INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 16, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN P. ROCHE

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Dr. Roche's home office, 15 Bay State Road, Weston, Massachusetts

Tape 1 of 2

M: Let's identify you to begin with, sir. You're John P. Roche, and you're a professor of political science at Brandeis University currently.

R: That's right.

M: You were a presidential assistant in the White House from the fall of 1966 until the end of the Johnson Administration.

R: I left in the fall when the place began to look like a graveyard and came back to teaching.

M: You came back for the 1968 school year, so you were there two full years.

R: I was there two years.

M: Did you know Lyndon Johnson well at all prior to the time he became vice president? In the fifties?

R: I had never met him. I came out of the Kennedy background. It's kind of ironic, as a matter of fact, because I was one of the first so-called Kennedy intellectuals in the fifties, in 1956. I went to work for John Kennedy when he was here in Massachusetts as a senator. At a time when Arthur Schlesinger and the other fellows

were all holding hands with Adlai Stevenson, James MacGregor Burns, and I, I guess, and Sam Beer of Harvard perhaps and three or four other people were the sort of Kennedy cadre. I never had the slightest contact with Lyndon Johnson in fact until after he was president.

M: Did you take part in the Kennedy campaign to the extent that you would be involved in the vice presidential nomination of Johnson in 1960?

R: No, I was not at the convention. I despise conventions, by and large, and the ADA was actually in Jack Kennedy's pocket. In fact it created some stir later on because Sam Beer, who was then the national chairman--you see, I became national chairman of ADA in 1962, from 1962 to 1965 I was in that office; Sam Beer had it from 1960 to 1962--on official ADA stationery wrote every delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1960 a little letter which suggested that Lyndon Johnson, not by name as I recall, was a racist. It was a little private coup. I had nothing to do with it myself, as a matter of fact, since I was not then a member of the executive committee of ADA, but I understand that Beer and a couple of other people sat down and cooked it up. It was a straight political job. So that the only connection I had with President Johnson early on was not one that would have made him particularly fond of me and the Americans for Democratic Action.

M: Did you react with horror like the rest of the Kennedy cadre when the nomination became obvious?

R: No. My objective in life was to win elections with good candidates, and I didn't believe that Lyndon Johnson was a racist. I thought it was absurd. I didn't realize how intelligent a man he was until later on. He had a capacity for coming on corny, which sometimes was disconcerting. I suppose maybe I shared some of the biases of the effete intellectuals of the northeastern corner of the United States, though not very many of them. For example, Kennedy's little debate with him before the Texas and Massachusetts delegations at the convention: my God, Jack made mincemeat of him. Kennedy was quite a guy, and this statement I would not make about either of his brothers.

But, in any event, I was strictly on the margins of politics. I wrote some speeches for John Kennedy both before and after the campaign, mostly, ironically enough in the light of the events of the last decade, very hard-line, liberal, cold war speeches, such as the University of Washington speech that Kennedy gave in I think it was November of 1961, which was, I still think with certain bias, one of the best expositions of what I think to be the correct American position in the cold war.

M: You became chairman of ADA, you said, in 1962.

R: That's right.

M: You did have some direct presidential contact through that job with Mr. Johnson as soon as he became president?

R: I'm trying to remember. I had a good deal of contact with Kennedy when he was in the White House--a fair amount, let's put it that

way. Everybody tends to exaggerate these things. The day after Kennedy died ninety thousand people promoted themselves as being intimate friends. I was not an intimate friend of Jack Kennedy's.

M: Nine hundred ninety-nine thousand of them wrote books about him.

R: That's right. I was not an intimate friend of Kennedy's. He was a man in many ways an isolate with a core of ice. I don't there were very many intimate friends of John Kennedy. But anyway he was on first-name terms with me, and at the time he became president, I was on first-name terms with him, which is a category, let's say, that didn't include too many people. As national chairman of ADA I used to do business over there trying to tell him to get moving on civil rights, and he gave me little speeches about why didn't I understand the problems of the president. So I told him my problems were his problems; but I wrote about the problems, and he'd have to do something.

But I was immensely fond of him. He was a singular man. Lyndon Johnson was correct, I think, when he said that Kennedy couldn't have gotten the Ten Commandments through Congress. But on the other hand there was a real, I don't know, I hate the word charisma.

M: Hero, somebody from the Boston Globe called him.

R: He was gallant. There was a gallantry about him, and there was a quality of quick, ironic intelligence which I could find personally very appealing, perhaps because I myself am an ironist. I suppose it could even be a simple old ethnic bias. I mean, he was one of us Irishman who made it.

M: Did you ever get any insight as to his relations with Mr. Johnson during that period when you were working with him?

R: None whatsoever. What one picked up tended to be the stuff among the courtiers, Schlesinger and Fred Hoborn, who used to work there. There were a number of people around him who occasionally would suggest that the President didn't think too much of the Vice President. It was that sort. There were all kinds of stories, nothing of any consequence.

M: There's a well-published story concerning you and Mr. Johnson when he was first president and you were still chairman of ADA that Evans and Novak reprint. Is that substantially true, regarding the throwing away of the question and his use of that question later to ridicule the ADA in front of the NSC meeting which followed?

R: That was in 1965. That was February, 1965, and what occurred, as I understand it, was we had a delegation in to see President Johnson from the ADA. We were at that point split among ourselves on Vietnam, a split which remains to this day as far as I'm concerned. A number of us were strong cold war liberals, and while we were not particularly happy about what the tactical potentialities in Vietnam, we felt that the containment of communist power in Asia was a legitimate American enterprise. There were others among us who were even at that point off on an essentially kind of anti-militarist, pacifist kick.

As I remember the story as it was reconstructed for me, somebody had written somebody a note. I didn't even know about it until I read about it in Evans and Novak, and I don't believe anything they

say until I've checked it out further, which I did in this case. What had happened was that somebody had written a note to somebody else saying, "Why don't we take it to the United Nations?" or something like that. This particular note had been thrown in an ashtray or something like that. My understanding is that right after we left there was a meeting of the NSC. In fact, I know there was, because I remember we kept them waiting forty minutes. There was a meeting of the National Security Council. Somebody, I don't think the President, did it. I asked Bill what had happened, and Bill said that somebody had taken this note out of an ashtray,saying, "Why can't we get rid of the war in Vietnam by going to the United Nations?" and somebody made a nasty crack about it.

But like most of this stuff you see in these columns of that order it could be completely invented, I don't know. I was assured at the time, after the Novak column came out and my ADA troops were screaming bloody murder, I talked to Moyers about it, and he said that there was no truth in it whatsoever, et cetera, et cetera. It wasn't a very intelligent suggestion, as a matter of fact.

M: If it hadn't been for Vietnam, could the ADA have been brought to united support of Johnson, ever?

R: It's an interesting question. Let's start from a different place. To a considerable extent, ADA became the bastion of the Kennedys in exile. Now the Kennedys in exile were not interested in Vietnam; they were not interested in poverty; they were not interested in

anything except getting a Kennedy back into the White House. It's as simple as that.

Now as I said to you a little while ago, while I had immense admiration and respect for John Kennedy, I thought Bob Kennedy was a little shit. We had almost had a couple of fist fights in the course of ten years, one being in 1960 when I wrote an article in the New Republic before the election saying, "Everybody's sitting around passing out jobs in the cabinet, and the fact is we're likely to lose this election." By September of 1960 there was complete euphoria in the Kennedy camp, and I was convinced they were crazy. They didn't know how many Protestants there are in this country west of Pennsylvania.

M: They should have been in Oklahoma.

R: You're damned right. Bob Kennedy got furious, and we had a kind of an altercation. I didn't like him. I didn't trust him. The word I always thought of in connection with Bob Kennedy was demonic. I don't think he knew a principle from a railroad tie.

Ted Kennedy is his brother, on the other hand, I've known here. I did some work with him at one point. I opposed him initially and supported McCormack in the clan wars in Massachusetts. Ted Kennedy seemed to me to be a genial idiot. There's nothing wrong with Ted that, say, a hundred points in I.Q. wouldn't help, you know. But he's not a bad fellow. He's a schlumph, as we say in Gaelic.

But to come back to your question, the ADA's anti-Johnson perspective, I think, was not issue oriented so much as it was

Kennedy oriented. Arthur Schlesinger was always the deus ex machina in ADA, and these fellows sat around trying to figure out how to get Johnson out and Kennedy in. I think that would have been a problem. I think President Johnson was absolutely right. There are certain people that he just couldn't get to, not because of his parochialism necessarily but because of theirs, or, let's say, matching parochialisms. The snobbery with which Johnson was treated used to annoy me very much.

The first time I really got a chance to talk to him was before the 1964 election. I guess it was October, and it was about the multilateral nuclear force. I was immensely impressed with the grasp he had of his problem. It's kind of an interesting thing. You see, I went down in 1964--to be discursive and jumping from your question--to write Humphrey's set piece speeches in the campaign. I was living in Washington and working in the Capitol and writing speeches, having Humphrey give them, plus two or three others on any given day. That's when I got to know Moyers. I was still then chairman of ADA, among other things. I got to know Moyers fairly well. I wrote a couple of things for him that he needed in a hurry, foreign affairs things. I was bitterly opposed to the multilateral nuclear force that a bunch of theologians at the State Department cooked up, which I needn't go into the details of. But I thought it was inherently absolutely preposterous. So I was arguing with Moyers about it one day, and he said, "Well, you ought to tell the President. I'd like you to talk to the President about

this." As I say, this was some time I think in October of 1964.

So I went down to the White House and was in Moyers' office, which then wasn't the press office, if I remember it, it was in fact where Larry Temple later was, next to the Oval Office.

M: I don't think he was press secretary by that time, was he?

R: I don't know. He was running the campaign. He was really running the campaign, he and [Willard] Wirtz. At any rate, I was in talking to him, and then the President came in. Bill asked me to explain to the President my views on the MLF, and I did. I laid into it very hard. Just [from] the kind of questions he raised it was perfectly clear to me that this man was not the Philip Geyelin model, the guy who can't understand anything that happens outside of the three-mile limit.

This comes back again then to the earlier point. I don't think that Johnson's capabilities were appreciated, and it used to make me mad, partly because I guess I'm something of a professional proletarian myself. I've always disliked the professional intelligentsia. Indeed I wrote an article in the New York Times in 1964 in which I discussed Johnson's problems with the intellectuals and laid into the intellectuals--also into him, I might say.

M: What you're saying, though, is it is not really so much a matter of style in the case of the ones who were actively anti-Johnson as it was simply their determination to back another man.

R: Oh, yes, they had another horse. Almost anything he did was subject to interpretation and opposition. If they liked what he did, then

the way he did it was wrong, that sort of thing. This was just built-in.

I think, by the way, that probably the most serious thing that happened in undermining Johnson's public status in 1967 and 1968 was the defection of the Kennedy crowd. From 1966 on, that is, they began taking off, and with them, you see, they took the whole communications elite-- I mean, it's not Spiro Agnew's argument that there's one vast network here. There isn't a vast network. But what you have is a subculture which tends to accept certain values without there being a need for a conspiracy. As the Kennedy people left, always sort of shooting a Parthian shot over their shoulder about "how hard it is to work with this crude, unsophisticated guy," you had a very significant defection with regard to the way the country got to see Johnson, that is, the magazine articles and the rest of them. As I say, it was wholly opportunistic in the classic sense of the word, because Bob Kennedy made me look like a pacifist on the subject of Vietnam as of, let's say, 1965 and 1964 and 1963. Roger Hilsman was saying, "Get in there and fight." The whole crowd swung from being the greatest bunch of crusaders for world freedom, et cetera, et cetera, and domino players and everything else, to all of a sudden, bang!, they went the other way. This was I think a body blow.

M: What about the Kennedy aides who stayed on through that first year when you were watching it still from the outside? Did they actively serve him badly so far as you could tell?

R: Kenny O'Donnell, of course, was drunk all the time, poor guy.

