INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: WALT W. ROSTOW

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Professor Rostow's office, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

R: --study the problem of guerrilla warfare. I get into that in *The Diffusion of Power*. I forget what page--about 119, yes. Pages 118 and 119 I describe how I got into guerrilla warfare. I was, of course, studying the whole process of growth and simultaneously looking at the problems of the developing world. And when I mean problems, I don't mean simply the economic problems, because my view of growth and development is that it involves a whole society--political, social, cultural, as well as economic dimensions. So far as the politics are concerned, especially in what I call countries in the stage of the preconditions for takeoff, before they begin to develop sustained growth, but even to a degree afterwards, you're dealing in many ways, in most countries, with a political problem, which is the problem of establishing effective unity in the traditional society where nationhood was not strong. This doesn't go for all countries. You have a sense of nationhood in Thailand reaching back over centuries, but in many of the countries the problem [is] of unity. So in those situations the governments are struggling with societies where the connection between the central government and the rural areas is dilute. You may be dealing with societies fragmented by region and regional feelings or by tribes, as in Africa, where the energy, as it were, concentrated in the center is limited. And then you get all the cross-strains that come when

parts of the society are beginning to modernize and others are not, *et cetera.* Such societies are particularly vulnerable to intrusion from outside by guerrilla warfare.

Now, quite specifically, as I point out, we had two men in the Center for International Studies at MIT who were by way of being serious professionals in this field. One was Jim Cross, James Eliot Cross, who was studying the lessons to be drawn from guerrilla warfare all the way back to the peninsular campaign in Napoleon's time down through Ireland down through Philippines, Malaya, *et cetera*. We also had Lucian Pye, who had gone out and interviewed a number of the guerrillas captured in Malaya and wrote an extraordinarily perceptive book based on those interviews and came to certain insights which he passed along to the British about them. So that in a way the guerrilla warfare and vulnerability to it was part of the potential pathology of developing nations. I followed the work being done by Cross and read Lucian's stuff and thought a bit about it in the context of my general work on the developing regions.

And then when I came to write about policy, when I did *The U.S. in the World Arena*, which was finished in 1958 but published in 1960, I introduced quite explicitly the dangers of guerrilla warfare as a technique. There was a good deal of thought in that period about the inadequacies of the so-called Eisenhower great equation, that is to say, a preponderant reliance on the nuclear threat. And a great many people were saying that in a world which the Soviets shared with us, thermonuclear weapons was not a very satisfactory stance and counseled a building up of our conventional forces. To which I added that there was another area that lay beneath the threshold of nuclear weapons and our then-present force structures, which was guerrilla warfare.

G: Dr. Rostow, is it possible to look at these four examples [Philippines; Malaya; Cuba; French Indochina and Algeria] that I have here under the second question to give us any specifics or anything that stands out?

R: Yes, sure. The lesson that I drew from them, aside from the fact that a good many societies in the developing world were vulnerable to this kind of thing, was that it was extremely difficult to deal with a guerrilla war with an open frontier, because the costs on the defending side to control one guerrilla range anywhere between ten and twenty to one. So guerrilla warfare, once it laid an organizational base and could infiltrate, meant that you could throw in, as it were, an exchange rate of ten to twenty to one. For every one you put in, you put that extra burden on this weak country. So I put--as I would today, incidentally--a tremendous emphasis on this problem, the problem of open frontier.

G: Would you say that the force ratio to which you referred of ten to twenty to one, does that explicitly come out of the Malayan experience?

R: Well, it varied, but it goes out of the Irish, it comes out of the--it was kind of an average that came out of all of [them], the Philippines, Algeria. I forget the numbers, but that's where it came out of, and that's incidentally what it was in Vietnam. Now, I would say right at the beginning that you must not interpret the war in Vietnam as a guerrilla war wholly. It was a three-tiered war; it was a guerrilla war at one level, it was a main force unit at a second level, and it was a conventional war with the North Vietnamese.

G: I participated at one tier, so I subscribe to that.

R: It was simply a conventional war without a fixed front. So it was an extraordinarily

complex military engagement, and as former President Eisenhower said to President Johnson once, when we met out in, I forget, somewhere out in Palm Desert or somewhere, he said that [Gen. William] Westmoreland faced a much more difficult job as a soldier than he did in Europe.

G: What was Eisenhower's evaluation of Westmoreland? Did he give one at that time?

R: No. I think he thought well of him, but we didn't get into that. I don't know.

