such an extremely competent organization.

F: Being Director of the CIA also meant that you were Director of the U.S. Intelligence Board.

M: Yes. President Kennedy's letter to me asked me to assume the directorship

of the Central Intelligency Agency and a responsibility over the entire intelligence community. I sat as chairman of the United States Intelligence Board. My first act was to put my deputy, as the representative of the Central Intelligence Agency on the Intelligence Board, so I could sit and so far as possible remove myself from the agency and represent the President as chairman of the board, which is the way it should be. There are some people that claim that it's impossible for a person to wear two hats like that. Of course, you know the argument about the Joint Chiefs, whether they can act as Chief of Staff of their respective Services, and then objectively view the totality of the Defense establishment as a member of the Joint Chiefs. But I did my best to wear the two hats, and the records will show that on any number of occasions I reversed the position of the representative of the Central Intelligence Agency on the United States Intelligence Board.

F: At the time of your nomination to the directorship there was some criticism in the liberal press that you would not recognize sufficiently that the CIA is a branch of the government, and is not sort of a semi-autonomous agency. Anything justifiable in that criticism?

M: I know that there was some criticism. I think the criticism was not only the liberal press but some of the liberal members of the Congress. Whether justified or not, I don't know. There were fifteen members of the Senate that voted against my confirmation for differing reasons--some of them because they thought I was too stiff-necked in my views on the threat of Communism and for that reason my estimates and evaluations might be slanted.

But most of the votes were internal to the Senate itself who were criticizing the lack of control on the part of the Senate over the Central

Intelligence Agency. I thought it was quite significant that Senator Fulbright who voted against me, in doing so made a speech on the floor of the Senate that he would very probably vote to confirm me as Secretary of State but he wouldn't vote for me as Director of Central Intelligence because what he was doing was moving against the manner in which the Senate handled its control of the CIA. I had taken the position that that was a matter of concern in the Senate and for them to lay down the ground rules and I would abide by them, whatever they were.

F: What sort of controls are exerted on the CIA? This is something that people talk about with very little knowledge.

M: Well, there has been a good deal written on it. The Senate had a small select committee, representatives of the Armed Services Committee and the Finance Committee. There were four or five of them, and chaired by Senator Russell in my day. The House had a similar committee from the Armed Forces Committee and the Appropriations Committee, chaired by Mr. Vinson in my day. We would meet with them quite frequently and review our programs, and be guided by their judgment on a great many matters. I would consult individually with both Mr. Vinson and Mr. Russell on matters which I felt they should be informed on.

Now the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House were not represented on those committees. Senator Fulbright resented that very much. Congressman Morgan, chairman of the House committee, didn't express himself as violently as Senator Fulbright did. Since then, after I left, those committees have been expanded a little bit is my understanding; and two members of the Foreign Relations Committee sit on that committee, and two members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee sit on that committee on the House side. So there's

adequate control in my opinion.

F: Is it possible for the CIA to engage in some sort of clandestine operation without the approval of either the National Security Council or the Executive Branch?

M: No, it is not--under the controls that existed during my time.

F: In other words, you do not have an independent situation in which the CIA can make its own policy?

M: At no time. The Executive Branch of the government--represented by a representative of the White House and the State Department, Defense Department, and the CIA--discussed and reviewed all operational matters.

F: If you were getting into some sort of operation, you would always coordinate with State and Defense?

M: Yes, that was always done.

F: So that you would, then, deny the charge that the CIA is another U.S. government operating abroad?

M: Certainly, as far as during my time, and I'm sure since, this is a charge that can be honestly denied.

F: You, of course, very quickly got caught up in the--well, within a year--got caught up in the Cuban missile crisis. You had the problem there of intelligence, which I judge you had some difficulty at first getting anyone to believe--that missiles were being set up in Cuba.

M: Yes. That's a long story. I was persuaded myself that there was a danger that the Soviets might be tempted to put some missiles in Cuba. The majority opinion in the intelligence community, as well as State and Defense, was that this would be so out of character with the Soviets that they would not do so. They had never placed an offensive missile outside the Soviet's own territory. They had never placed an offensive missile

in any satellite area. I pointed out that Cuba was the only piece of real estate that they had indirect control of where a missile could reach Washington or New York and not reach Moscow. So the situation was somewhat different.