Because Kenny, you see, was the guy who actually made the decision not to put the bubble on the car in Dallas. President Kennedy had characteristically delegated. The Secret Service was unhappy about Dallas, and they urged him to use the bubble. My understanding, which was I think pretty accurate, was that the President didn't want it and said, "What are you going to do? Next time you're going to take me in town in a tank or something like that. I don't want to go through Dallas or any other city in the United States in a tank." But he left it with O'Donnell, the decision as to whether or not to put on the bubble. Kenny made the decision, as any of us might have done, quite understandably, of no bubble. O'Donnell I think took the assassination of Kennedy as just a terrible, personal thing, the guilt himself, personal guilt. He was just out of circulation. I don't think he was disloyal. I think he was just in shock.

Schlesinger within a week--I think--of the assassination was trying to organize a dump Johnson movement. My recollection, although this is completely hearsay, I was not involved, was that he organized a dinner party in the upstairs dining room of the Occidental Hotel in December of 1963 to which were invited a number of luminaries and liberals in the government. The topic was, "How can we get this guy out of here and Bob Kennedy in?" But then, you see, so far as Lyndon Johnson was concerned, the White House was providing Arthur Schlesinger with a welfare program, too. He was off writing his

book and on the payroll. He wasn't doing anything.

M: He was in the East Wing then, wasn't he?

R: Yes, he was always in the East Wing. The government carried him until he finished writing it.

[Lawrence] O'Brien struck me as being meticulously loyal to Johnson. McNamara certainly was, and in a sense I'm afraid it was one of the problems we had, because as will emerge subsequently in our talking here I think the great disaster for American policy in the Johnson foreign policy emerged from overreliance on McNamara. But McNamara was completely loyal to Johnson, and I think as a consequence of this the President was perhaps not as [critical as he might have been]. Well, look, when you come into a situation like that, a sense of personal loyalty has to be a top consideration. I think he probably would have forgiven McNamara almost anything, because he really did give him his devotion.

Rusk, of course, had an odd position. I've never understood it. I hope I will some day, but I don't. Rusk was out of it pretty much in the Kennedy Administration, and in a sense the job description was that: he was given that job because he was not going to make trouble, I think. It's a very peculiar thing, because Rusk is an extraordinarily able man. But he rarely got involved in the brawling. He looked on himself as kind of a personal counselor to the President.

M: McGeorge Bundy?

R: Mac had left the White House before I came there. Bundy belongs, in

my book, in a category of political types that--I don't dislike them, I distrust them, and again not on personal but on policy grounds. Now people talk about Bundy as being a very deep, thoughtful guy. My impression of Bundy was that he was a guy who shot from the hip, that he reacted too quickly, as I think McNamara did. Bundy and McNamara are in many ways I think quite similar.

M: Very good friends, too. That probably explains it.

R: That's right. They are. They're very similar political types, or nonpolitical types; that is, neither of them could be elected fence viewer. There is a kind of arrogance about them; there's a kind of hauteur in a sense, which I don't particularly like. But I have no reason to believe that Bundy was not totallly loyal to Johnson. I think that he felt that perhaps Johnson should have listened to him more than he did, because after all he, Bundy, knew a great deal more about things than Johnson did, which is a doubtful proposition.

M: You said that your first conversation with Johnson took place in October of 1964.

R: Just before the 1964 elections.

M: Then what was the subsequent nature of your relationship with him after that time?

R: I didn't see him again until in the spring of 1965 when we had this ADA meeting with Johnson. Valenti was there, and Moyers. At this point there was, as I say, a split inside the liberal movement, the ADA, on the war. I certainly wasn't a hawk by the standards of that time. I have become a hawk by today's standards, 1970.

M: Everybody else has moved.

R: A lot of people have gone by waving, yes. I presented to the President at that meeting an argument of the views that I held on Southeast Asia. They were funny ones. I didn't want to draw the line in Vietnam because once you draw the line, once you really put your stack in, then your credibility is involved as far as every place else in the world is concerned . I was very leery of Vietnam. I knew a hell of a lot about it even then. I thought that it was like building in a swamp. You see, it didn't make a dove out of me. The fact is I said that we ought to build our defense of Southeast Asia in Thailand. I had argued this as early as 1962 in ADA and with the government and felt that Thailand had an indigenous nationalist tradition that was quite strong, certainly far more viable than Vietnam and so on. I made this pitch and wrote it up; indeed, it appeared in the papers at that time. But I saw the President then in the spring, in February or March, whenever it was when the ADA group was over.

M: Incidentally, I think it has to be a little later than that because didn't he read you the Johns Hopkins speech? That was made April 7, so I think it must have been April. Or late March perhaps, he was reading you a draft maybe.

R: I guess it was March. I'm trying to remember when the article I wrote appeared in print, which was the speech I gave to ADA and the one that I gave to the President, called "Liberals and Vietnam." That can be checked very easily. But I think it was March it

appeared in print. I have a feeling it was right around in there.

One of my big objections to the way we were conducting business in Southeast Asia was that we didn't seem to have any overall policy, and the President's speech at Johns Hopkins seemed to me to fill that gap very well. It was a damned good speech, even if Dick Goodwin did write it.

M: There's one who has gone by waving.

R: Yes. Well, that's the way it goes.

In a sense, I suppose I could say I owed my job to the New York Times. I wrote an article in the fall, I guess, of 1965 in the New York Times, which they with their characteristic banality entitled--it was in the Times Magazine--"A Professor Votes for Mr. Johnson." In it I tried to assess his strengths and weaknesses and said he was a pretty good man. I don't think I pulled any punches. I criticized the Dominican intervention as a complete flop. I defended the strategy in Southeast Asia. I praised him for getting rid of the MLF, and so on. That article appeared, and then I guess the next thing that happened was Bill Moyers and Hayes Redmon, who was Moyers' sort of chief cook and bottle washer, his PR man--Hayes Redmon and I had gotten to know each other in the 1964 campaign.

You know, things happen, and it's very curious how things happen. They happen with no sequential logic to them at all. I used to think that everything was on a wheel. You'd spin the wheel, and wherever it landed you'd pull a name up and say, "Oh, today is Roche day." "Today is somebody else's day." If nothing happens

that day, then it goes back into the mass again, and nobody thinks about it again for three or four months. Well, Moyers had been suggesting that I ought to go to work for the administration, and I said, "I don't really particularly want to go to work in government. I certainly don't want to be an assistant secretary of health, education and welfare, or all the rest of this nonsense. I used to be dean of a university, and I don't particularly enjoy that kind of administration. I'd like some kind of a policy job, but there aren't that many of those around," and so on.

On a completely separate track, Bill Bundy had read this article I wrote in the spring of 1965 and wrote me a very nice letter about it arguing that I was wrong, wrong on several points at any rate, but nonetheless congratulating me on the article. I guess that Moyers and Bundy had crossed on this one.

So the next thing I know, somewhere in the fall of 1965, winter maybe--I never had the ego to keep a diary, which is a mistake I suppose--I got a call from George Ball, under secretary of state at that point, inviting me to come down, he'd like to meet me. So I went down and discovered that Moyers and Bundy were pushing me to be Rostow's replacement as the head of the Policy Planning Office at State when Walt went over to the White House.

M: They were already talking about Walt going to the White House at that point?

R: When did he go to the White House?

M: Bundy left in March of 1966.

R: All right, this may have been, let's say, January of 1966. It could have been that winter some time, 1965-1966. They were interested in my replacing Rostow. Well, I expressed myself rather critically on the subject of the job, which turned into writing country studies, little encyclopedias about Honduras, you know. And I'm not an encyclopedist, whatever you call one. I said that I might be interested in the job, but clearly not along the lines of its present focus. It seemed to me that the real function of this outfit, if it had any function, was to play devil's advocate and to take all the cherished policies of the administration and to try to cut them apart behind the scenes, obviously in camera. Ball seemed to like that idea, and I left the meeting and never heard another word about it. Henry Owen was appointed to the job. I don't know when or what the sequence of time was. Moyers, as I say, had several times asked me if I wanted to go to the Peace Corps and this and that and the other thing, but I had no interest in those things. I never was offered a job as such at all. The only job I was ever offered was in fact the one I took. It's funny.

We now move to March, 1966, I would think. The Honolulu Conference had taken place in February, right?

M: Right.

R: There was a big argument going on inside the administration on how hard we should push on the democratization of South Vietnam. Lodge, of course, was against it on the grounds it was destabilizing. To be perfectly honest, he's right. It is destabilizing.

M: That's right, anywhere.

R: That's right. That's one of the few times Lodge was right, in my recollection. I had been banging away on the subject of the need to broaden the regime. Again Bill Moyers called me and asked me if I would go to Saigon, essentially as a presidential spy to find out whether Lodge and MACV were doing what they were supposed to be doing. They gave me a cover for the job. I was made a consultant to AID.

So I went down and talked to Bill [Moyers] about this. It interested me very much. I headed out for Saigon in April I guess and spent the next, well, almost six weeks, two months--it's hard to be exact at this point--out there sort of just snooping around. Of course, it was kind of funny because everybody knew there was something odd about this, but nobody knew quite what. Lodge once said to me: "Oh Professor, how good to see you--here. Why are you here?"

M: You didn't talk to the President?

R: Yes, I did, in Moyers' office briefly before I left, yes. He said, "I want to know, can they pull it off? What kind of options are there in the democratic development in Vietnam?" Words to that effect. "And I want it frankly. I want it with the bark off," or some such phrase. So I spent time out there doing a lot of research on Vietnamese politics and talking to the people out there, Americans and some Vietnamese. Meanwhile, back in Washington somebody floated a story that I had gone out there to write

the Vietnamese constitution, which was kind of funny. I. F. Stone picked it up and dogged me with it from that point on.

I came back June of 1966 and reported to the President that the options in Vietnam were between the Fourth and the Fifth Republic; that is, with luck we'd get the Fifth Republic, with bad luck we'd get the Fourth; that there was no question in my mind but you could have democratic procedures that could be operative, that the people, so on and so on. But there was no guarantee of stability. I also gave him and Bill Bundy and others a good deal of caustic commentary on the American presence, which I thought was just unbelievable.

M: In what way?

R: I suppose I was one of the first spokesmen for Vietnamization, as it's now called, because it seemed to me that the only way we could possibly do this thing in Vietnam was by getting the Viets into the action. Now what happened in July of 1965 was that McNamara was given the war to run. He and his Mickey Mouse state department, the ISA, came up with this scenario that it was going to take two years, a limited war scenario , and at the end of two years things would be all right. Now part of this involved getting the children off the streets. That is, the whole fundamental premise of the McNamara operation was to get the Viets off the street, run them in to sit in the balcony in box seats and watch us while we win this war: "They're just a nuisance if you get them in there. You've got to train them, and they're corrupt" and that kind of thing.

So what was happening when I was in Vietnam in 1966 was this incredible input of Americans and American stuff just piling into this little country and literally tearing its social fabric. I really felt that we should have cut two-thirds on the size, and we might have increased the efficiency 50 per cent. Although I have some warm feelings about PX's and the rest of it from my own experience in the Second [World] War, I don't really think you have to have eleven Americans in the tail for one up front. I mean this is just a little too much. Of course, the American operation, as I told President Johnson when I got back, resembled the Holy Roman Empire going to war. You had all these feudalities. You had the Teutonic knights off in one end, and you had the Bohemians here, and you had the AID over there, and you had this and that and the other thing. It was a shambles. Saigon was just--I mean the whole thing.