So, that's the major lesson, and I never forgot it. It's fundamental in guerrilla warfare. Now, next question: Did the Eisenhower Administration miss opportunities for successes in the Third World? The answer is yes, and there I really have written about it. I noticed--I went back and looked in *The U.S. in the World Arena*, and then chapter eight in *The U.S. in the World Arena* ends as of August of 1958. In *The Diffusion of Power,* I was in a position to evaluate the whole term, and I have Eisenhower's policy towards the developing world in chapter eight, and I will just go through it. I think that he was pushed into--he didn't anticipate with sufficient vigor, in my judgment, the rising importance of the developing world and the role in it of development aid and other things that might have been done. But he did--I use the phrase "reluctant innovator." He did respond. His administration responded in the second term defensively to crises that arose and gradually moved towards a wider approach. But it was usually in the face of some external pressure.

G: A crisis management [inaudible].

R: Well, in responding to crises he was pushed off the position he initially held, which was that foreign aid should be military aid plus private investment. After, for example, the

Lebanon-Jordan crisis he made a big speech in the U.N. which I had a central hand in drafting, but he came out with a big development program there which the Middle East governments didn't pick up. But in 1958 Vice President Nixon had a miserable time on a trip to Latin America. In Caracas there were riots, *et cetera*. He [Eisenhower] responded to a degree positively to [Brazilian president Juscelino] Kubitschek's notion and set up the Inter-American Bank, for which his brother Milton had been lobbying for many years, and Nelson Rockefeller and others. So there was some progress, but there was a great deal of difficulty there, because his initial dispositions did not fit very well a period in which the problems of the developing world came to be nearly the prime problems that he faced, whether it was the nationalization of Suez, or Southeast Asia or the Congo or the Middle East. It was an administration that initially did not have an outlook that fitted that very well. Gradually the personnel changed; you got the rise of people like [Christian A.] Herter and Doug Dillon and the withdrawal of people like [George M.] Humphrey and so on. So towards the end it was better geared to it, but it was always defensive. As I say, I have a little section called "Eisenhower, The Reluctant Innovator." But yes, I think he did miss opportunities.

"What was behind the emphasis on the army's special forces in the Kennedy Administration? Any perceived contradiction between the apparent shift of mission for special forces from guerrilla fighters to counterguerrilla operatives?" I don't quite know what you mean there.

G: Well, it seems to me that one could say that the special forces had been conceived in the Eisenhower Administration as a force tailored to meet certain contingencies in Europe,

actually.

R: Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, that's correct. You're quite correct. But I think the simple point is that Kennedy--

(Interruption)

--the special forces. Well, no, it's simply that the general feeling that conventional U.S. military forces--there was a tendency, as we looked at the way that the MAAG, the military advisory group in the Eisenhower period, had been working with them, that they were building up rather conventional Korean-type forces, and we thought that for a part of the operation--and you did need that to deal with the main force units, the VC main force units. But the guerrillas--they were kind of muscle-bound in dealing with the guerrilla operations, and we thought that the smaller special forces teams would be better at training Vietnamese special forces, because the special force small units, you know, five- or six- or whatever-a-man teams they were, could be very helpful to the Vietnamese, and that's why we sent them over as trainers.

G: Of course, they had specialists in those teams and things like medical specialists.

R: That's right. They were used to working on their own out in the country with the locals. Part of their basic training was to understand the locals and get close to them and be constructive with them.

G: An unconventional environment, you might say.

R: That's right. That's right.

G: And they were handy.

R: So they were sort of converted over to that function.

G: Okay.

R: "So far as we know, what was behind the escalation of the insurgency in South Vietnam in 1959?" Now there I really have written about that, and you'll find that in chapter four, pages 40 to 49, in *The Diffusion of Power*, and behind that, because it's related to the previous--chapters two and three.

What started it up--it was 1958, not 1959. What started it up again after this quiet period from 1954 to 1958 was Sputnik, the launching of the first Sputnik, which in itself, but much more in the psychological reaction of the world to Sputnik, with this image of the Soviet Union having jumped ahead technologically with ICBMs [Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles]. It was judged throughout the communist world as an occasion for historically pressing forward, and in November of 1957, directly in the wake of Sputnik, the leaders of all the communist parties who controlled governments came together in Moscow. Mao made only his second trip out of the country. He only made two, both to Moscow. He came. They were all there, including Ho Chi Minh--I don't know whether Ho Chi Minh himself came; I don't think he did. But in any case, they decided this was a moment to move forward. Mao made several speeches saying how the east wind is prevailing over the west. And the whole communist movement in the world judged this to be a moment of historic opportunity which they could exploit.

