INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 20, 1968

INTERVIEWEE: PAUL NITZE

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Pierce

Tape 1

P: This interview is with Paul Henry Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense. Today is Wednesday, November 20, 1968; it's 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. We are in the Secretary's offices in the Pentagon. This is Dorothy Pierce.

Mr. Nitze, I'd like to begin with some background information on yourself. You were nominated to be deputy secretary of defense by President Johnson and confirmed by the Senate in June of 1967. Prior to that from December 1963 to 1967, you served as secretary of the navy; and from 1961 to 1963 you served as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. Earlier from 1946 to 1953, you also had government service in the State Department. Is this background information correct?

N: That is correct.

P: I believe you told me previously that you also had had some other government service, and would you repeat that for me.

N: I said I thought I was one of the three people still in government that were presidential appointees who were in policy roles in 1940. At that time I was assistant to Mr. [James V.] Forrestal, who was one of the anonymous six presidential assistants working with Mr. Roosevelt.

P: And who were the other two?

N: They were Mr. Averill Harriman and Joe Fowler, now secretary of the treasury.

P: And then you said you returned again after a brief three months in the White House to work with General [George C.] Marshall?

N: Yes. Mr. Forrestal became under secretary of the navy; then General Marshall asked me to help work on the Draft Act of 1940. Then I later worked with Mr. [Charles] Harding on eliminating German and Italian airlines in Latin America. I then subsequently worked with Nelson Rockefeller in the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Then during World War II I did a variety of jobs--the Board of Economic Warfare, the Foreign Economic Administration, the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. In the State Department I had been director of the policy planning staff.

P: This is extensive background, and I'm very sorry I must out of time--your time--limit some of my questions more to the 1961 area of your service in Defense. Would you briefly define for me the responsibilities of deputy secretary of defense?

N: When Mr. [Robert] McNamara first became secretary of defense, he signed an order providing that the deputy secretary of defense would have all the powers of decision that he, the secretary of defense, had. While Mr. McNamara was secretary of defense and when he was here in Washington, he would cover really in very great detail probably a larger volume of matters of importance to the Defense Department than any preceding secretary of defense. The deputy then while he was here was really his assistant, helping him where he needed to be helped. When he was out of town or engaged on other things, the deputy secretary acted in his stead in the same manner that he would have acted.

When Mr. [Clark] Clifford became secretary of defense, he signed an order similar to the one that Mr. McNamara had signed. However, Mr. Clifford, not being as

familiar with the Department and being closer to the President, spending much more of his time with the President on the important policy issues, he has tended to delegate to the deputy a whole realm of work which earlier was either divided between the secretary and the deputy secretary or which was not divided, but which was basically done by the secretary himself before.

P: And so the area of the delegation of authority or the volume of your work depends a great deal and in great part on the secretary of defense and his decision on what your role is?

N: Yes. It's necessary for the secretary and the deputy secretary to adjust between themselves what is the most useful division of responsibility and time.

P: Mr. Nitze, when did you first meet Lyndon Johnson, and what were the circumstances?

N: I believe it was in 1956 during the presidential campaign. I was serving as a member of the advisory council to the Democratic National Committee, and was a member of the subcommittee of that body dealing with foreign policy and defense issues. We were asked to prepare a first draft of the platform, that portion of it dealing with foreign policy and defense matters. A committee of three was appointed including Mr. [Dean] Acheson and Senator [Mike] Mansfield and myself. And the drafting and most of the work fell upon me. And the decision was made that our draft should be cleared with all the active candidates, so I cleared this draft with then-Senator Johnson and I think this was the first time I'd ever been in any way intimately involved with him.

P: What were your first impressions of Mr. Johnson?

N: Of buoyancy, energy, and political acumen.

P: How would you describe your present relationship with Mr. Johnson?

N: I think it's one of mutual respect, but of distance. I'm not one of Mr. Johnson's circle.

P: Has Mr. Johnson appointed you to any study groups, task forces or commissions outside of Defense?

N: I believe not.

P: Have you ever traveled with Mr. Johnson or have been asked to travel somewhere for him?

N: I have not.