At any rate, I came back and reported to the Democratic leadership. I reported to him, and then he asked me to repeat to the Democratic leadership what I had said about the possibilities of democratization. Of course I was debriefed, as they say, by everybody and his third cousin. Then he had me go out and have a little press conference out in the lobby there in the White House. Then I went off to try to cure myself of dysentery. Moyers said to me before I left, "Look, we want to get you on board." I figured, "Well, all right, I'm not accepting anything." I've always been an outsider. I've always been a loner. I always end up in these odd

positions that people then attribute to my masterful scheming, and the fact is that I have singular talent for accidental eminence. I was made national chairman of ADA in 1962, for example. I called my wife up to tell her about it, and she said, "I suppose you were the outstanding Irish liberal candidate in a reserve supply of one." And, you know, that's probably about it.

So I went up to Martha's Vineyard, as a matter of fact. Then the phone rang one day, and it was Bill [Moyers]. He said, "We'd like to have you join the administration, either part-time or full-time." This was August of 1966. "The President wants to have you around." I said, "Well, I certainly would not do it part-time because I don't think you can do that. I'd have to come down and do it full-time. What's the job?" Here I guess it gets a little tricky, because Moyers had his own apparatus scattered around the government. Really, I think he wanted me in there to plug into his private presidential operation, which included people at State and other places around the government.

M: Who were working now contrary to the President?

R: No, no. Bill Moyers was attempting, I think, if he could put it himself, to protect Johnson from certain characteristics that he felt were unfortunate. Now to do this Bill built up his own kind of apparatus so he'd have information, intelligence. He had his own network around to try to keep abreast of things. It happens all the time in government. I think he wanted me in this. I said that I was under no circumstances going to become an ornament.

I did not have any interest in coming down to Washington and being some kind of an ornament. I said, "You've already got Goldman." He said, "No, no. We want you to work." I said, "All right, that's fine. That I would be interested in doing."

So I went down and talked to Bill and the President briefly, and I agreed to go in the White House, essentially to be another eye and another ear I think is the phrase that was used, sort of a roaming assignment mostly on foreign affairs. But I also did a lot on domestic. I ended up doing a lot of speech writing. Harry McPherson and I wrote just about everything that came out of there, that is, final draft. Obviously we didn't type the drafts, although in many cases we had to throw out the originals and rewrite them ourselves. But that was the background of it.

M: In no sense were you Goldman's replacement?

R: No. What happened on this was one of these wild things that happen. It's known as Roche's luck. They were bringing me aboard on an independent track. I think it's fair to say that they knew Goldman was unhappy. But the fact is that I agreed on the phone that I would come down full-time and be special consultant to the President in late August. I guess it must have been about the twenty-fifth or somewhere in there. September 7, I think, I took office.

The day before I was to take office, so to speak, to be sworn in, Goldman got himself boozed up at a dinner party with Pete Lisagor and Hugh Sidey and a couple of other vultures who took him off to the Madison, and he spilled his guts. Literally, the sequence was

Goldman bleeding all over the papers on Tuesday; Roche is appointed special counsultant to the President on Wednesday; Goldman resigns: Roche becomes special consultant; so post hoc, ergo propter hoc, it stands to reason, you see, that I was his replacement. Whereas, in fact, my thing had already been locked up, and I suppose this thing [Roche's commission on wall] over here had been printed and signed already. I don't know. They didn't know Goldman was going to shove off. The Times christened me the intellectual-in-residence. It used to annoy me, and I gave it up after a while and figured, "What the hell, as long as they spell my name right."

And I never had the functions. I made it clear from the outset I was not going to be tucked away in the ladies' room over there at the White House in the East Wing. I was in the West Wing within a month, I'd say. No, just after we got back from the President's Asian trip I moved into the West Wing, which was November 5 or something like that.

M: So you never were really performing the functions that a lot of people thought you were?

R: No, and it wasn't that I didn't make it clear either. When the appointment was announced and there was a lot of speculation on this, Moyers made it clear I was not Goldman's successor. I said that, first of all, I didn't think there was such a job as presidential ambassador to the intellectuals; and, second, if there was, then my enemies were all correct, I was the last man in

the world for it because I happened to have very little respect for most of them. But a little matter of that sort didn't bother me. As I say, you can't kick. What can you do? The story goes out, "intellectual-in-residence," and that's it.

M: You mentioned the Asian trip. Was that one of your first functions?

R: Twice. Moyers, McPherson, Symington and I advanced it; that is, we went the whole circle around and then back out again. We figured it out once. It was something like 50,000 miles in five weeks or something like that, just incredible. Yes,that was the first major assignment.

M: But then you did get with the President, too?

R: What happened was, they sent me out to Manila with the Secretary of State. The President headed for Pago Pago. We came back on Sunday or Saturday night; the President left Monday morning for Hawaii and Pago Pago and Australia and New Zealand. You see, before you go to any conference like the Manila Conference you've got to have the communiques drafted. Obviously, you don't walk into one of these things and say, "Well, who's going to sit down and write the communique?" Ideally you have all the documents done in advance, or drafts of them. Obviously, there are modifications to be made. So I was asked to go with the Secretary of State and do the draft papers for the Manila Conference, which I did. I'd say at least a third of it I wrote on the plane on the way to Manila. Then I joined up again with the President. He went on his way, I went on to Manila. The President came to Manila, then I went on with him from there.

Well, that isn't accurate either, because the President sent me from Manila to Saigon. There was a momentary crisis in Saigon because some of the Vietnamese were engaging in a little blackmail, threatening to resign from the government just with Johnson on the horizon. You see, it was a lovely attempt to strong-arm him. So the President asked me to fly to Saigon and see Bill Porter, the chargé. Lodge was at the beach or someplace. That's not fair. I think he had gone from Manila to the beach. But at any rate, I went to Saigon and spent three days there making sure that things were quiet. Then I went to Seoul and rejoined the President in Seoul, Korea.

M: Did you get to watch him pretty closely as he dealt with the other chiefs of state at Manila?

R: No. I was not in the inner sanctum at that point at all.

M: I'm thinking of the Philip Geyelin image of the way he doesn't relate to other chiefs of state.

R: All I know about it is from later experience watching him at Punta del Este and Adenauer's funeral. But from what happened at Manila, as conveyed to me by people who were there, in and out, hearsay evidence but pretty good hearsay, he ran the show very well from all I could gather.

It was a peculiar relationship, because after all the United States was in a situation where it was dealing essentially with clients. So that you didn't have a free-for-all and great forensic displays on his part were to a certain degree

with a captive audience at Manila. In general, from what I've seen of him when he was talking to these people, as at Adenauer's funeral, for example, when they had a working funeral--it was a brand new introduction of a bureaucratic device and people came and saw him, and I saw him dealing with two or three of them--he seemed to me to be very damned effective in close range. I think sometimes he overkilled to the extent that when a visitor got out of the room, suddenly he say, "My Jesus, I haven't got my watch any more! And he didn't steal it either, I gave it to him!"

M: What do you think he was really tring to accomplish with something like Manila? Did he have goals that he went out there to accomplish, or was it mostly cosmetic?

R: This gets us involved in the whole problem of what went wrong in Vietnam from the retrospect of 1970. He was convinced that one of the most important things we had to have in Vietnam was the kind of multi-national presence that had been in Korea, and so we had this crazy business of "Send more flags." The State Department people were running around the world trying to get somebody to send a contingent. In the recent British election Harold Wilson got a crack off about it. He said that Johnson had asked him to send some help to Vietnam, and was prepared to settle for one bagpiper with the flag. That is, I think ,true; it was cosmetic in that sense. But the whole thing was to try to make it clear that this was not just the United States out there fighting, both for purposes of domestic opinion and foreign,

and quite legitimately.

You see, the U.N. has gone to hell since 1950 from this particular perspective. In 1950 you could get a majority vote in the U.N. Assembly for the peace-keeping function, so the U.N. flag went into Korea. Today, good Lord, you couldn't come within a hundred votes of it, if that. So he was trying to work out a substitute. One of the things that he always emphasized was the extent to which we have got to build up the non-communistic Asian states, the ones around the rim of China and so on. So it was both cosmetic and at the same time designed to try to get these non-communist states in the habit of working together.

There was some very delicate stuff involved in it, because you see, for example, SEATO headquarters is in Manila and the Secretary General of SEATO is a guy named Vargas, a Philippine general. Johnson didn't want to get SEATO involved in this at all, so they had to find a pretext to ship Vargas out of town so he wouldn't even be there for the Manila Conference because he didn't want to confuse this with the SEATO alliance. This was going to be a great new foundation for a non-communist Asia. Then if you go read the stuff, I say with some immodesty, that came out of it, at least on paper it reads pretty well.

M: You talked to people in all those countries when you were advancing it and then again at other times. What's your impression about the Clark Clifford justification for his turn-around in the summer of 1968, that when he went out there they told him privately that

they didn't care if we got out. They weren't going to help; they didn't think it was worth it, and so on, which made him change his position. Do you think he's depicting them accurately?

R: Yes. One of the things that annoyed Clark Clifford was that, say, Koreans behaved like Koreans instead of like American Democrats with a big D. Clifford, I think, was later very much embittered by the Thieu government's screwing up the Four Party talks in Paris which probably cost Humphrey the election. Certainly in an election as close as that one had the momentum that originally arrived with the announcement of the talks and the total ceasefire continued for a week, or a full five days or whatever it was--October 31 wasn't it?

M: Thirty-first.

R: Four days--I think Humphrey might have made it over the top. Now Clark felt that this was an act of treachery on the part of Thieu. My reaction to it was that it was exactly what I would have done if I had been Thieu. That doesn't mean I was happy about it. The Vietnamese are very smart people. They're sitting there looking at this, and they've got to choose a candidate in the American election. Who are they going to choose, Humphrey or Nixon? It would take them all of two minutes to figure that one out. Humphrey's running around the country half a dove, half of this, half of that, God knows what. The Salt Lake City speech--the backgrounders that were going out saying that actually this, that, and the other thing. So if I had been Thieu I would have

done exactly what he did. I'd have figured "Screw Humphrey" and taken action in that direction.

M: It didn't take Republican intervention with Thieu?

R: No, I don't think so. That is, I'm sure that the boys--you see, Buy Diem was the Vietnamese ambassador in Washington, a very intelligent character, a rascal. He didn't need Anna Chennault to tell him the facts of life. I've talked to Buy Diem like two or three hours at a stretch on occasion, and he knows plenty. He knows about as much about American politics as I do. The conspiracy notion here--I mean, I'm sure Anna Chennault did something of this order, absolutely certain of it in fact that somebody did, because messages did go out saying that the Republicans wanted this screwed up.

M: Any names involved other than Anna Chennault? That's the one that surfaced, but are there others?

R: My own hunch is that it's conceivable it could even have gone out of the Vietnamese embassy. I just said it's "conceivable." You know, there are all kinds of odd and interesting machines around to read other people's mail. But that's something which can't be gone into in detail. As I say, the notion that Thieu and Buy Diem and others had to hold a seminar to decide which guy to support for president doesn't make sense at all.

Now, the same way with the Koreans and the others. They behaved like Koreans. The Thais persist in behaving like Thais, the others, and so on. Clark gets annoyed about this. Now from the viewpoint of American national interests, I agree. I think they ought to pull

up their socks. I think we let some of these thieves get away. The Filipinos, my God, if there ever was a large scale larceny operation it has been American aid to the Philippines. I think that a great deal ought to have been done about these things. But on the other hand, I refuse to say that you change your fundamental aspect of your foreign policy because you're dealing with a bunch of guys who are playing their own game.

It's the same with NATO. Look, the Germans, I think the last time I saw it, have got all the way to 2.3 per cent of GNP going into defense in the Federal Republic. No wonder they've got prosperity. I think that it's outrageous for the United States to be picking up the tab for NATO the way it has. But on the other hand, I'm not going to say to these guys, "All right, if you don't pull up your socks and deal at a higher level, we're going to pull out." Because I think that the notion of NATO is too valuable for that kind of spoil-sport play.

Now I happen to think the same thing about the Pacific, without engaging in overly facile analogies, that is, that the Thai are far more interested in getting choppers for themselves than they are in the defense of the free world--a phrase which always puts me up the wall.