Also, this was a time in which Hanoi was--as it always did and I dare say would like to do it again, if it could--was playing Moscow off against Peking. Because the Vietnamese Communist Party in itself was an important element in the movement, and Moscow and Peking were competitive for that support. Out of that competition, Hanoi

got permission from both Mao and Khrushchev to resume the war on the South, and they came back and announced it. You see the pickup of the infiltration in 1958. It's all discussed in there. So, there's a perfectly straightforward origin of the resumption.

G: It's been alleged by at least one scholar that the escalation was in response to [Ngo Dinh] Diem's highly successful security activities in the countryside, and that the southerners--the southern communists insisted that either they be allowed to resume the military struggle or they wouldn't have an organization left.

R: I think that's quite possible. In here, I forget whether Le Duan or who, who had been in charge of the thing in the South, came North, and it's alleged that he made that argument. It was much more than the security. What happened is, to everyone's astonishment, Diem succeeded in consolidating the country. It's very hard to recapture the view of everybody in 1954. Here were these--at Geneva, the North Vietnamese were the negotiators. Okay, there was this group of sullen, out-of-it politicians in the South. John Kennedy, for example, who had followed Vietnam since his visit in 1951, never thought that Diem could make it. And a great many people in the State Department didn't think so. But he did, he consolidated it, and then about a million people came south and no doubt from 1954 to 1958 he made extraordinary progress. The government was recognized and the thing was going pretty well, you know, for a post-colonial developing country. Much better than in the North. And against that background of success and consolidating and economic progress, *et cetera*, he was able to--there never was a big indigenous communist movement in the South, but that was getting attenuated. The cadres were being rolled up and Diem looked like the wave of the future in the South.

There was some violence, but diminishing. And I think it's quite true that the North Vietnamese--because the thing was always directed by North Vietnamese--who were in the South were reporting that--"Look, this thing is going to hell in a hack. It's going to get just rubbed out unless we revive it." In any case, that's in there, too.

That takes the next question, too.

G: Yes, about the anti-government forces--

R: Yes. See, what they did was to revive the infiltration. And what they were infiltrating were these cadres--some of them North Vietnamese, but mainly--remember, about a million came south after 1954 and about a hundred, maybe two hundred thousand went north. And these were the folks that were trained for reinfiltration. In 1961 I interviewed several who had been recaptured by the South Vietnamese.

G: These were regrouped southerners that you interviewed?

R: That's right. They went north and were trained up there for reinfiltration. They were the major trouble, although there were North Vietnamese always in the South and the thing was always North Vietnamese-led, always. And that's how it was revived. Then they put more arms and they infiltrated through Laos and that was why that was so important.

"What do we know about the insurgent hierarchy in those early days?" Well, there's a very good piece on this. Actually, Bill Jorden did it after a trip out there. He collected all the solid evidence.

G: Is that the White Paper?

R: The White Paper of December 1961, not the one you're talking about.

G: Right.

R: And that's very solid. There was also further evidence that I wanted us to put in that the security people wouldn't, which was the pattern of communications. We did not break their codes, but we knew exactly who was sending messages to them. There were two patterns: there was a military and a political pattern. There was no central place in Vietnam. It all came out of Hanoi, and they had this, as always, a double chain of command, the strictly military and the political one, and it was all over the place. If you wanted to see visually the dominance of Hanoi, of the communists in Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam, you just had to look at the communication pattern. And we had a lot of other--Douglas Pike is very good on this.

G: Marvelous book.

R: It's a first-class book. Now I don't know what this working paper on the North Vietnam role published in 1968--I don't know what that is, but I doubt that any man in his right mind would say the southern branch of the party was coordinated with--

G: Well, I'm taking the word of the man who wrote the *War Comes to Long An* book--Race I think is his name [Jeffrey Race]--who cites this.

R: I'd go back and look at the source, because I don't think any responsible fellow in the State Department would have said that. Because it was run by the North. The Lao Dong Party is one party in Cambodia and Laos of which these were branches. There just never was a question as to who was running it. And whatever there was in the South, there was a front that they put up, and they had a few--but they never could get anyone of any stature to join them--a southerner. Then at Tet 1968, whatever there was got completely destroyed, to this day. That's one of the many reasons that they have to run South

Vietnam on a strict carpetbagger basis. It's an occupation regime in South Vietnam, to this day it's [inaudible].

G: That raises an issue which is not on here but which I wish you would comment on. We'll have to jump ahead a little to do that. I have seen it suggested that one of the reasons that that is true is that there is no VC hierarchy left, that it was destroyed.

R: It was always very weak and did not have much specific gravity in the South, but it was destroyed in Tet in 1968. They were thrown into the cities, you remember, the VC cadres, and got chewed up in the cities. People just turned them in to [the] cops. That was an extraordinary political demonstration in South Vietnam.