Furthermore, the bulk of opinion was that what we were witnessing in the build-up in the summer of 1962 was purely defensive--the location of surface-to-air missiles such as the Egyptians are now putting along the Suez. I was not persuaded about that because Cuba, being an island, such a defensive mechanism could be destroyed momentarily by low flying airplanes that could come in under radar, and with a very few well directed rockets could destroy the very intricate radar control mechanism of a surface-to-air missile site.

I reasoned that they were putting the surface-to-air missiles in as a means of stopping our U-2 surveillance. Once they did that, then we wouldn't know what went on in the interior of Cuba, and they could safely put in some missiles. This was exactly what they planned to do. They got a little out of phase, and they didn't get their surface-to-air missile sites all operating before their offensive missiles began to arrive, and that's how we discovered it. Fortunately we did.

F: Did you have much trouble persuading the National Security Council that there were missiles there?

M: Yes, I did, for the reason that the intelligence that we had up to the point when those very dramatic photographs revealed the presence of missiles was not really solid intelligence. We had lots of reports from informers, mysterious-looking large objects would be hauled through the streets at nights, and things of this kind.

F: It was difficult to gauge--

M: Exactly how big they were. Sometimes there were delays in the transmission of this information, because sometimes the information would have to go to Mexico. Then, there were delays in getting that information through. Some of it had to find its way by way of a traveler going to Mexico and coming out. There wasn't a great deal of instant communication because of the restraints of travel and communication and so forth. So we didn't have the hard information that a constant aerial surveillance would have revealed.

It happened that during the month of September I was away until the 25th or 26th of September. I found that during my absence--I was on a wedding trip incidentally--surveillance had come to a stop. I insisted upon its resumption. Then there was a delay of a week or ten days for two reasons: One, bad weather--there was a tropical storm that swept through that made U-2 photography impossible--and secondly, a fear that if a U-2 plane operated by a civilian pilot from the CIA was shot down, it would create one kind of a problem. If operated by the military, it would be a different problem. Therefore the decision was made to transfer the surveillance responsibility over to the Air Force, and this took several days to check out the pilots and familiarize them with the equipment which was very complicated.

F: These were the same type missiles that had shot down Gary Powers over Russia?

M: That's right. And you'll recall one plane was shot down over Cuba. But in any event, these things cleared up so that a flight was flown on October 10, I believe, or some time in early October--I've forgotten the exact date. When those pictures were developed and analyzed, there were the missiles. Now in some ways, it was providential that we didn't fly

the flight the week before because they might not have been there; and then it might not have been necessary--

F: Might have relaxed.

M: We might have relaxed a little bit. So it was just the right days. So maybe God was good to us, causing these delays, which were very aggravating at the time. In any event, once the indisputable evidence was placed before the responsible people in government--not only in the Administration but in the Congress--it was apparent that action must be taken. I must say that a very, very fine job of tactics was followed by the Kennedy Administration.

F: Was there ever very serious consideration of the quid pro quo with Russia to give up our Turkey bases if they'd take the missiles back, or was this just talk?

M: I think that was just talk.

F: Didn't get beyond that stage really.

M: Nobody ever thought the missiles in Turkey were worth anything anyway--or those in Italy either. They never should have been put there in the first place. I opposed them. I wanted them taken out a couple of years before.

F: What do you do--get a sort of mentality where once you get an installation you just feel you have to defend it?

M: I have my own personal opinion of why those were put in, and I don't think I should express them, because they're just opinions. Sometimes, you know, when you spend a few billion dollars developing something, you've got to do something with it.

F: Did Vice President Johnson take any active part in these deliberations? I know he met with the National Security Council during this missile

crisis. Or did he stay pretty much in the background?

M: In the first place, I saw to it that he was informed. I briefed him personally so that he knew what was going on. We developed our policy through an Executive Committee that President Kennedy established. That committee met practically day and night for days, as you know. Vice President Johnson appeared with that committee and on one or perhaps two occasions, expressed his views--and of course was tremendously concerned. The records of that committee, which I presume are available to you, revealed his position. But his position was a strong one.