M: In regard to Thailand.

R: There is a qualitative line of distinction between a communist totalitarian state and even an authoritarian state like, say, the Greek junta now or the Thai. But to think that every night the Thai sit down and think

about "What have we done for the free world today?" is pretty ridiculous.

But I think Clark's bitterness on this is an overkill job, as I never had any doubts from the outset that in my own mind there's only one way to do it--and I've got memos on this that go back to the fall of 1966--namely, we have to do in Vietnam what we did in Korea: create an army from scratch, start at the ground and go right up, build. Our lead time in Korea was eighteen months. First, I think it was the Capitol Division. It was eighteen months before the United States training mission in Korea got a division out, a Korean division that was trained through the mill. Now once you get the mass critical, of course, the training process then repeats itself geometrically, and up you go. But the thought that you're going to get a platoon from New Zealand and a regiment from Australia--these are all right to show flags, but the real job had to be done in Vietnam on the ground, training the Vietnamese. This is a job we didn't do because it didn't fit Bob McNamara's blueprint for a limited war.

M: Were there people in the government who were strongly suggesting that other than yourself?

R: Oh yes, Bill Bundy was very good on this. One of the original pioneers, a guy who really fought for this hard, was Graham Martin, who was the Ambassador to Bangkok, Thailand, and who literally ran McNamara off his turf. McNamara tried to put MACTHAI, the military aid program in Thailand, under the same command as MACV in Vietnam, namely

Westmoreland, first Harkins and then Westmoreland, in effect setting up an independent functional feudal barony, a military barony in Southeast Asia that went right across national lines and ambassador's jurisdictions. Obviously, this was not under either the ambassador in Saigon or the ambassador in Thailand.

Martin just wouldn't play. In fact, he refused to even let Westmoreland into Thailand. He has the right to. He refused to let him in except once to attend a SEATO exercise. He insisted on MACTHAI being put under a separate commander, because he said, "By God, I'm in charge for the President of the United States. I'm in charge of the efforts taken by our government in Thailand, not somebody working for Bob McNamara." Thais were coming over there with shopping lists. They wanted choppers and they wanted jets, and he said, "Learn to walk," which is one of the first lessons. I mean, learn to walk, it's very important. One of the troubles we have in Vietnam is that the mechanization is such that nobody bothers to clear roads any more, and you think choppers.

Well, back to the point. Martin had made this very strongly from Thailand. Westmoreland, for example, in 1965 had weighed into the Pentagon with a request for M-16 rifles for ARVN. Now, the first thing that had to be done obviously with the South Vietnamese army, with ARVN, was to modernize its equipment. Garands are plenty useful things if you're shooting moose or something, but the modernization program for the ARVN would be the first step in the Vietnamization process. As of let's say the fall of 1965, the spring

of 1965 certainly, a platoon of the North Vietnamese and main line VC outgunned an ARVN batallion because they had the 7.62 weapon stuff that they brought in. These poor little bastards, what are they supposed to do? Charge into a village and so on? So ARVN was outgunned. All right, Westmoreland said, "They need guns." Nothing happened. That was in 1965, the fall of 1965. The order for the M-16's for ARVN was issued by Clark Clifford in April or May of 1968.

M: Why?

R: There's a whole series of answers to it. I can't be sure. First is it ran contrary to the Pentagon scenario, which was, as I said, "Let's keep the Viets out of this. They just make it more complicated." But I think more basic than that is what I think of as the computer fallacy, the systems analysis nonsense. I'm sure that when Westy's request for these M-16's came in they put the question to the computer in the Pentagon. They said, "Now in terms of cost effectiveness, here you have a platoon of PAVN, of North Vietnamese, and a battallion of ARVN with superior firing power in the smaller unit. What is the cheapest and most effective way to provide ARVN with fire superiority?"

So they put it in, wheels turn, machines click, out comes on the tape, "Air and artillery." All right, fine. So every time an ARVN company gets pinned down they blow a whistle and get on the horn. Out come the goddamned jets and the 155 howitzers someplace thirty miles away and zero in, and it has a marvelous effect, all right. It gets rid of the enemy. It also blows the whole goddamned countryside up. Now it's all very well if you're going to fight a war on sombody

else's turf to do this, but if you're talking about fighting a war in terms of maintaining a nation you don't do this. If you come into a village and there are a couple of snipers in it, you send in a couple of guys and chase them out. You don't blow the village up.

M: Or you shouldn't; sometimes we do.

R: That's right, I know, but that was the problem. I'm sure that it grew out of this kind of cost effectiveness analysis, which got us into it. It did absolutely nothing for ARVN; that is, ARVN, all they remained were the decoys. They went out and waited until somebody shot at them and called for airplanes. I've written on this at some length. I'm going to write on it again because this is something I feel very strongly about.

M: Once you got back from your Manila breaking-in, that's a pretty good way to get broken in as a new White House aide.

R: Broken in is right. We were all zombies. There's a marvelous story in this. The President went in to speak to the Korean National Assembly, and he was going to take the chopper out to Kimpo. The plane was waiting, and we had to get there early so they drove us from that Walker Valley place, the resort, to the airport. We got on the plane, and there was a TV set on the plane. We turned it on, and they had Korean television. There was Lyndon Johnson speaking on television. This was in the President's compartment of the plane. Moyers and Carol Welch, who was a secretary and a very nice gal, Harry I guess, myself, the four of us were sitting watching it. I had written the speech that the President gave to the Korean National

Assembly. Harry had gone over it and changed some sentences and Moyers had gone over it and changed some sentences, but basically I had written this draft. Everybody was familiar with the draft, and for reasons which were rather funny. I'll tell you in a minute.

So we were sitting there watching it, and gee, it's going great. Bill's sitting there listening to a sentence, and Moyers turns to Harry and he says, "Was that yours or was that mine or was that John's?" Then they panned the camera behind Johnson as he's speaking, and Carol looks and she says, "Gee, that's funny. There's a Korean there sitting behind Johnson on the podium. He looks just like John McCormack." We said, "Oh no, come on." So then we said, "Well, politicians all look alike." So then another pan, and Moyers said, "Well, that's funny. The guy sitting next to him looks like Carl Hayden." So again, we all, "I guess politicians are the same the world around." Then they did a panning of the audience, and there was Hubert Humphrey. We suddenly came awake to the fact that we were watching a tape of the speech that Johnson gave to the Congress in November of 1963. We thought this was the same speech, and we'd all written it. The whole crew of us were involved in the speech that he was giving, and we didn't know the difference. This was wild!

M: That sounds zombie-like.

R: We were all dead when we got off that [plane]--and a wild ride back. The President was going in the hospital and hadn't announced it. This was one of the credibility problems that arose, because Moyers had

told the press in Manila--and I know he did tell them because I was in the room when he did--that when he got back to the United States President Johnson was going to campaign on the West Coast for a number of Democratic candidates. Then on the plane he said he wasn't; he was going to go to the hospital and be operated on for ileitis, or whatever it was. Bill said, "Well, they're expecting you to campaign." The President said, "Well, who's expecting me? I didn't say anything about campaigning. Did you tell them I was going to campaign?" Bill said, "No, I didn't tell them." Subsequently Johnson was jumped all over because he'd said he was going to campaign and then denied angrily that he'd ever said it. The fact is he didn't say it.

But he and Mrs. Johnson had kept the fact of his sickness in his stomach completely a secret, and Moyers had set that one up for him completely innocently and inadvertently. But that was often used in the catalog of credibility. I know perfectly well Bill did tell the press that because, as I say, I was in that hotel in Manila, the "Filipanas," and heard him backgrounding about a dozen correspondents.

But the President was in a bad mood, sore and hurtful. It was a strange ride in many ways. We hit the worst weather I've ever hit in my life flying. He wanted to get in to Andrews in time to hit the television screens, so he had old Jim Cross gunning that damned airplane full speed. We finally shifted to Dulles and got in about nine o'clock. But I have never in my life seen anything like it. The plane was full of the sickest, stunned zombies. I fell asleep

in the plane finally. I took a pill. I was scared to death. I took a pill and went off to sleep, all buckled in.

When we arrived at Dulles I was back in the corner right outside the President's cabin. There were two tables with benches like seats on the opposite side. You could work there or play cards. I had gotten in a corner and buckled in with just a couple of pillows and had gone to sleep. When the plane arrived at Dulles everybody got up and left. I woke up suddenly, and the plane was empty. I got up, and the steward came out. I said, "My God, my family is out there." I went out the back door and went down and into the airport, missed the ceremonies. What was funny was that my wife was over at the ceremonies. She saw McPherson, and she said, "Where's John?" Harry said, "Oh, he got off the plane right behind me. I saw him." Then she said to Jimmie Symington, "Jimmie, where's John?" "I don't know. He was right ahead of me. I saw him just a minute ago." She said, "What a bunch of zombies." She never saw anything like it. However, it was a noble victory.

M: He went to the hospital. What kind of job did you find yourself doing as you settled back in at the White House in late 1966?

R: The President centralized the speech writing.

M: Has Goodwin gone by now?

R: Oh, yes. He'd gone, I think, early in 1966 or late 1965, one or the other. There's a long and involved story as to whether he was fired or left. Jack Valenti is my authority for saying that he and Moyers kept the President from firing him about five times.

Finally it was just too much, so he got rid of him.

There was a vacuum in the speech operation due, again, to historical conditions over which I have very little knowledge in depth. For openers, when I arrived in the White House there was a guy sitting in the basement in the corner room whom I took to be the White House bookmaker. His name was Kintner, and he sort of sat in there. I figured he was taking bets. I didn't know what else he did. He looked like a bookie.

M: He had a high title, though.

R: Yes, very fancy.

M: Counsel.

R: Yes. Well, Kintner had come in; President Johnson allegedly had even said, "He is going to be my assistant president." He was going to be the great relater of Johnson to the world. I'm completely illiterate about the media universe, but I gather he had been president of CBS or NBC or something.

M: NBC.

R: Yes, that's right. He was in my judgment a thoroughly unpleasant man who kissed Johnson's ass with an assiduousness that could only nauseate the onlooker. He used to write his memos in third person. "If the President feels . . . I think the President should do the following," sort of thing and so on. I gather he had some problems. I don't think I ever saw him sober. But at any rate he was down in the corner there theoretically supervising a speech operation which he had set up, which was quite an operation in terms of personnel. He brought

in a whole collection of professional writers, so-called, on the notion that the guy who had once written Henry Ford's speeches, or somebody's speeches, could write anything. In other words, writing a speech on defense or foreign policy is something which can be done by a professional writer even though he doesn't know shit from Shinola about the subject matter. Presumably you get the peasants to bring him in a brief, and he then sits down and on the basis of this can write a speech. Well, this was a complete flop as a system, as you might imagine. At any rate, the Executive Office Building was full of characters who were speech writers, and in my judgment they couldn't write worth a damn. Most of them weren't even very good writers.

And the President blew his lid. Kintner by this time was sort of out of circulation. He'd sit in his office talking to people for hours and hours and hours and things of that sort. He had one staff meeting or two. Every so often he'd call a staff meeting to assert his baronial standing. I went to one shortly after I arrived, in fact three or four days after I arrived, and he was very nasty. It was eight o'clock in the morning, which is not a time I take pleasantly to anybody being nasty. I don't take it anyhow. He ended up having sat there and asked so-and-so to discuss this and so-and-so to discuss that, and Juanita Roberts explained how we ought to be very careful about whom we write letters to and things of that sort. "If the White House stationery gets out--" Kinter came to me, and he said, "Now, we have an intellectual here who will give us a few philosophical thoughts," or some such thing as that, a very nasty crack. I simply

said to him: "Intellectuals where I come from know how to keep their trap shut until they know the turf." That began and ended a long friendship.

In any case he drifted off but his crew remained, that is the writers remained. I tried to fire a couple of them for two years. You know, Lyndon Johnson would never fire anybody. I mean the stories of Johnson as a ruthless guy, I don't know where they started or who started them because you couldn't get him to fire anybody. We had the most incredible collection of incompetents around there just tucked away.