"To what extent was the southern insurgency a communist movement?" Well, it had a bit of--it *was* a communist movement. There were some fellow-travelers who thought they could get along, many of whom regretted it--I mean, those who survived. But it was a thoroughly professional communist apparatus.

G: Were the communists--

R: "Size and importance of the non-communist element?" Not very important. Well, see--yes, not very important.

G: I asked this because one does see it suggested that one of the sources of the communist strength in the South was that they had co-opted the nationalist element. You wouldn't agree with that?

R: I don't believe that for a minute. They had no nationalist appeal in the South. You know, nobody that I know of in the government or out of the government, the South Vietnamese government, ever worried about communism as a southern phenomenon. There is a

famous report that I hope gets cleared, maybe it is cleared, a brilliantly contrived--constructed poll of the South, done, collected--Quayle, the Quayle Report [A *Survey of Public Opinion in South Vietnam*]. Try to get hold of that. You have access to it.

G: It's in the works, but they have not cleared it yet.

R: But you personally have access to it.

G: No.

R: You don't? I see. I see. Well, you must get it, because it's most persuasive. It was designed by Paul Lazersfeld and the best people in polling in the United States, done under circumstances by Vietnamese where the people had confidence. It comes at the South Vietnamese people from so many angles that you really get a feel for it. And this was in a very dismal part. I think it was done in late 1964 or 1965. In any case--no, maybe it was in 1965, it must have been, before things picked up. But in any case, you'll see very well what the mind was, and I've talked to Soviets and others who thought that the maximum communist strength was about, what, 16 per cent of the population, 15 per cent of the population, and that was pretty soft. If you want demonstration of it, at the time of Tet they put out a million--they gave guns to everybody, students, civil servants, anybody who wanted a gun. They were never worried about which way the guns would shoot.

There was an authentic South Vietnamese nationalism. Sure, there was an element of attachment. . . . But that was never a big problem. If there had been no infiltration from the North, if this was simply a domestic problem of South Vietnam, there might have been some sort of violence, but there was never any question. What

people miss is that Vietnam, although it has a common language and elements of common culture, has had a profound north-south split. The people in the Delta and central Vietnam just don't want to be run by Hanoi. Very powerful regional feelings which go back a long way.

G: Some people even suggest a three-way split between the central--

R: The central--exactly, the Hue--and actually, the Hue fellows, both Ho Chi Minh and Diem came from the same central Vietnam.

G: Went to the same high school, I think, or secondary school.

R: That's right. So this whole business of nationalism in Vietnam has been very much oversimplified.

G: And so to call it a civil war in your view would be not only an oversimplification but simply wrong, is that right?

R: The conflict in Vietnam? Well, it was a civil war in the sense that it was the South Vietnamese nationalism against North Vietnamese nationalism. But, it was--after all, a line had been drawn that had been internationally recognized. It was not to be transited. It was reaffirmed in 1962. There would have been no serious problem in the South of a military kind if the North Vietnamese had not infiltrated, and sent arms and men and so on, and invaded from 1964 on with their own forces. They would have plenty of problems, like any post-colonial country, as they evolved, including that obviously Diem was like Syngman Rhee, a man of one generation, and then a new generation would have come in at some time, just the normal problems of development. They never would have had this kind of misery.

As I say, there was a small element of civil war in the South, but never a major problem. That was the big question that Kennedy had to have answered for himself before he was prepared to go forward. Do these folks want to be run by Hanoi? And the clear answer from everybody [was] obviously no. That went for all sorts of intellectuals--people against Diem. And there was never any reason down to the present day that that would have happened. These folks don't want to be run by Hanoi.

Now the domino theory is valid in Southeast Asia. Now, the domino theory, which Eisenhower enunciated and Kennedy in the last days of his life reaffirmed, is based on certain geographical facts, basically. There are also psychological and political ones. The first is the weakness of Laos and Cambodia relative to Vietnam, so that if communists took Vietnam it was pretty clear that they would dominate Cambodia and Laos. That's one element; that's one domino.

The second and critical aspect of the domino is what people are not aware of but it accounts for the fact that, of all people, the Carter Administration has reaffirmed the validity of the Southeast Asia Treaty with respect to Thailand. As far as Southeast Asia is concerned, Thailand is the heart of it, and it's the heart of it because of its links to Burma, in one direction, and to Malaya in the other. In fact, the whole policy of the U.S. government in the fifties and sixties can't be understood unless you realize that in large part it was an attempt to protect Thailand. Why? Because you have this extraordinarily long border, part of it in the Mekong, and the Mekong is a very shallow river, easy to cross. And so it was feared, as it is feared today, that if the communists get to the line of the Mekong, if they're not distracted by internal troubles or Cambodia and so on, they

will turn to wrecking Thailand by infiltration, guerrilla warfare, and of course there has been for twenty years or more elements of communist-run guerrilla warfare in the peripheral areas of Thailand, and it's been a drain on Thailand throughout this period.