F: There was no contention between him and other members of the committee? I'm thinking particularly of Bobby Kennedy.

M: Not that I know of, no.

F: Did you get the feeling that this blunted Castro's subversion in Latin America?

M: Unquestionably it weakened Castro's stature throughout Latin America. Whether it blunted his subversion efforts or whether other things did, I don't know.

F: But you think it did place him in a sort of puppet role?

M: It put him in a puppet role. It had very serious consequences on him.

F: Did the fact that Mexico refused to go along with the quarantine of Cuba give you any great problems? Or did it actually open up a listening post?

M: I, personally, wasn't concerned. There were people in the Administration who were very disappointed that Mexico would not go along, but in fact there were some pluses as well as minuses. You mentioned one; it did give a listening post that proved valuable.

F: What were other pluses?

M: Well, it gave a source of transportation in and out of Cuba that permitted some people that wanted to get out to get out that otherwise could not have done so. It permitted people from third countries, who were authorized to go in, to find a convenient way to get in there. It was very important.

F: In '63 the First Secretary to the British Embassy, H. A. R. Philby, was disclosed--that is, he had been First Secretary back in '49-'51--he was disclosed as the Russian agent who had warned Burgess and McLean that they were being closed in on. I rather gather the CIA was the one who made the disclosure. Also there are rumors--which you can confirm, deny, or ignore--that you and Bobby Kennedy pretty well forced the hand of the British in making public the defection of Burgess and McLean.

M: I didn't. I know of no activity whatsoever on the part of Bobby Kennedy forcing the public--. The whole chronology of that Philby thing, and the fact that his role was uncovered and that there was a little delay in getting him out of Beirut, and during that delay he escaped behind the Iron Curtain, has been written up and is all rather blurred in my mind. Authority sources are much better sources than I am for that.

F: There were also in '63 rumors of a policy rift in Viet Nam between Ambassador Lodge and the CIA chief in Viet Nam. Can you lend credence to that, or is this again in the rumor stage?

M: There were two schools of thought throughout government with respect to the Diem Administration. There was one school of thought that Diem was a liability to the country--a liability to the goals that the United States sought. This prevailed in many sections of the White House and the State Department and in certain sections of Defense and some sections of the Agency.

The other school of thought was that there was really no apparent replacement for Diem, that the greatest of pressures should be brought onto him to revise some of his policies, to improve his relationship with the people at large in South Viet Nam, and to improve his image throughout the world and most particularly in the United States. He was being bitterly criticized by the more liberal press at that time.

Now, I was very much in favor of this latter course for the reason that, after analyzing all of the potential leaders of Viet Nam, I could see no one on the horizon that could say, "Well, if the focal authority was transferred from Diem to this man, then conditions would immediately improve." Ambassador Lodge, I felt, was not aggressive enough in pressing his views on Diem. However, with the passage of time after his arrival in late August up to November, he had several meetings. I guess the differences were a matter of degree. He did have some sharp differences of opinion with John Richardson, who was our man over there; we withdrew Richardson because of those differences. To that extent the fact that there was a problem was not rumor--it was fact.

F: The CIA had warned both Ambassador Lodge and President Kennedy of the impending coup?

M: Oh yes, coup rumors were frequent, and we had warned about it. I had also warned President Kennedy personally that removal of Diem would result in not one coup, but several coups--political turmoil that might extend over several years--and that's exactly what happened.

F: Shortly after the overthrow of President Diem, of course, you had the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas; what did this do to you and your organization besides the fact that you had to sit out another group of rumors that you were somehow involved and Oswald was an agent?

M: I couldn't understand you.

F: You know there were those wild rumors that CIA was somehow involved in the assassination. There were the rumors that Oswald was a CIA agent, and so on, which you took care of by ignoring.

M: I never heard of any rumors that Oswald was a CIA agent.

F: His mother charged that at one time.

M: There were rumors that Oswald was an agent of either Castro or Moscow and that the CIA had such information in its files--which we did not have. We knew of his movements, but we knew of no activities of his that would lead us to believe that he was an agent of either.