M: Just shoved aside but kept on the payroll?

R: Yes, that's right. Johnson finally blew his cork about the Rose Garden stuff and proclamations and all the rest of this stuff he has to sign every day, so he called Harry and me in, I would guess in November. Let's see, he had his operation and went down to the Ranch, and we went down to the Ranch. Connie and I went down there just about Thanksgiving of 1966, and he let go. He told me none of these people could write for shit and so forth and I was a good writer and so forth and so on, which was in fact true. I'm not the world's greatest writer, but there was nobody around the White House who could write better than I could. So he said that he wanted everything that went to him, a speech or a proclamation or anything that went to him for signature or to be issued or anything, to be approved by McPherson or myself. Thus began the avalanche of stuff, of proclamations, of, you know, Captive Nations' Week and all this

stuff had to be cleared.

M: Which is this week.

R: Is it really?

M: Isn't it the third week in July?

R: I forget. We managed to kill it one year. Congress got quite annoyed. It has always struck me as kind of a silly thing. I mean, I'm a great believer in Lithuanians and Latvians and so on having a right to freedom, but there's something so phony about it.

At any rate, I had that kind of job to do, Harry and I. On the major speeches Harry and I would both work on them. Sometimes I did drafts; sometimes he did. At one time I took, I guess, about five days off. He said he wanted to make a really good speech at the Lincoln Memorial on Lincoln's Birthday in 1967. He told me, "Now I want you to give me a real good speech, the kind of speech you'd write for Jack Kennedy." Kind of funny, "the kind of speech you'd write for Jack Kennedy."

M: He still identified you as [a Kennedy man].

R: Yes. Not only that, but the point is, you see, that people would write speeches for Kennedy that they wouldn't give to him because they think of him as a peasant. You see, it's that kind of thing. He had that tremendous chip on his shoulder about this business.

So I literally took off about four days and sat down and went through Lincoln's collected papers, which I have, and I wrote him a speech which I think is probably about as good a speech as I ever wrote in my life. He loved it, and he gave it at the Lincoln Memorial.

Then, I don't know, you get travel, you get all kinds of things. He'd call you up. You know he had direct lines, and he'd call up and get therapy.

M: Therapy by him talking?

R: Him talking, sure.

M: Not you talking.

R: No. Well, he'd ask you what you thought about something, or yell. He would sometimes start to bellow. He used that horn on the desk, that microphone for his phone, so that by the time it came out of my phone it sounded lika riot on 14th Street as heard through the subway tunnel at 42nd. I couldn't understand half of what he was saying. I'd just hold the phone out at arm's length and every so often say, "Yes, sir," and let it go at that, because he was just talking. So many people, again, have misunderstood him, it seems to me. They thought he was screaming at them; in fact he was screaming at the universe, and they were sort of just witnesses to it. I used to look up and see who was down there, who had been in on the off-the-record appointment list. Usually I'd discover that some guy had been in there that he wanted to kick the shit out of and he couldn't for political reasons, so when he got finished he'd hit some staff phone button and bitch about the world. If you took it personally, as some of my colleagues seemed to have, it could have been pretty rough. I didn't take it personally. I knew he couldn't be talking about me. What the hell! (Laughter)

M: When you'd write him one of those beautiful speeches that he really

wanted, then would he follow it?

R: Oh, he was great on this. There was one thing about him. You see, I'd broken in with Kennedy, and I wrote some stuff for other people earlier, and Hubert Humphrey. With Kennedy there were always five kibitzers in the back room. Everybody thinks he's a speech writer. The number of people in this world who think they are speech writers is astronomical, and the fact is they're not. Speech writing is kind of an art form. Both Kennedy and Humphrey had the habit of passing the speech out to everybody who came into the office that day, "Here, take a look at this" sort of thing. So somebody would say, "Oh, that's a terrible speech. You don't want to say that." Oh, God, there would be drafts and counterdrafts and counter-counterdrafts and every other damned thing.

On the other hand, with Johnson you wrote a speech and you sent it downstairs and he liked it, he might call up and say: "You know, you've got me using a word. I can't use that word. That's an eastern intellectual word you've got in there." He'd change a word or two he didn't like. As a matter of fact, he was usually right. But he'd change a word, and then he'd sit on it. I mean, he'd probably show it to somebody, but you never had this business of the six kibitzers. You didn't have to fight for a speech right down to the last second to make sure that somebody else didn't walk in and hand him another copy or another draft.

M: But then you get things like the "nervous Nellie" thing in Chicago. No speech writer ever put that in a speech, did they?

R: No. I wasn't there at that. It was a Democratic fund raiser, wasn't it?

M: Yes, something like that.

R: He flew up from Texas. No, that was the kind of phrase that he probably got on the plane from talking to a lot of his friends and just threw it in. Actually, it was not an unfair statement. American politics is a pretty rough game, and I think "nervous Nellis" is--there are a lot worse things I can think of calling people. But of course it got picked up in such a fearful way.

M: Well, "coonskin on the wall" at Cam Ranh Bay, for example.

R: Well, what was he supposed to say to these fellows? "Get out there and die for a compromise"? Damn it, that's the trouble. Here you've got a president of the United States, he's out talking to the troops in the field. In effect, he's fighting a war with his hands cuffed because of the whole notion of limited war. You can't go in and invade North Vietnam, blow the dikes, bomb Haiphong out of existence. But he can't get out on the battlefield and say, "Now you get out there and die and fight in order that we have a good bargaining position." You can't! On this sort of thing I think the critics were just a bunch of idiots.

But on the speeches, no, he was very good about it. He was not a prima donna about them either. You didn't constantly get nudged on something: "Change this, change that, change the other thing." Basically he read it, liked it, "Okay, go."

M: How was the staff put together by the time you got there? Had

Califano already emerged as the sort of domestic chief?

R: Yes. I was in an interesting position then because I had no line operation. I didn't want one. I worked out ground rules with Rostow in foreign affairs, which were very simple, namely, "I'll say anything I want to the President, and I'll send you copies of it."

M: To, but not through? Right?

R: Right. To Walt. I'd send him a copy. I said, "As far as the town is concerned, you talk to the town. I will not talk to the town. I will not be behind your back talking to State. You're the guy in here that talks to the town."

Walt and I got along beautifully together. You see, I was an opponent of bombing North Vietnam from the outset. Not on moral grounds or anything like that, I thought it was a crazy attempt at a shortcut, limited price war. It wouldn't work. In fact, it could very well be counterproductive. I suggested in 1965--it's in print, it's in an article--that bombing North Vietnam could lead North Vietnam to commit its one great card, namely it's army, in the South, which it did. I'm not arguing that it would not have done it anyhow. But the fact is that the notion that you could punish North Vietnam to the bargaining table struck me as inherently absurd, within the parameters of limited war.

President Johnson knew that. Walt knew it. Just as they both knew that I was opposed to the Dominican operation. But the ground rules were simply that as far as I was concerned I was not going to undercut the President in public. I didn't talk to

newspapers. The miracle was that the newspapermen weren't smart enough to start pushing on some of this stuff; that is, they didn't raise these things with me in such a fashion as to make it tricky.

But at any rate I got along fine with Walt, for whom I have immense respect. He unfortunately has something of the computer. My criticism of Rostow is an intellectual criticism. He believes because there's a question there has to be an answer. He believes far more than I do in the capacity of "by acts of will," of men's capacity by acts of will to reshape the environment. Walt was always trying to reorganize Vietnamese political parties, for example. I kept telling him, "Walt, for Christ's sake, you're no good at Vietnamese politics. You couldn't be elected precinct captain in Saigon. Leave them alone. Let them there work it out themselves." Walt had an erector set. He was always ready with it. Partly I suppose that's being an economist. I think economists come equipped with erector sets. But I got along fine with Walt.

Joe was a very interesting guy. I liked Joe very much, too. I got along very well with just about everybody I think. Kintner had been out to kill Califano and didn't succeed, obviously. Joe was immensely capable. Nobody ever accused him of having much political judgment. Among my other jobs I had to placate the Vice President on occasions when Califano pushed him over the edge, as occasionally would happen because Humphrey would go out and make a speech, come out for a domestic Marshall Plan or something like that, a Marshall Plan for the cities. This is one I remember.

Johnson would call up Califano and say, "Goddamn that Hubert, can't you tell him something?" So Joe would call up Hubert: "Mr. Vice President, you simply can't say that sort of thing," and so on and so on. Hubert at this point would blow his stack. I don't blame him. The President would then call me and say, "I understand that Hubert has got his feathers ruffled. Now I didn't mean for Joe to put it to him quite that hard. He didn't have to say that. But just somebody tell him. Somebody tell him. I don't want to read the speeches, but somebody tell him." So I took the cue. I'd call up Hubert and tell him the President loved him, and there was just a little misunderstanding, and so forth and so on.

Tape 2 of 2

M: What about the domestic staff relation with the executive departments? Were they pushing them pretty hard?

R: Yes they were, and by God, they were right. One of the things that amazed me was the extent to which Califano, with the very bright and able young men that he got together, was able inside of usually three months to know more about a department than anyone in it, with the possible exception of a guy like Wilbur Cohen in HEW. These guys were good. Their power, and the reason the departments were mad at them all the time, arose from their expertise. The fact is they knew what they were doing. I've seen a number of situations when departments came up with these cockeyed statements, and Califano's boys were able to set them straight on what was on their own business. That was a spectacular unit.

M: This is Larry Levinson and Jim Gaither and Matt Nimetz?

R: Levinson and Gaither, Matt Nimetz, Fred Bohen, Stan Ross. There were a couple of others who sort of drifted in and out of it. No, Califano was destined for great things. Somehow the Mafia missed him. It's a fortunate thing Joe didn't go astray. No, he's a fantastically able guy. As I say, he had to have somebody running political protection for him because he had a capacity for infuriating men. Joe is not particularly tactful.

M: That may be experience. He hadn't really.

R: No, look, it's a chromosome. If Joe lives to be a hundred, he'll be the same guy. He would tell Willard Wirtz to kiss his ass and so forth.

M: Was there that preventing of access, as represented by that example you just gave there, that infuriated some of the higher ups. We've had the same problem in the Nixon [Administration].

R: Yes, well, there's bound to be. You see, the fundamental thing about a cabinet is there is no such thing as a cabinet. A cabinet is just an artificial creation of people who happen to hold jobs at a certain level. You might as well have a meeting of GS-15s. They have no common subjects of discussion. One of the jobs that I had, among other things--Cater was sort of in charge of what I call acrobats for cabinet meetings. We had to figure how to enliven cabinet meetings. We used to sit around and figure out how we could have some subject introduced and somebody come in with charts and so forth and so on. The cabinet secretaries, except for their membership in the cabinet, really have very little in common. For the President

to sit down and take this as a sort of board of directors is not the way the game goes, because he's the only one who has been elected. Nobody has ever been elected Secretary of State or HEW.

Now cabinet members naturally enough get annoyed when their status is not treated with appropriate deference, but on the other hand the president of the United States has a vested interest in achieving certain programs. When he calls up and asks the secretary to do something and nothing happens, and then he gets Califano and Califano finds out who the guy who knows about it is inside the department over there, gets the guy over, they get a proposal together and everything else and hand it to the secretary, the secretary of course goes up in smoke. But he has no right to. The fact is he hasn't done his job. I have no sympathy whatever with this perennial bitching. There's only one way to power in Washington--real power--and that's work. Homework. Really do it.

I'll never forget Johnson briefing out [John] Gardner, the "Great Stone Face," on his budget. Now one of Johnson's problems was he knew too much. If he'd know about half of what he knew he probably would have been better off. He knew more about a lot of these fellows' business than they themselves knew, having been in Congress as long as he had. He had a session with Charlie Schultze, me, Joe, Gardner, Cohen wasn't there [but] some guy from HEW was along, I forget who it was. Gardner was scheduled to go up on the Hill and testify the next day before the Appropriations Subcommittee on the budget.