Now, Thailand in turn links not only to Burma, but Burma links to India, and another element that people don't realize is the sensitivity of the Indians to what happens in Burma. They support, and my guess is they'll continue to support, Burma in its counter-guerrilla operations. They did it in the immediate postwar [period]. Because for India, Burma is the Ardennes.

G: Yes.

R: Now the other thing is the--so that when the Chinese were deeply in this game in the sixties, down to 1965 [?], when they got Indonesia out of the U.N. and they were conducting what Sukarno called the nutcracker, which was the Malaysian confrontation combined with the North Vietnamese regulars coming into South Vietnam--New Year's Day 1965, Chen Yi, the foreign minister, said, "Thailand is next." So it's not an automatic thing, but it's a set of--a sequence of linkages which are for real.

G: Let me get your reaction to a quote that I can't give precisely. It goes way back, I think perhaps to 1963 and I think it's William Bundy, I'm not sure. He said he wasn't especially worried about the Red Chinese expanding in Southeast Asia, but that the North Vietnamese worried him considerably. Would you have agreed with that at the time?

R: Well, it depends on when he said it.

G: I think quite early. I think 1963.

R: Well, it wasn't a question of the Chinese troops pouring across the border, because the

logistics of that were--and at that time the Chinese, early sixties, were recovering from the setback, just beginning to recover from the tremendous setback of the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap Forward fell on its face and the Russian aid was withdrawn. The early sixties were a dreadful period, and they had to buy enormous amounts of grain abroad in Australia, Canada, *et cetera*, to survive, and the whole economy was terribly set back. Then they began to recover, and then they got into this period of great optimism about expanding their power in Asia. They were up to here in the Indonesian coup, Sukarno's attempt to kill the general staff, which almost came off. They were up to here with the Malaysian confrontation. They were up to here with the North Vietnamese when they moved into South Vietnam, the regulars. They were the dominant--had the big influence at that time in Hanoi, and they were very ambitious, and you just have to read what they said and what was then going on. It's instructive, you know. People don't do it, but it's instructive historically to go back and read what was being said by the New Zealand prime minister and [the] foreign minister of Australia, the Tunku in Malaya, and the anxieties in Tokyo. Because in 1965 the setting in which President Johnson made his decision was a setting in which the people in Asia thought the dominoes were about to fall. Now it was not a question of the Chinese troops pouring across the southern frontier, but it was a question of their helping, inspiring this nutcracker.

G: Their proxies.

R: Their proxies, that's right. And they were operating with guerrilla warfare, military means in the Malayan confrontation, and in the North Vietnamese regulars coming into South Vietnam, which was a decision made in 1964, probably in the summer.

G: The next one has to do with the problem or existence of the Vietnamese antipathy toward the Chinese. What part was that seen as playing in this?

R: Well, it was felt that in addition the Vietnamese sure wanted to be independent of the Chinese and they wanted to be independent of everybody, but they were quite capable of working closely with the Chinese when there was an authentic overlapping interest. It was the Chinese who were their support at the time of Dien Bien Phu. In fact, the Chinese supplied a lot of the logistics. The Chinese was their route of supply. The Chinese were their closest ally in the surge of 1964-65. Now, [in] 1965 two things happened. One is that we began bombing and they began to have to get more sophisticated equipment, and that is why in early 1965 Kosygin went to Hanoi with a lot of generals. As the need to get more sophisticated military equipment, which the Chinese couldn't supply--the Russians saw the opportunity and moved in.

G: Was that at the time of the Pleiku incident?

R: Some of it was tied in. You know, this period is very vague in my mind, because I was not in the business, but you'd have to check it. And we were bombing around there. We bombed, I guess, when Kosygin was there. People said, "Wasn't that a dreadful thing to do." Hell, he was not there to make peace, he was there to get his hooks into Hanoi and outflank the Chinese in his influence. That led to a big military deal for anti-aircraft and planes and all sorts of things. That's how they really moved Hanoi away from China. Then another thing that happened in 1965 when President Johnson moved forces in, and then the coup came in Indonesia, which failed, and two weeks later the Cultural Revolution starts. And the Chinese were on cloud nine and out to lunch for everybody

for a couple of years. There is some linkage, everyone agrees, among the China experts, between the coup--the failure of the coup, and the Cultural Revolution. But what it is, no one can make out. (Laughter)

In any case, my short answer is, of course, the North Vietnamese wanted to be independent, but that doesn't preclude them from working with either a Russian strategy or a Chinese strategy.