F: After Johnson became President then, when did you see him first?

M: I saw him almost immediately upon his arrival in Washington. I think he arrived, as I remember it--

F: He arrived late evening on Friday.

M: Late evening, and I think I saw him at his home that night.

F: What was his mood like at that time?

M: Well, his mood was one of deep distress over the tragedy, and grave concern over how to get his arms around the problems that confronted him--some concern over how to properly handle the men in the organization whose competence he recognized, but also whose allegiance to President Kennedy--. And, of course, you know the background of issues that arose that dated 'way back to the convention here in Los Angeles and even before. However, he decided to work with the organization and to win its support and he did so very successfully. Many men who were determined to leave the next morning stayed on and served him very loyally and very well--and some to the end of his Administration.

F: Did the sudden coming of a new Adminis tration like this make any changes

in CIA procedure or organization?

M: No. We pretty well followed the pattern of dissemination of information as we had with President Kennedy. I think the only real difference--President Kennedy used to insist that he sit down with me alone for an hour or so a week to review a lot of things, both current and prospective. He was always very anxious to know what we thought might be the danger spot down the road in six months or a year. Was trouble going to erupt in Cyprus, or Suez, or in the Philippines, or what? He was always very interested in that. President Johnson--each man has to organize himself differently. President Johnson only wanted to see me when I had something particularly I wanted to tell him. His door was always open, but he wasn't inclined to want to sit for a general review.

F: To sort of have a philosophical talk, in a sense. Did the fact that the French had refused to sign the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty give any particular disturbance, either to President Kennedy or to President Johnson, that would have affected the CIA? Did you keep a special eye on the French after that?

M: No, we knew pretty well what the French were doing. When I was chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission I made several trips to France--official trips--and their people to the United States. We knew the state of the art--the state as far as they were concerned. We had a good measure of the competence of their organization and the people that were involved in their program. We had a reasonable estimate of their production of fissionable materials and could translate that into a weapon arsenal. Of course, what we didn't know was how fast they could bring about a successful atomic and, finally, hydrogen bomb. And the time has been much longer than we expected for the reason that it has been halted a couple

of times because of fiscal problems, political problems, within France itself. So we were regretful but not surprised that they have failed to go along.

Incidentally, I can say at this time that I've been asked frequently why I supported the Test Ban Treaty in 1963 when I was so adamant against the Test Ban Treaty in 1959 and '60. The reason is simply this. During the period we had so developed our efforts of detection of a violation that I was satisfied that our detection devices would reveal any violation of the Treaty, regardless of where it was done. The Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, after I went over that with them very thoroughly, agreed with this. It was for that reason that I was able to support the Treaty.

F: I know the CIA forecast the Chinese explosion of the nuclear bomb.

M: Very accurately.

F: Was this on intelligence, or was this on a detection system?

M: It was on hard intelligence. We knew what they were doing, and we predicted that they'd explode a bomb within thirty to sixty days of a particular date. I went to Europe and briefed the North Atlantic Treaty Council on the status of their development, and said they'd explode a bomb within thirty to sixty days, and on the thirty-first day they exploded the bomb.

F: They made a prophet out of you.

M: Yes, they made a prophet out of me.

F: Early in the Johnson Administration in late January of '64 after he had come in at the end of November, you went to Spain to confer with Franco. The subject of this meeting was never revealed. Was that at Presidential direction, or was that on your own?

M: I went to--

F: There were talks of rumors again. The CIA, as you know, travels in rumor because of its secretiveness, but there were rumors of upcoming Spain-USSR talks that the press was--

M: That wasn't the purpose of the trip. I made a trip to Europe at that time. The fact is I made two trips, and I went to all the principal capitals, including Spain. My purpose was to give a thorough background briefing on a status of the weapon developments and the military posture of the Soviet Union and of the Chinese Communists. I found Franco very receptive, very interested, and very appreciative of the briefing. I didn't go only to Spain. I went to all the capitals and briefed either the head of government or the head of state.

F: Later that spring you were named to a committee to study the feasibility and desirability of the supersonic transport. Did the President give any directions to that committee, or did he just want the committee to come up with the facts?