So Johnson started asking him questions about the budget. "Now, what are you going to say when they say this?" It was really obvious Gardner didn't know what the hell he was talking about. He didn't know anything about it. He wanted to make a speech about excellence, I suppose. So Johnson sort of explained to him patiently. He said, "Now, John, look here. You're going to go before the committee, and Senator So-and-so is on this Appropriations subcommittee. Now this particular provision here is something that he thought up. It's his bill. It goes back to 1956. When you come to that, you stop and say to him, 'Now, Senator, I hope you appreciate the extent to which we found your ideas valuable.'" Marvelous. Instructions that Gardner should have got there. He left and went back and started bitching at HEW that Johnson had been bullying him. Johnson turned to Schultze, and he said, "Charlie, will you please budget him a seeing-eye dog?" Marvelous line!

But this was constantly the situation on domestic things. You had HUD, for example. Now Bob Wood is a nice fellow. Bob Weaver's a nice fellow. Charlie Haar is a nice fellow. The fact of the matter is that they had no more control over the operations of their department than if they'd been on the moon. First of all, they had a geographical problem of being scattered all over Washington in twelve buildings. I think they've finally got themselves a building now. So what you had at HUD was all these operational feudalities in business for themselves, and Weaver, Wood, and Haar are up in the central headquarters, I guess playing

three-handed pinochle. I don't know what else they did. You couldn't get any information out of them. If you wanted to find out what was happening, you didn't call them up.

Califano had his own apparatus, and he knew where to go. If he wanted to find out something about transportation, he got hold of John Robson, and so on around. What the bureaucracy resented about this was of course that they knew that the source of power, as I said a while ago, is work, namely intelligence. One of the ways to keep the president off your turf is not to let him know what you're doing. So the minute that the President set up an apparatus, which was essentially kind of a KGB, I suppose, without the guns, the minute the President was in a position to find out what was going on in your department, you're liable to be in trouble because he's liable to call you up and say: "What are you doing that for?" They had a vested interest in ignorance in the White House, just as Congress has a vested interest in an inefficient executive. It's the same kind of thing. But Califano's outfit was spectacular. It had to be kept, as I say, in a kind of padded cell politically speaking because those guys in ten minutes could create more of a bureaucratic furor than anything I've ever seen in my life.

I'll never forget the night poor Joe got caught in the McNamara-Johnson resignation mess. It was in October, 1967, some time. Some London paper, the Financial Times Telegraph I think, leaked the story McNamara was going to head up the World Bank. Then in rapid successession Bob Kennedy rushed over to the Pentagon in the evening and spent two hours

with McNamara, stories came out that McNamara was quitting because he was fundamentally in doubt about Vietnam, all of the rest of this stuff.

M: How did that leak happen, do you know?

R: Sure. I remember Califano saying it to me as clear as crystal right now. He said, "These two great public relations geniuses, Johnson and McNamara, worked this thing out together. They think they can tell the executive committee of the Bank"--which is eighteen countries or twenty countries--"and ask each of these guys to go home and check it out with his government without there being a leak. They're crazy." It's as simple as that. I assume the British representative leaked it. It came out in London anyhow.

At any rate, within about three hours the situation had degenerated totally. Joe, of course, had been McNamara's special assistant. At this point it was about nine-thirty at night. I came downstairs. Califano called me on the intercom and said, "Come here, will you. Come on down." I said, "All right. What are you doing?" He said, "I'm trying to keep from going insane." Because at this point Johnson wasn't talking to McNamara and McNamara wasn't talking to Johnson, but they were both talking to Califano, like the good friend in the divorce case sort of caught in the middle of it. Poor Joe! I tried to get him to keep a chronology of all his calls that night. I asked him to write it up because it would have been hilarious, what happened. He's the only guy I think that knew the sequence of events.

But Joe is a spectacularly able man. If I were president of

the United States I'd sure as hell want Califano working for me.

M: The staff was pretty well united within itself? No backbiting?

R: His crowd? The whole staff?

M: Well, his staff and the whole crowd.

R: Oh, his staff was first class. Oh, I don't know there may have been some backbiting around. I wasn't involved in it. But I don't think so. One or two of them weren't as good as some of the rest. But no, it was a very harmonious operation. All right, that's Califano.

Kintner left. Cater was down in his corner in the basement, and I frankly never did find out what he did. He wrote a few speeches. He used to write some stuff for Mrs. Johnson, too, I think. He always seemed to be having delegations of educators and people involved in hospital work. I guess he was sort of liaison with HEW. I never got the sense of Cater being really involved, plugged in, as were Califano and McPherson and myself and Marvin. Marvin Watson was a special friend of mine. But Cater was sort of off in his own corner. He seemed like a very competent man. I had the feeling that he had been tremendously buoyed up by the Great Society years, and then there was a letdown as those programs began to sort of become bureaucratized and so forth. I got along fine with him. As far as I know, he got along fine with me. I rarely saw him.

George [Reedy] came along to occupy Kintner's office later in the year. That was, as far as I could figure out, basically a welfare program.

McPherson and I became intimate friends. We had offices right

across from each other. I think Harry is probably one of the finest guys I ever met in my life, of tremendous integrity, and a guy who used to lay into Johnson, too. I mean, he used to really sock it to him.

M: This might be a good point. We mentioned coming over here in the car the Reedy thesis regarding the President's insulation from reality. You indicated then that you think there's not as much to that as Reedy makes.

R: I object to George's confusing his autobiography with reality; that is, it may be Reedy didn't have the balls to argue with Johnson. I'm not saying that there's any requirement one should have. All I'm saying is that I don't think that from that you go on and say nobody did. I've heard Califano stand with President Johnson and say to him, "Mr. President, you are wrong!" Just like that. And Harry, oh boy! Harry used to weigh in, in memos particularly. Harry was, I think, very close to President Johnson in many ways. With all due modesty, I did it. I mean, naturally you're polite to the president of the United States. You're courteous and so on, and you don't go running around Washington the next day saying, "You know what I said to the President yesterday?" or anything of that sort. But George Christian certainly expressed himself independently and firmly with the President. But after all, he was president. We weren't elected president; Johnson was. He was the only president in the White House. Watson certainly disagreed very strongly and expressed himself privately with the President very strongly.

M: What about Watson? Watson seems to have been very unpopular with a great number of people. You indicated that you were a particular friend of his.

R: I never could understand why Watson was so unpopular.

M: Am I reading that in? Is that not correct?

R: No, he was unpopular with a lot of people because he was the guy who always said no on the President's behalf. He was the logistician, so to speak. People would send in requests for this, requests for that, and Marvin was real tough. He could really squeeze a dime, and he did a good job of it. Marvin felt, rightly I think, that if people needed an assistant they should have it not because they wanted to pick up some bureaucratic brownie points but because there was work for the person to do. A lot of people resented this, they felt that Watson was demeaning them.

I found Watson to be absolutely fair even when he disagreed very strongly with you about something, as he did with me on a number of occasions. In terms of getting access to the President from my position, never the slightest difficulty. In fact, on the contrary, he was just as nice as he could be. As long as you played fair with Marvin, I think, Marvin played fair with you. Now, he got a lot of guff. He wouldn't talk to newspapermen and things of that sort. Actually he's a very astute and able guy, and anything but the kind of peasant that he was made out to be. But that job is an impossible job. Kenny O'Donnell was the biggest bastard that ever walked the earth when he was in that job at the White House. Long before the Camelot legend

became wrapped up it was quite common knowledge around the White House that O'Donnell told the Secret Service that if Arthur Schlesinger turned up trying to get into the President's office to throw him out of the building, you know, and this kind of thing.

Marvin had the job, you see; Machiavelli describes it somewhere. He says that the Prince should always pass out the medals himself but let somebody else handle the executions. Which meant that if you wanted something and you made a fuss about it and the President said okay he'd tell you himself, "I'm going to do this for you." But if it was no, then back it came from Watson. That's the job description, and I thought Marvin handled it very well. He certainly didn't go out of his way to make trouble for anybody, and if he didn't talk to newspapermen, all right, he didn't. So what? Why should he?

M: Was Moyers already beginning to get into cross purposes, difficulties, at this time?

R: I know now from hearsay--I came in after the Moyers crisis had been triggered. The long and the short of it, and again this is hearsay, was that the President caught Bill playing president, telling people what the President thought about this, that, and the other thing.

M: Repeatedly, or in a specific case?

R: I think he caught him in a couple of specific situations, the details of which you should get from, I suppose, Watson and Valenti, who probably could clue you in on exactly what happened. There had been a very emotional scene between the President and Moyers. The President fired him, and Moyers burst into tears. The President

actually pulled him off the plane and brought him back to the White House. Bill was about to leave for Texas, and the President pulled him off the plane and brought him back to the White House and had this real whing-ding with him. As I say, this is all hearsay, but it's what I consider highly reliable hearsay. The President then really let him have it, fired him and told him to get out of the White House and everything else. Moyers allegedly burst into tears and said that, after all, he looked on Johnson as a father and so forth and so on. All right, so Johnson ended up saying, "All right, but no more of that. You can go back, and I don't want to hear any more of these backgrounders with these newspapermen in which you tell them what I think when I don't even think about it yet."

I gather this was in the summer of 1966 some time. Moyers, at this point, was already obviously beginning to--you know, once you've had this kind of thing. The President talked to me about it once, but I discouraged it because he was looking for sympathy vis-a-vis Moyers. I told him, "Frankly, Mr. President, I don't think you have anyone to blame but yourself because you built this guy up, you encouraged him in this. He's very young. Then when you found out that he was behaving as a young man under these circumstances predictably I think would behave, you blamed him for it. You have to blame yourself." He got madder than hell. Mrs. Johnson was there, and she said, "Lyndon, John's right." That sort of ended that. He has never discussed it with me. Although I know he has discussed it with others, because they've talked to me about it, and really

complained bitterly about Bill's behavior.

My experience with Moyers directly was that he was a very intelligent and able fellow, enormously, hypnotically ambitious politically, a man driven by an inordinate ambition with no base. He had a real problem: no base, no political base at all, except Johnson. In the advance on the Asian trip in Australia Bill raised with me the possibility of Newsday, the job he took in Long Island the newspaper. I grew up out in that part of the world, and I told him I personally didn't think much of it. But he was obviously at that point trying to get out, hit the eject button. I guess that he probably left in January or February, at which point, by the way, Bob Kennedy did for him exactly what he did for McNamara. It's a marvelous story.

The day Moyers announced his resignation Senator Kennedy had called up and invited him to lunch with him in his Capitol office. The phone rang then later, and Kennedy said, "Look, I'll be coming down your way. Why don't I pick you up at the corner out there?" So Bill had gone out, Kennedy had picked him up, took him to Sans Souci. In they walked, and there was a cameraman and, bang! The Evening Star has this front page picture of Moyers and Bob Kennedy at the Sans Souci. Johnson just went right up the wall. Jesus Christ! It was such a set-up, too. As I say, Kennedy did the same thing for McNamara. He was a demonic little bastard. You've got to hand it to him. That was a beauty. Of course, nothing would ever convince Johnson that Moyers really hadn't been on the Kennedy payroll

for years and years. He was crazy.

Moyer was hypnotized by Kennedy. There was something about the whole Hickory Hill environment set-up. I guess if you come from some little town in Texas and you were once a fundamentalist minister and suddenly you see the kind of jet set Kennedy thing it can hit you pretty hard. Bill was enormously attracted by that whole crew--Sarge Shriver, the same way.

M: Even Califano sort of played the Georgetown dinner circuit, didn't he, without being affected by it?

R: Yes, I think so, some. Joe was close to McNamara, but I don't think he was ever close to either Kennedy brother, that is either Ted or Robert.