G: Would it have complicated things very much for them had we pried the Russians away at this junction in some fashion, made them entirely dependent on the Chinese?

R: How are we going to pry the Russians away in 1965?

G: I haven't got a good answer for that.

R: This is a very serious business. Remember--go back and read about the origins of the really serious part, the deeply serious part of the Sino-Soviet split, which was over the nuclear question. I don't think--I didn't really understand that nuclear role until I wrote the book *Diffusion of Power*. I knew it was an incredibly deep split, and then the Chinese in 1964, about our election time, exploded a nuclear weapon and that's when the Soviets began to build up the forces on the inner frontiers of China. But the whole nuclear thing is fundamental to that split. You see it, the surface, in early 1958, and it gets more and more intense. The whole business of the role in Southeast Asia is all tied up (a) to Russian ambitions in Asia, (b) to their confrontation with China, as well as their confrontation with us. It cuts both ways. They are now in Cam Ranh Bay and flying out of our airfields in Danang that we built.

G: Much to the chagrin of a great many of us.

How would you compare the roles of the national security advisor under Kennedy and then under Johnson?

R: Basically they're very similar. I'll just tell you what's in the book. It's in *The Diffusion of Power*. LBJ's instruction to me--there had been a lot of talk about whether he was going to change the role when I came in. After I was brought over there, he had me in and he said, "I want you to do everything that Mac [McGeorge] Bundy did, but two additional things. One, I want you to generate some ideas, new ideas for policy. I've made my commitments to the Great Society. I've made my commitment to Southeast Asia. But the world can't stand still. We can't stand still. I want you to generate new initiatives." Dean Rusk was present when he said this, and Rusk said, "There are very few new ideas in the world, and if you can generate some, that's fine. The only thing I ask of you is that when you send an idea to the President, you send me a copy." And it worked perfectly and never any difficulty.

The second thing he said is, "When we leave here three years from now"--this was April 1, 1966--"when we leave here three years from now"--

G: Not "if we leave"?

R: No, he said, "When we leave here three years from now, I want you to build that staff so we'll be proud of them, and I want you to stop the leaking." It turned out there was no leaking. One leak, but that was due to a misunderstanding between Mac Bundy and the fellow, and the fellow was gone by that time. Because he had that anxiety, I took pains--as I said, "As part of my dowry, I want you to meet the staff." He had never met with them all. He said, "I'm so busy." Finally--a half hour. After his nap one day, he set the

time, and we went up to the Cabinet Room. I suspect that's the only time that ever happened, that the President met with the whole staff, NSC staff. We weren't a big staff. He spent more than two hours with them, and they'll never forget it. It was a marvelous time. I built up a whole set of direct connections between them to try to get them into meetings with foreign ministers and ambassadors and get them invited to White House dinners, because it was very important for their prestige around the town, and also--goodness, I mean, they were working like slaves. They should have [a] direct connection with the President.

In any case, it was very much the same, except we did generate some new initiatives. The first one was the summit for Latin America, which--two weeks after I came in we pushed that and got that launched in Mexico, the whole set of them. But in any case, that's what he told me, and that's the way it was run, and I don't think there was any basic difference.

I did some things in terms of the personnel. I brought Bromley Smith in and used him more, and I tried to build up, as I say, the connections between the President and the staff, which was a small staff, so that he really knew Bill Bowdler and Ed Fried and all these fellows, which is terribly important. Because it was their memos very often that he was reading, as well as mine, and I being an academic could never sign a memo written by somebody else, so I would say, "Here's Bill Bowdler's memo. It says this and I agree with it," or "You might want to consider this also." Bill would know that. I had to be away a lot doing things for the President or being out with him, and he had to know the--I felt it important he know the faces of the guys who were carrying forward the work. So

we had with this small staff a really good collegial feeling with the President and extremely good morale right down to the last day.

G: You mentioned leaks and I'd like to make a little aside on that topic. In several other places it's been alleged that President Johnson occasionally was the leaker and had forgotten that he had leaked it to someone.

R: Well, presidents often leak. The *bon mot* in Washington was that the White House was the only bottle that ever leaked from the top. Presidents do that occasionally. But I think we had very good discipline in our gang. Some people left, I brought in other people. I was proud of that group and they've gone on to very distinguished careers. Hal Saunders, for his sins, is assistant secretary for the Middle East, handling among other things--poor fellow--both Afghanistan and the hostages. Bill Bowdler was assistant secretary for Latin America and Bill Jorden has gone on to great distinction. Other people--Matt Davis went on to be ambassador. I really thought we did end up with a good collegial staff.