M: He wanted the committee to come up with the facts and a recommendation as to what he should do. We worked for about three years on that. McNamara was the chairman of it--the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Director of NASA, and the Director of FAA, and then there were three non-government people. I, at first, as Director of the CIA--that really was not my role, but the President asked me to do it because of my business experience. Then, when I resigned, he asked me to stay on the committee as one of the three non-government people.

F: You really went on as an engineer and a builder.

M: An engineer and a builder and a person familiar with the field who just happened to be the Director of CIA. If someone who hadn't had the technical

background that I had the good fortune to have had been the Director of CIA, he wouldn't have asked him to be on it.

F: Later in the year, in the fall of '64, Khrushchev was ousted, and you made the statement that this surprised the CIA. What happened to intelligence in that case?

M: We had no advance notice of it. I don't think that anybody had any advance notice of it. I learned about it by a telephone call from Moscow telling me that Khrushchev was going to be removed the following day--or later that very day. Now, in analyzing it, we felt this: there was a good deal of dissatisfaction that had grown up in Soviet higher circles over Khrushchev's conduct, some of his statements--principally the missiles of Cuba and some of the things that had gone on in the UAR--plus some of his domestic policies. Now, a two-day meeting of the Politburo, or some segment of it, was held and Khrushchev was not attending. He was down at his vacation resort on the Black Sea. Apparently when they gathered they found that this criticism was so general that they had the strength to do something about it, and did. But looking back, there was no movement--

F: It had almost the spur-of-the-moment quality about it.

M: There was no discernible movement. These various factors all had to come together and then they found they were all thinking the same thing, and so they decided to act. So they sent for him, and he said well he was down there and he wasn't coming up. And they said, "Well, you'd better come up. There's a plane on the way to get you." It was just about as simple as that. I know of no intelligence resource that could have told the outside world what was forthcoming.

F: In '65 in April you retired from the CIA. Did President Johnson try to get you to stay on?

M: Yes. I told President Johnson in June of '64 that I wanted to return to private life--that I felt that I was getting to the point in age that I was getting too old to run a large department in government--and I thought that the larger departments in government should be run by a younger man. He complained about that. I said, "Well, you have to remember that my age now is where you'll be after your third term quite a ways from now." So he said, "Well, all right, but not until after the 1964 election." He said that would be all right.

Then after the 1964 election, he never refused to accept my resignation, but he would never give consideration to the appointment of a successor. So I finally submitted a list to him and set a date when I would have to leave because I found that I would have to leave. I submitted a list of men who I thought should be considered. Shortly before April 30, he called me and talked to me about Admiral Raborn. Then when he had made that choice, Raborn came up and I took him around to the various Senators who would be involved in his confirmation. We got that lined up so it went through without any trouble.

F: Now, yours and President Johnson's relationships were always cooperative and harmonious I gather--as much as any two men who have to think out policy matters together can be. Admiral Raborn had been a great man with the Polaris atomic sub program, but was not generally considered to be too successful with the CIA. What do you think the difference was?

M: I think Admiral Raborn was a hard-driving, technical man; and I think the CIA requires a different kind of mentality. You have an operational responsibility on the one hand, and you have several thousand academicians on the other, and you have to be kind of an operational manager and play somewhat the role of a college president on the other hand.

F: Sort of a fractious faculty on your hands.

M: Yes. So I think that the appointment of Admiral Raborn was an unfortunate choice. Here was a man who had a most distinguished and successful career and he was thrown into a job that he wasn't really equipped for. I think he drew a lot of criticism that was unfortunate and unfair. I think a great deal of Admiral Raborn. But at no time would I have considered him for that post. I would have considered him for a lot of other posts, but not that one.

F: Is the CIA's role somewhat exaggerated by press and public and Congress?

M: I think it is. I think that the press and various books that are written place total emphasis on the clandestine operations of CIA. This makes good reading. Everybody is fond of James Bond, and so forth. Really, CIA gathers important intelligence. There are such activities.