M: But Moyers was?

R: Moyers was, yes. He used to go over to Hickory Hill and attend these seminars that Bob Kennedy held there.

M: So the Moyers difficulty was not primarily over some kind of subversive Vietnam circuit that Moyers was running on the dove side?

R: No. As I said earlier, the irony here is that it was a dove position as of 1965-1966 that I held and that Moyers held [that] involved the bombing cessation, concentration on the war in the South, and what is now, as I say, called Vietnamization. In those days the minute you started talking like this you got McNamara's footprints engraved on your ass. Now it's looked upon as kind of an advanced form of hawkishness to say this.

M: But McNamara was a secret dove.

R: I don't think McNamara--you see, McNamara had two platoons working. I don't know if he even had them working. I don't want to sound paranoidal. Johnson's paranoia used to get on my nerves. There was not a sparrow fell from a tree but what he was convinced that it was the intervention of a Kennedy, you know. The trouble is, he was right on a number of cases, and I was wrong. I was absolutely convinced that Bob Kennedy was not going to run in 1968. We sat down one day and argued it out. Marvin thought he was going to run; O'Brien thought he was going to run; Jim Rowe thought he was going to run; and George Christian thought he was going to run. I said, "No, he's not going to run." Because I assumed there was somewhat more rationality there than there was. I discussed it with the President at some length. He used to be very interested in this kind of thing, these speculative conversations. "What do you think McCarthy will do in New Hampshire?"

By the way, the night before the primary in New Hampshire in 1968 the President called me up about ten o'clock. I had been trying to watch what was happening up there. It was a chaotic situation on our side. The President called me and said, "Well, what's Gene going to do?" I said, "Well, his name is on the ballot, yours isn't. I can't see how you can keep him under a third." He said, "No, he'll get 40 per cent, at least 40 per cent. Every son-of-a-bitch in New Hampshire who's mad at his wife or the postman or anybody is going to vote for Gene McCarthy."

I got sidetracked from Moyers, I guess. I forget where it was.

M: Moyers and Vietnam.

R: Oh, Vietnam. I just feel that Bill was a guy with a lot of talent who did a great deal of very good things for the President, and who in a way just got caught by his own--he pushed too hard. He really wanted to be the Cardinal Richelieu, and it's impossible with a man like Johnson. Any man who gets elected president of the United States has got to have an ego the size of the Washington Monument. I mean, there's no payoff on meekness outside of the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps. So sooner or later this is bound to happen to anybody who got into this relationship, who in effect attempted to pre-empt. I think it was unfortunate that it happened the way it did, because I think that there was a very basic, deep personal relationship there between the two. Moyers was a kind of surrogate son to Johnson I think, and I think it was very tragic in a way that it was torn up the way it was.

M: You said you operated on a foreign policy track separate from Rostow. Did Johnson give you specific foreign policy activities to undertake?

R: I spent most of my time backstopping Southeast Asia, by which I mean that whereas Walt was involved up to the ears in the day-to-day operational side of it, my job was, as President Johnson put it one time, trying to look around the corner to see what we were coming to, what's happening in the longer run. So I sat there and read all the intelligence stuff I could lay my hands on. I can't promise I read every cable, but I had every cable from Vietnam and most of the other Southeast Asian material, anything that related to it. I was

on that distribution list right up through the exdis and nodis material and communications intelligence reports and so on. I sat there and tried to figure out what we were up to. I wrote memoranda, for example, on what we could anticipate the next year or so as far as Red China was concerned, a memorandum which, by the way, was a pretty good one. It came out pretty well the way I suggested it would.

I told the President that Thieu was going to beat out Ky as the military candidate for president of Vietnam. The State Department didn't agree and the CIA was running Ky's campaign for him in Vietnam. The day before it actually happened we had had a meeting about it, and I was still arguing that Thieu was going to take Ky, for reasons that had emerged from one's study of the structural politics, whether it's Massachusetts or Vietnam, namely that Thieu had the constituencies that counted. When it happened, ironically enough, the news of it came not from the embassy, where I suppose the boys were sitting around trying to cover their ass with some cable that would say that the wrong thing had happened but that it was for the right reasons or something like this, it came over the UPI ticker. The President got this thing on the tape, called me downstairs: "Your friend Thieu's done it," he said. My friend Thieu! He said, "Look here. Here's how I learn about it. I learn about it by reading this thing in my office along with everybody else in the United States that has one of these machines. They know as much as I do. They know as fast as I do. Let's fire that mission in Saigon and replace them with the United Press." At any rate, this sort of thing took up my time.

M: But you were not in policy decision discussions?

R: You see, Johnson's technique here was, an outfit like the National Security Council would be something which would approve decisions that had already been reached on a basis of one-to-one or one-to-two meetings that Johnson had had. The most significant of course were the lunches with Wheeler and Rusk and McNamara and so forth, and Rostow. I was not a participant in the lunches, and I was not involved in the meetings that were held except on an occasional speech. When I was writing a speech, I would be involved that way. But the President would often talk to me about these things, sometimes Walt and I both in a session, as he did with a lot of people. He was not isolated in the White House. He had those damned telephones of his going all the time. He'd talk a great deal by phone. But no, I cannot claim to have saved the Republic at any given point by participating in some crisis session.

Now on the Middle East I was involved in the presentation of the first statement the President gave on it, which was May 23, 1967, as I recall, before the war but after the Strait of Tiran had been closed. Here he called me up in the middle of the night and asked me to come in. They had a draft from the State Department of what they thought he should say. He wanted to go on television. Of course, his purpose at this time was to try to keep the Israelis from attacking and try to bring some pressure on Hasser to open the Strait, and at the same time make it clear that he was not going to support the Arabs, that we were going to support Israel if it came to a crunch.

The State Department had prepared a draft for him which was the most incredible document. It was a completely "on the one hand," or "on the other hand" thing. It didn't cut any ice at all. It didn't have one declarative sentence in it as to what we were going to do.

I worked until about two o'clock in the morning on this, or three o'clock in the morning, and rewrote it from scratch and inserted some quite tough operational language regarding the fact that the closing of the Strait of Tiran had been a violation of international law and norms and so forth. I called Walt and I read it to him, and Walt said, "That sounds fine to me, but mark it." So I marked the speech in the margin. I said to the President, "This is new language. I've checked it with Walt Rostow. I don't know if the State Department, the Secretary of State has done anything, but here it is, and it's what I think should go."

Then the next day was really funny because Johnson, for a man [in politics]--there are two myths about men in politics in my experience. One that is they are thick-skinned. They are the most thin-skinned crowd you ever met in your life. Jesus Christ! You never saw anything like it. To touch Johnson off just mention the word credibility; [he would] go right up the wall. Bang! Just like that. Gone. Vanished. The second thing is they hate pressure. The theory "If you don't like the heat, stay out of the kitchen" sort of thing [is] nonsense. Maybe Truman was that way, but the fact is that they hate being pressured, even though you think it's par for the course.

The next day there was tremendous pressure brought on Johnson to get him to come out. Jewish pressure groups in this country were lined up all the way from Washington to California, and Johnson engaged in one of his little malicious games. It was really very funny, and I was put in a terribly difficult spot by it because I'm very committed to the Israeli position on this. The various Jewish groups would call Johnson. So what he did was he'd fish out the State Department draft and read it to them and say, "Well, how do you feel about that? How does that sound? They think this is the kind of thing I ought to say. How does it sound to you?"

So, boom! The phones are ringing. The Israeli ambassador is over in Humphrey's office in the EOB practically in tears. So Humphrey calls me up, and he says, "What do you know about this?" It was very embarrassing, as I said, because I happened to know that what I had written the night before had already gone on speech cards, and he was going to go on television, I think around five o'clock. It was already set up. He'd approved it, signed on it, everything else. It was all locked up. But I couldn't tell him; I couldn't say this to Humphrey. I mean, Johnson once said about ways of getting information around Washington: "Telephone, telegraph, or tell Hubert." By the way, this is an interesting point. One of the great problems with Humphrey--people said that Johnson didn't talk to him, and so on. Johnson had the utmost regard for Humphrey, thought very highly of his wisdom and his judgment, but didn't dare tell him things because Humphrey told his staff and his staff leaked to the papers.

M: It was a staff leak, not Humphrey's though.

R: Well, Humphrey told his staff, and none of those guys could keep their trap shut. I saw this happen five or six times, so that really Humphrey was in effect a security risk of sorts, you see. It wasn't that Johnson was mad at Humphrey for his views substantively, it was Johnson had a passion for keeping things quiet. Now I thought he overdid it. I told him so. He knew my views on this. But nonetheless it was his country, he was president, and if that's the way he wants to do it, he can do it that way. So that the minute you told anything to Hubert, within about two hours it would probably be on its way to the Washington Post via one of his staff boys. Then the staff would play the game of calling up newspapermen and saying, "You see, Humphrey went over to see the President, and he really laid in there on behalf of a fundamentally sound liberal position on Vietnam," or something like that. Out would come a story in the paper saying, "The Vice President has been in to argue on behalf of the dove cause with the President." The fact of the matter was that, on the contrary, Humphrey in my judgment was unduly carried away in those days by the hard line position. He made me look, again, like something of a pacifist.

But to come back to the point we started with. Humphrey has got the Israeli ambassador, Av [Avraham] Harman, over there, there's all this pressure going, and Johnson had read this same State Department blurb to Harman. All day he went on doing this. I called Rostow. I said, "For God's sake, what is he doing?" Walt said, "Oh, he's just getting a little therapy for all this pressure they put on."

M: Did he think he had Israeli assurances against a pre-emptive [strike]?

R: No, on the contrary. The Israelis, first of all, did not promise him that they would not hit. That's an overstatement. I've seen that several places, that the Israelis made him a commitment that they would not act until he had been able to go with his proposals to New York to the U.N. They never flatly said that. Indeed, the crucial day--not the crucial day in the war but in Washington--was the Abba Eban visit. Eban turned up, and it was weird because the next day there was a story that the President was mad at him and kept him cooling his heels for an hour and a half.

What happened was that Eban had turned up and sent in to Rostow through Eppie Evron I guess, who was the Israeli [D.C.M.] minister then in Washington, the draft with marginal notes in Dulles handwriting on the 1957 agreement in which the United States had guaranteed Israel's frontiers and so forth. The Dulles handwriting emphasized this very strongly in a marginal note. Well, this was the first Walt had ever seen of this thing with the Dulles annotations. So immediately he tried to find out whether the State Department even knew it existed. They were ransacking all over the place in the State Department for an hour and an half while Eban had been sitting out there cooling his heels. Finally they turned up an old girl who had once been on the files, an invaluable member, and she found it some place in the files. At any rate Eban was in, and Johnson pushed him for a flat commitment that they would not hit. Eban hedged around and gave semi-semi, demi-quasi commitments, but never flatly.

That evening about, I don't know what time it was, it was late, nine-thirty or ten o'clock, I was working. The phone rang, and he said, "Come on down." I went down. Harry was there, I think. No, Harry was in Israel.

M: Harry was there [in Israel].

R: Harry was in Israel.

M: Right.

R: That's right. Who was there? Walt was there, I guess. Yes, that's right. Because Harry was in Israel. Walt was there. I have a feeling someone else was there. I forget. Anyway, he had some of that poisonous low-cal Dr. Pepper, and I had a cup of coffee. He said, "What do you think they're going to do?" He told a little bit about his visit with Eban. You know he was a great mimic, Johnson was. He did a take-off on Eban, a little miniature Winston Churchill, and sort of did a little imitation of him. His imitation of Willard Wirtz was the funniest thing I'ver ever seen in my life. He used to mimic Wirtz. But he did a little imitation of Eban, and he said, "Now, what do you think they're going to do?" We sort of sat around and talked about what we thought the Israelis were going to do. Somebody, I forget who it was, said, "They'll wait." It wasn't Walt. I didn't think so either. I said, "I think they'll hit them." He said, "Yes, they're going to hit. There's nothing we can do about it." He knew his customers--very, very penetrating intelligence.