Now. "What justification is there for the view that there has been a steady accretion of power in that office at the expense of the secretary of state?" No, that's--first of all, you ought to know, I got out the figures. There was a big cut in the staff, you see. We inherited--in 1960 there were sixty-three. [The] average [number of] employees in 1965 was thirty-eight. Now that includes all sorts of people not on my staff, I mean, communications rooms and so on. We had a hell of a big cut. The budget in 1960 was $792,000; 1965, $627,000. Then Nixon blew it out--$1,860,000. Then in 1975 it's $2,900,000. Well, there's inflation in there, but it never recovered. We cut it way back

from the Eisenhower period. Now you have to take those figures and put them in real terms because of inflation. But between 1965 and 1980 it's a six-fold increase in the budget.

G: But it comes after--

R: We dropped it from $792,000 to $627,000 in our period. It was Kennedy who did that, and I described how he did it and how he teased Mac Bundy and me. The first thing, we come to Washington, a couple of academics, and we thought we were realistic and the first thing we asked him to do is cut our budgets. He said, "Don't you realize what power is in this town? It's offices and secretaries and typewriters and the kind of inkwells you have on your desk. Here you can--don't you understand, it's a loss." It is. And he did it. So it's not a state--

Now as for the power of the secretary of state, I write about that relationship and I don't think it's a steady accretion. I think that there was a sharp decrease in the power of the secretary of state under Nixon because Nixon had this sense that he couldn't trust the State Department. He wanted to do it all himself in the White House, with a yellow pad and Henry [Kissinger] and a staff around him, which I think was a very grave error, for many, many reasons. Ford--then when Henry went over to the State Department, I think that changed. Although Brent Scowcroft did an extremely good job in a quiet way. He's an able man.

But it's really up to the president as to what the responsibilities are. Now, President Johnson, he had plenty for me to do and plenty for the secretary of state. There was more than enough work. The real thing is the relationship between the two men, but

it's all set by the president. If the president has a clear policy and both men adhere to the policy and do their jobs in terms of that policy, there's no reason for trouble and every reason for collegiality.

Now, Mr. Rusk and I had a unique advantage; that is to say, by the time that I went over there in 1966 he and I had been through every kind of crisis together since early 1961. I had served on the Policy Planning Council with him, and in general I had a very serious view that the secretary of state should be *primus inter pares* in the cabinet, and he should be both the man who runs the Department of State and speaks for the president on the Hill, but also the mobilizer of the whole foreign policy community in the State Department. It's hard to make them carry out that coordinating role. But in any case, our relationship was easy.

So it has not been a straight-line expansion; it's varied with each president. But the basis has got to be the president, the coherence of his policy. If the president is sort of ambivalent about policy and lets the secretary of state take one line and the fellow in the White House take another, that's bad. The man in the White House should be as low-profile as he can be, and there's a very good reason for it. He doesn't go up on the Hill to committees and defend the policy. He doesn't go abroad and shouldn't, except on rare occasions, be an agent of diplomacy. The secretary of state has got to be the president's man for that. It's terribly important for the president and for the country that the role of the secretary of state be unambiguous. The special assistant's job--it's a marvelous, interesting job. It calls for every kind of quality a man has, and he should do it, but be conscious that the secretary of state has been doing an even harder job and needs all the

help he can get.

And the other thing about it is this: in the--you might want to, incidentally, see the little piece I did in this congressional [inaudible] on the role of the special assistant.

G: I want to see that before I leave, yes, sir.

R: I did a little paper for it. And I also, incidentally, reproduced the two chapters on the organization of national security affairs in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations out of *Diffusion of Power*.

But one of the most rewarding aspects of that job, if the man who does it is viewed as not being governed by personal ambition, he's in the unique position to hold that little team together. In the end the people making decisions in foreign policy--the president makes them, but it's a very small collection of human beings. It's the president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, if the president has confidence in him he brings in the chairman of the joint chiefs, as we did at the Tuesday lunch, and the director of central intelligence. It's a handful of human beings. Now, the man sitting in that special assistant's post is in a situation where he has the privilege of knowing the president very well, he sees the president every day, for many hours usually, in many circumstances. He knows what's on his mind. If he reaches out, he understands also the problems and anxieties of the secretary of defense and the secretary of state. And by being in that position, if he has a human confidence in these men, he can be a very healing and unifying element in the equation. Because it's sometimes hard for a president to explain everything on his mind to one of his cabinet officers, and the cabinet officer may not want to burden the president with all of his anxieties. That human role in that

extremely small group of human beings who bear these burdens is potentially one of the most rewarding aspects of that job.