P: On what significant times have you been called into the White House on critical matters regarding defense and foreign policy?

N: I imagine you're asking about--during the Johnson Administration or over the entire eight years?

P: During the Johnson Administration.

N: Well, I've attended all the meetings of the National Security Council; those meetings of the Cabinet when either Mr. McNamara or Mr. Clifford were not present; and a number of special sessions on particular issues. But I would not say that in my present capacity that I have been particularly close to the White House.

P: Were there critical periods where you were there either as secretary of the navy or as the deputy secretary?

N: In the days when I was assistant secretary of defense, then the National Security Council and the executive committee thereof dealt with all the important policy issues, and I was always present at those; so in those days I used to--in Mr. Kennedy's day--I used to spend almost as much time in the White House as I did in the Pentagon.

P: Have there been times of major events related perhaps to the war, or decisions to be made regarding the war in Vietnam, or other crisis areas that developed in the world that you have been in on the activities in the White House?

N: To an extent, but generally--usually Mr. NcNamara or Mr. Clifford have been the principal involved. I've been there sometimes in the capacity of deputy to Mr. McNamara or Mr. Clifford, and my views have been sought; because President Johnson does generally seek the opinion of everybody who sits around the table. But as I said earlier, I have not been a member of Mr. Johnson's circle.

P: What specific times did this occur?

N: Well, obviously a number of occasions with respect to Vietnam.

P: Bombing pauses or halts or the--?

N: Well, certainly during the--I think the number of times were greater prior to the March 31st [1968] presidential speech than after that. And I think the reason for that is perfectly clear; and that was I think because I was probably the strongest advocate of the position that we should try to de-escalate the war. And even though President Johnson eventually came around to that point of view with what I thought was great courage and an excellent speech, but I think he has always resented that fact that I was on that side and very vocally on that side prior to the decision.

P: How would you at this time characterize Mr. Johnson?

N: Well, that would be hard to do. You mean in this period after the election?

P: I mean, can you think of adjectives that describe him? There's the obvious one of his energy, being a very energetic person and things like that; I'm only thinking of your

impressions of him now.

N: Oh, I don't think that would be useful.

P: All right. Mr. Nitze, my following questions are of a very broad nature, and I'd like to draw on all seven years of your experience in the Department of Defense. To begin with, what in your judgment have been major foreign policy and defense related problems of this period?

N: Back in 1960 after the election, Mr. Kennedy asked me to head a group to deal with just this question, and to point up for him the issues in the foreign and defense field which needed early resolution. And I happened to look at that paper the other day.

The first issue which we dealt with was the question of what kind of strategic forces did we need; the question in more precise terms was could we rely purely upon deterrent forces, or did we also need some mix of forces designed just not for deterrence, but designed actually to fight a nuclear war. It appeared at that time in 1960 that it really wasn't within present technology to develop forces which would give you a meaningful war-fighting capability where we could in a nuclear war assure the survival of the United States as the kind of a country that it was.

On the other hand, it did not seem advisable to concentrate solely upon deterrents because with a purely deterrent posture there never would be any sense in using it, and this could be easily played against by the Russians and might not be effective. And so that question as to the balance of deterrent forces and war fighting forces seemed to be a crucial issue in 1960, and it remains a crucial issue today. We've done a great deal about improving the posture of the United States in this field, but the Russians have, as was

anticipated in 1960, done a great deal to improve their position so that the net balance of the issue remains not radically changed from what it was then.

This was one of a dozen issues. Another issue was that of how does one intelligently deal with one's allies. On the one hand, it is important to--as the leader of an alliance--to take the broadest view of not only our own interests, but those of our allies. Otherwise one can't hold the alliance together. On the other hand, as the leading power of the non-Communist world, we cannot let our decisions be controlled by one of the lesser states of the alliance. The problem becomes most acute when you have two potential allies who are antagonistic to each other, and where the Russians play upon that division, and where it's important for us to try to bring the two together to avoid becoming postured behind only one of them, and at the same time to keep the Russians out of the area--a crucial case in point being India and Pakistan; another being the Arab states and Israel. But other cases could be evinced.