M: Shortly after you got back from the Manila trip the episode occurred

that has been the subject of a whole book, the Kraslow and Loory thing on the Marigold peace initiative. Would you get into something like that?

R: Yes.

M: As a matter of substance?

R: Yes. I followed it, and I thought it was an agitprop set-up.

M: You mean a set-up in the sense that the Poles were--?

R: It may be that the Poles in good faith thought they could deliver a live Vietnamese. I didn't think so. I had thought it was basically a communist agitprop operation. You see, there was Marigold; there was Nasturtium, the one in India, I forget about that. But I followed this whole thing very carefully, and what you had was a worldwide campaign to get at the United States on this question of negotiations. They did a beautiful job of it. They really did. To line up a patsy like Norman Cousins, for example.

You get the following sort of sequence: Cousins is invited to lunch by some guy at the U.N., a guy who says he knows a Pole. The Pole says that in fact he thinks that the war in Vietnam could be ended very quickly by negotiations, but the trouble is that he thinks there are people in our government that are holding it up because they don't want peace and so forth. So Cousins at this point--or whoever, there are half a dozen candidates I could name for this particular spot--of course gallops off to Washington and always received very good attention. So the President said, "All right, look. I'm willing. You go ahead and see what you can do if you

really think you can get something out of this." The rest of us who happen to know something about the way these scenarios are run are getting the damage control machinery ready.

M: The Cousins business had in fact happened before you came in, right? In early 1966?

R: Oh yes, that was early 1966, but these things continued. There was one in India.

M: You're just using that as an example.

R: That's right. Marigold was in Poland, but there was one in India. There were at least five major ones, plus a whole flock. There was Ashmore and Baggs; there was Operation Pennsylvania, which was at a time right after Kosygin was here for the summit meeting in the summer of 1967, I guess that was; there was Henry Kissinger's buddy in Paris, Jean Santigny, who knew a guy who knew a guy. Always it was the same thing; that is, fundamentally we were set up for a punch on the grounds that if we just stopped the bombing of course these talks could start. That was the whole purpose of it, I'm convinced, from the outset. I'm sure it was designed that way. It was a KGB operation.

They're doing the same thing to the Israelis now. Nahum Goldman got the Cousins treatment just recently. A French journalist told Nahum Goldman of the World Zionist Organization that Tito had told him that Nasser would talk to Goldman, and they could reach peace. The same bit. But you always end up looking bad in these things because you can't prove a negative. That is, you can't prove that

these guys didn't intend seriously to negotiate in the first place but were engaged in political warfare. They were, I'm certain of it.

The Indian case was even worse. What was that one called? Was that Nasturtium? They gave them names of flowers, and they unfortunately wilted away.

M: It was Green Bay Packers once, weren't they?

R: Oh, God, I forget.

M: Ben Read was naming them, I think.

R: Yes. But at any rate the one in India was a real hoax, and Cousins picked that one up and made a big deal out of it in the Saturday Review. I had him down. I got the President to authorize me to let Cousins see the whole damned cable file. Cousins came to my office, and I broke out the top secret cable file, untouched, because if there had been any summaries or anything else Cousins and the rest of these guys could have said, "Well, it has been doctored." So I just gave them the raw cables from Bowles and to Bowles and all the rest of it. Cousins read them over, sat in the office--Bill Jorden and I were there--spent about forty-five minutes discussing it, left the office, said: "Well, it's perfectly clear this was a frame-up. It was just a fake." He came back with another editorial saying, "I'm sorry. They've been very nice to me, they were most courteous, but I'm still not convinced that a real effort was made to meet this." What do you do?

M: Did we have a well developed position to negotiate?

R: Gladiola. [The code-name for the Indian ploy]. What?

M: Right. Did we have a well developed position to negotiate? In other words, were we prepared to accept? Maybe this is why some of the critics persisted in believing that we weren't trying very hard, if indeed we didn't have in mind what we wanted to try to negotiate at that time. Did we have a scenario?

R: We had a position all right, but the trouble is that it was one that was wholly unacceptable to Hanoi, namely, that we were going to stand on basically a Korean-style settlement. That's what we had in mind. Now there were all kinds of Christmas tree ornaments you could tuck on to this thing; that is, guarantee of elections in ten years and free determination, Austrian solution, things of that sort. There were a whole series of variations, but the one thing we were not prepared to give them was coalition government, a guarantee. We weren't going to let them turn on the old Polish salami slicer which they used in Europe and used for years. Now people say, "Well, this means you're standing out for a military victory." You see, those are the options. No, it wasn't that we were standing out for a military victory. We were not going to permit a military defeat. Those two are not the same thing.

Now the bombing was strictly a red herring. I was convinced from the outset part of it was so goddamned irrelevant. I wrote a memorandum to Johnson in 1967 in which I said--I remember pointing out precisely this, it was about May, 1967--that "Ho Chi Minh would negotiate with bombs coming down his chimney if he thought it was

in his interest to negotiate. On the other hand, in terms of the world opinion and all the rest of it and the way in which the bombing campaign has misled the Americans as to what has to be done in terms of this war, I think it ought to be stopped." This was called the Pneumonia Memorandum, and it was circulated around in a very limited way. It was known as the Pneumonia Memorandum because I said the military reminded me of physicians who had a cure for pneumonia but not for the common cold, so they had a vested interest in the patient with the cold getting pneumonia. It was not well received by Secretary McNamara.

M: What about by Johnson? Could you talk to Johnson about the Vietnam bombing thing?

R: Yes. Oh, he'd give me a speech about going into the ring with Jack Dempsey with one hand tied behind your back, or something like that. I once got off a very good one. I said, "I wouldn't go into the ring with Jack Dempsey with both hands tied behind his back," but unfortunately I don't think he heard me.

M: But you could go in. It wasn't a matter of him closing you out?

R: Oh, no, no, no. He'd then send you down to see Walt, and Walt would break out his charts and show you how many weapons had been captured last month and how many mortars had been captured and how many Chieu Hoi had come over the last month. They're marvelous charts. The only thing is that they proved something else. They were arguments about a different war than the one I was worried about. I was never under the illustion that the United States would be beaten by North

Vietnam in a war in Vietnam, not in a military sense. But that isn't the problem. The problem was they weren't going to let us fight that kind of war. They were engaged in fighting an entirely different kind of war than we were. Every day that we sent bombers out chasing bridges around North Vietnam, or whatever they were after, was one day wasted in doing the only job that could possibly make this thing work, namely, creating a South Vietnamese state with military apparatus.

M: How thoroughly was the government around town getting disaffected on policy by the time you got there in mid-1966?

R: Oh, hell! The liberals had already pretty well signed off, along with the Kennedys. You see, Kennedy took them out really. Bob Kennedy had gone off the reservation, I think, really for the first time somewhere in the summer of 1966. I can't remember right now when. Arthur was saying that "They wouldn't be doing this if Jack were only here," you know, that sort of thing. There was already very substantial disaffection.

I took the job. Oh, boy, did I get the works. It's kind of funny in retrospect. I went to work for this guy knowing this. I was quite aware I was going into the Alamo. I had no doubt about it whatever. But I took the job because I believed, damn it, that we had to do what had to be done out there, and I didn't like the way it was being done. But I thought that strategically the risks involved in losing the war in Vietnam, namely, what seemed to me to be the dangers of shifting to a nuclear war, that limited war is thrown out as an option, are so much more perilous than anything that could

possibly happen in Southeast Asia. I was then accused of all kinds of things wonderful.

Right or wrong I'm an old hard-liner, an old hard-line Social Democrat really. I came out of the Socialist movement--I'm not a Socialist any more because I don't know what it means--but went on to the ADA and became a hard anti-communist liberal, always had been. Then suddenly when I took the job in the White House I had people saying, "Roche sold out." As I said, I wrote a couple of Jack Kennedy's toughest speeches.

M: Those people forgot that they had been anti-communist liberals, too.

R: I know. Oh, well . . .

M: How much did those people who stayed in the government but who were disaffected from the policy hamper the undertaking of that policy?

R: They didn't have much of a hand in it. As I say, it was McNamara's baby from 1965 to 1967. Then McNamara began to wobble. He started out just cocky as hell in 1965, with all his computerized projections of two years and so forth. McNaughton had worked up the odds, and two years was it, this sort of thing. Then by the beginning of 1967 McNamara began to wobble. By the summer of 1967, I think myself that McNamara was in very serious psychological condition. It was my judgment, based on a certain amount of intuition and a certain amount of experience with people who are disturbed, that Bob McNamara was hanging on by his fingernails. What I'm saying here is not intended as a characterological criticism of Bob at all, because I have immense respect for the man. He did, in my judgment, just about

everything wrong. But there's no question about the fact that before he deceived anybody else, he deceived himself. He was a completely dedicated and sincere guy.

By the summer of 1967 his wife was in the hospital with an ulcer, as I remember it, and he was I thought in terrible shape. Oh, God, he looked awful. You see, nothing worked. Everything he believed in was being knocked on its ass in Vietnam. Here was a guy who really believed that truth is what you get out of that machine when you ask for it. You know, "What will we do about 'X'?" and here comes the answer, the organizational truth. It just wasn't working. The heat was terrific. He was I think a very, very disturbed guy, and I think the President was aware of this also.

I heard the Forrestal reference used two or three times by others. Harry McPherson and I talked about it at the time after one particular session with McNamara where he just sat there and his jaw quivered, and two or three times he looked like a man in just terrible shape. But I went in to see the President about something or other--this must have been August, I guess, 1967, somewhere in there--and he was just talking to Mrs. McNamara, who was in the hospital. He had just been talking to Margaret. He hung up the phone and turned to me and looked at me and said, "You know, he's a fine man, a wonderful man, Bob McNamara. He has given everything, just about everything, and, you know, we can't afford another Forrestal." Very interesting.

I think in October when the Bank thing came along that Johnson

was very pleased, I mean for personal reasons. It wasn't that he was trying to get--you know, people build this up. Johnson was very protective of people around him. I think that in part he was looking on Bob at this point as someone he had to save, that this was a way of getting this man out of a job that was just too much for him. As I say, I don't see how anybody can be secretary of defense or president, but secretary of defense either, without going insane. I mean, the pressures. And here's a guy who had the job for seven years.

M: One of the quotations attributed to you by Teddy White in his last book [is from] a memo in which you tried to talk the President into trying to explain his policy. Do you think that that was really the shortcoming, that they just never really got it explained?

R: I don't remember which memo that was.

M: This was in re the 1968 election. It was late 1967.

R: Oh, yes. That was a weird one. Actually, this opens up a whole subject which we might save for another time. I couldn't understand what the hell was the matter with Lyndon Johnson in 1967, because he was acting so erratically, politically speaking. His behavior was absolutely inexplicable in political terms. I said to McPherson in this connection, and he said, "Well, maybe he isn't going to run again." This was the fall, in November of 1967. I said, "Oh, come off it." Neither of us took it seriously. But he just was behaving in an absolutely absurd way in terms of any kind of organization of the Democratic Party. The DNC was just rotting on the vine.

That memorandum was written to him, in effect trying to tell him, "For Christ's sake, let's get off the dime and get out there and make the case."

M: I have heard people comment that there was a policy decision as to how thoroughly to sell the Vietnam War, for example, and that for some reason or another Johnson just simply would not really make the attempt to sell it that would have been necessary to sell it.

R: I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a copy of an article I wrote, which I think takes up part of this. He refused to get into what amounts to chauvinism. He would not let anybody really get up there and whoop and wave the flag--McCarthyism, he called it. Now occasionally he'd get off himself. He did at the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Baltimore and the "nervous Nellies" in Chicago. But fundamentally he was opposed to injecting that kind of thing into American politics, for the best of reasons I think.

M: We'd better stop?

R: Yes, I think we probably had.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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