Really, the important contribution the CIA makes to the country is in their estimative and analytical capacity. They can take this wealth of--the great volume of intelligence that comes from all sources--from the military, from the State Department, from the National Security Agency, and from CIA itself--and put it altogether and figure out just what it means with respect to the intentions and policies of others, and how it might affect our own policies. I have always felt that that was really the very important contribution that the Central Intelligence Agency makes, although their gathering of information upon which the basic estimate is important, but that gathering is done by others as well. It's just too bad that this side of the CIA isn't given more publicity, more importance. But it's kind of dull, you know. It isn't exciting, and therefore it doesn't make very good reading.

F: After you left the CIA, some time afterwards, there came that exposure,

if you want to call it that, of CIA support of National Students Association and some publications. I presume this goes back to the period in which you were associated with the CIA?

M: And before, I think.

F: Had you assayed the consequences when disclosure should be made?

M: The chronology of that whole thing is kind of dim in my mind. There were several Communist-organized student meetings held throughout the world. There was one in Vienna. There was one down in Brazil.

F: Youth congresses and peace meetings.

M: The youth congress. The National Students Association itself became somewhat concerned that these were dominated by Communist spokesmen; and it was they themselves that wanted to be sure that the other side of the story was told. And the CIA arranged so that it would be told--arranged the resources so that they--. And the great majority of people involved were past officers and presidents of the National Student Association.

Now the involvement was picked up and totally distorted, because it was a very, very successful operation. One or two of those youth congresses found at the end of the second of a three-day congress the Communist spokesmen had been so totally discredited--I mean somebody that was there that was willing and strong enough to get up and say the truth--that they adjourned the congress.

Now I never have been apologetic for one minute for the role.

F: I wondered--this is then in the guessing realm--if our government shouldn't have been more aggressive in saying, "We did it, and we'd do it again. We think it's a good idea."

M: Well, we were in a period then when there was sort of an inclination if

an accusation was made about the CIA not to analyze it at all but to crawl under the table and hope that it goes by. I thought it was wrong at the time. I was inclined to speak out myself. The whole thing, you know, was developed by these two fellows that ran this Rampart Magazine up here who were inclined to produce the sensational rather than the accurate account.

F: They're not very long on balance.

M: No.

F: One other question. After you retired to the tranquility of private life, you immediately got involved by Governor Pat Brown in this aftermath of Watts, and looking into the racial problems, the ghetto problems in general. Did President Johnson take an interest in this with you personally, or were you working independently of Washington on this?

M: I was working independently of Washington. I talked to President Johnson on two or three occasions about it. His man Joe Califano followed it very closely, and the report was very well received by a great many people in Washington. It was, in my opinion, a very balanced report. I was quite surprised, for instance, to have a very complimentary communication from Hubert Humphrey, a very complimentary communication from Senator Douglas--as well as several that represent, let's say, the other side of the spectrum. But when you look at that report, that was the first of a number that had been written, including the--

F: Watts was kind of a ground breaker--

M: Including the national commission headed by Governor Kerner. You could take our report and scratch out Los Angeles and put on Newark or Detroit and come up with about the same answers. The Kerner report differed from

our report only in one respect, and that is their claim that white racism was primarily responsible. We rejected that, and I still reject that personally. I think the Kerner report erred in that judgment.

F: In 1965 Major General Edward Lansdale of the U.S. Air Force and Colonel Napoleon Valeriano of the Armed Forces of the Philippines went to Viet Nam to head a special team. I would rather gather that they were trying to utilize the techniques that the Philippines had used to defeat the Huks. I'm wondering two things: What sort of results did they have, and did the CIA in effect sponsor them?

M: I can't answer that because that was after my time. You have to realize that Lansdale did a great job in the Philippines. He also had a lot of experience in South Viet Nam in the early days. I would imagine that he was leaning on both of his experiences dealing with the Huks as well as his earlier experiences in Viet Nam. Just exactly the purpose of his mission, who supported it and so forth, I don't know. That was after my time.

F: What is the CIA relationship to Air America?

M: I don't know.

F: There's a close relationship between the CIA in Viet Nam or CAS, I believe it's called, and the U.S. forces there. The CIA, I presume, provides valuable intelligence to our Armed Services there. I've wondered how these working relationships have stood up over the years, and what are the major areas of controversy or overlap that you've had to work with?