But this question of how you deal with the Germans, or even the British, so you bring pressure on them to do the things we think ought to be done; on the other hand, not too much pressure. You can't just buy allies, so it isn't just a question of carrot, it isn't just a question of stick. In part, it's a question of their understanding that we understand what their interests are, but it is not an easy task. Obviously this has a number of illustrations, and NATO is one illustration. And included in that in 1960 was the issue of what do you do about [Charles] de Gaulle. That still remains an issue.

Another issue was that of disarmament. How do you at the same time defend against the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union and the other Communist states,

while also trying to conduct negotiations which might mitigate the ever-growing confrontation between the two parts of the world? Don't you have to do both concurrently, and how do you do both concurrently, and what can you expect of agreements which are entered into on the other side by people whom you know don't wish you well and who have quite different standards of behavior than do we or anybody on our side? Another issue was that of gold and balance of payments situation. This was acute in 1960, it was acute again in other years; 1968--'68 has been another period when it has been acute.

There were issues of particular weapons systems. And it was then in 1960 not clear whether we should continue with Skybolt, with Dynosoar, with the B-70. As it turned out, all those--all three of them which appeared dubious in 1960, we finally had to cancel. I'm sure today the Nixon Administration, looking at their issues in the Defense field, would have a similar list of decisions we've made which they would want to look at and see whether they wanted to change them or not.

Another set of issues had to do with particular points geographically--Berlin, Cuba, Vietnam, and Laos were the ones which were outlined in this paper in 1960. Certainly Berlin continues to be a crucial point; Laos continues to be a crucial point; obviously Vietnam does; Castro less so than in 1960. Today, I think one would clearly add the Middle East to that list.

But perhaps the most important issue in 1960 was the balance between our nuclear capabilities and our non-nuclear capabilities. And one of the points that we had emphasized in the advisory council to the Democratic National Committee was the

importance of getting away from the doctrine of massive retaliation and moving instead to a posture in which it would be possible to have a more flexible and across-the-board capability of deterring and resisting aggression.

And in 1961 and '62 the main thing that Mr. McNamara and I addressed ourselves to was, A, in improving our posture in the nuclear field, but , B, simultaneously creating the capabilities which would give us a capability for more flexible response. I'm not sure I've covered all the issues that were in that paper, but I think these are the main ones.

P: What do you see as significant milestones in our relations with Russia over the last seven years?

N: Well, the first important point in my mind was the meeting in Vienna between Mr. Khrushchev and President Kennedy. I think at that meeting Mr. Kennedy found the position confirmed that the Russians were a real threat and had to be stood up to, and that it was no easy job to so do.

I think the second important turning point was when it became clear that the Berlin crisis was a real crisis, and that the Russians probably did intend to renew the blockade of Berlin. And Mr. Kennedy stood up to that and made it clear to the Russians that we would in fact stand up to that threat, and the Russians backed away from it. But they didn't back away completely from it. They moved the theater of confrontation from Berlin to Cuba. It is my view that the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis were related crises, so that it was only after the--I wouldn't use the word "defeat" of the Russians in the Cuban missile crisis--but their withdrawing under pressure is a better way of putting it in the Cuban missile crisis; and after that, there was a period of a relaxation

of the confrontation as a result of their having withdrawn at Cuba.

I think that was interpreted by many people as being kind of a long-lasting basic change in Soviet viewpoint. To others of us it did not appear to be a basic change; it seemed to be perhaps a tactical change. In other words, a short run rather than a long run phenomenon. The Soviet penetration to the Middle East would tend to confirm that view; and certainly their movement into Czechoslovakia, while of a different nature, it could be interpreted as being a self-defense move within the Communist bloc. Still they put on it overtones of reaching out beyond a doctrine of protection within the Communist bloc to being a threat externally wherever they chose to operate.

So back as early as 1947-'48, it was Mr. [George] Kennan's view and my view that in the relations between the USSR and ourselves we would have to resist strongly through the policy called the containment policy which Mr. Kennan and I interpreted somewhat differently, even though we'd worked together in the policy planning staff during those days. But the hope was that if the United States and its allies could maintain this over two or three generations, there would then be a radical internal change in the USSR which would permit a different foreign policy.

End of Interview I

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