M: I think the relationship has been, so far as I know of the CIA organization in Viet Nam, of both military and the Embassy had been very good. I know that throughout my experience, and from all I have learned

since, that the closest of liaison exists between the Ambassador and the Chief of Station (CAS) as well as the military organization and the Chief of Station (CAS). The fact is there are times when the offices were almost adjoining one another. The only difficulty was that incident with Richardson which we took care of--not because we necessarily thought Richardson was wrong but sometimes it's best to kind of move the players around a little bit rather than--

F: Was this to some extent a conflict of personalities?

M: It probably was a conflict of personalities. I've always felt that there was a very satisfactory relationship, and that the CIA--or the Chief of Mission over there--was able to provide both the Ambassador and the military with some very valuable intelligence and also to provide them with great assistance in interpreting the importance of recovered documents and interrogation of prisoners, and so forth. There have been many changes in the role of CIA--I won't go into the history of them because they're relatively unimportant--but I think the fact that the man that was most important in CIA's affairs in South Viet Nam for the last ten years is now Ambassador over there in charge of the civilian side of Vietnamization program is evidence of itself of the intimacy of the relationship--of the fact that the relationship--was satisfactory, and secondly that it was greatly respected.

F: Where does the CIA fit in with the concept of the country team?

M: Well, in every country, there is a country team headed by the Ambassador. The members of it are the head of the AID mission, the MAAG, and head of the information service--

F: USIA.

M: USIA, and the CIA. The country team's direct policy--obviously not all

operational matters are brought to the attention of the country team, but operational matters must conform to policy. Operational matters are reviewed with the Ambassador if he wants them. There are some Ambassadors who prefer not to have them.

F: But ostensibly the CIA head in a country is under the direction of the Ambassador and cannot run an independent policy to the Ambassador?

M: That's right.

F: Do you have a formal link with British, French,German, and other friendly nations, or their equivalent organizations, where you exchange information?

M: No, it's informal. There is a great deal of exchange of information.

F: There is a great deal of cooperation?

M: There's a great deal of cooperation, but it's informal.

F: One final question, and that is in the decisions in '63-'64-'65 to increase our troop commitments in Viet Nam, how much of a role did the CIA play in those recommendations?

M: Those were policy decisions, and that was beyond the province of the CIA.

F: In other words, you provided the intelligence--

M: Provided the intelligence and it was up to the President and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to make the decisions. Now occasionally the President would call upon me for my personal judgment on a policy decision and when I would give it I would qualify it by saying that doing so it was beyond my competence as Director of Central Intelligence. In other words, I didn't want to get in the position where somebody might suspect that our intelligence reports were slanted because I might have a particular personal view on a policy matter.

F: You more or less laid out a raw report and someone else had to arrive at

conclusions?

M: Yes. The difference arose in 1964--Mr. McNamara and Maxwell Taylor and Mr. Bundy, in the absence of Mr. Rusk, and I went to review the Viet Nam situation. This was shortly after President Johnson took over. He asked us to give a report. I had to take a dissent from the report. Mr. McNamara gave a very optimistic view that things were pretty good. I had to take the position that as long as the Ho Chi Minh trail was open and supplies and convoys of people could come pouring in there without interruption, that we couldn't say that things were so good. This caused quite a sharp difference. But this was an intelligence appraisal.

Now Mr. McNamara made several recommendations--or this group did--of the things that should be done which I thought weren't enough and therefore I added some more. I later withdrew those additional recommendations because they were policy matters, but the position that we took on the enemy potential because of the open road to access was an intelligence appraisal which I couldn't withdraw. This became a sharp difference, and that dissent is recorded in the report.

F: Again, in the Dominican intervention, you would have had the Administration making its policy decision with a good base on the intelligence that the CIA had provided, but without any CIA recommendations for intervention.

M: I don't know that one, because I wasn't there.

F: Again, this is after you've left.

M: It was the day I left.

F: Thank you, Mr. McCone.

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By John A. McCone

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, John A. McCone, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed John A. McCone

Date Oct. 4, 1972

Accepted Harry J. Middleton - for
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Date March 20,1975