G: Can you think of any instance where you had a special opportunity, as between let's say the secretary of state and defense, to play that role?

R: No. But there were a number of ways. It was a kind of a strand that--in my communications with everybody I was conscious of making sure the President understood how things looked to Bob McNamara or how they looked to Dean Rusk, and vice versa. It was not a question of big incidents. And we had the advantage of the Tuesday lunch, which in my time we systematized, had a formal agenda, and even got notes taken. I found there were no notes being taken systematically. So that it was not a question of big dramatic episodes.

G: A continuing process.

R: But a continuing process.

Now, let's get going. Okay. "Did you often get feedback from the President on the memos you sent him?" This is going--backtracking to the policy planning.

G: Yes.

R: Yes. I'm sure the President told me he wanted me to send these memos over. I don't know what he--I didn't get any playback. Sometimes the language that I suggested would appear in a speech.

(Interruption)

--"I don't want *anything* out of this house on foreign policy except through the special assistant. Great confusions are being created at State because we get memos from the

White House on foreign policy from all sorts of people." And we got that tightened up.

Now, on Vietnam *et al*. There were undoubtedly people who disagreed with the President's policy, which I supported, although as you know from reading my book I disagreed with the way the war was conducted. And I have no doubt that Bill [Moyers] and others may have been writing memos, and there have been allegations, which I can't vouch for, that they were in touch with Nick Katzenbach, *et cetera*. But basically that didn't matter, because the President was making policy. For people working on the domestic side and so on, and feeling the pain of Vietnam and not being in it and not having responsibility for forming professional views on it and so on, I didn't find it odd at all that they should have other views or even communicate them in some way. If they felt strongly, they should have communicated them to the President in the [White] House; they shouldn't have gone outside lobbying around Washington. I don't know whether it ever did happen, incidentally; I'm just giving you rumors. So I never felt any concern about it. The President was in charge, and he had a policy, and I was trying to help him, and Mr. Rusk was trying to help him, and we all were in it. The fact that there was a little noise in the system--after all, I'm a historian. I remember what it was like in President Washington's time with Jefferson being undercut by Hamilton, and everybody and his brother. (Laughter) So I thought that this was all very orderly, by any normal standards, and there was no real problem. Bill Moyers left very shortly after I came there to take this job up in Long Island, I guess.

G: Well, I asked it because it has appeared in several places.

R: I didn't--we did get the flow of paper from the State Department centralized, and we had

an orderly shop and an orderly relationship with the State Department. Sure, there must have been a lot of anxious and dissident views around, it's wholly understandable, but it didn't interfere with business.

G: Now you've answered, at least in part, the next question concerning the importance of the infiltration routes from the north to the south. You said they were absolutely crucial.

R: Fundamental. Fundamental.

G: Fundamental.

R: That's what I was suggesting. I find to my surprise I suggested, all the way back in 1961, the way to end the war was to put U.S. forces across the Ho Chi Minh Trail, block those trails, on the ground. I was a real professional in the bombing business in my time, and I never felt that that could do more in that particular terrain than to exact a price--I don't know whether it was 10, 15, 20 per cent. You never could interdict those trails with air power, and therefore I felt the only--what I wanted was to get a couple of the U.S. divisions across those trails. The logistics were excellent because it was a route running south of the eighteenth parallel, seventeenth parallel, whatever it is--the demarcation zone. A very short route from the coast.

G: Route 9, I think it is.

R: That's correct. It runs right into that area. Logistics would be easy, and you could supply from the sea these divisions. It would take a couple of divisions, it's not one trail, it's an area, and it would have to be an active defense, but that would end the war. Because you couldn't infiltrate across the parallel in large numbers. And then I wanted to put U.S. forces up in North Vietnam, as far north as Vinh, to hold that area hostage until they got

out of Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam, and we had a treaty. Then we would get out. That's the only way I thought we could end the war.

G: I know that you said that you felt that the failure to enforce the Laos Accords was one of the chief flaws in the Kennedy Administration.

R: In the sixties. A major mistake in the sixties, yes. Well, I don't know what he would have had to do, because they were fresh from the negotiation of a Harriman-Pushkin agreement, which was to make Laos a Finland. That was Pushkin's phrase. And the Soviet Union had undertaken responsibility to make sure they wouldn't violate Laos. I think if we had immediately made it a federal case--and I think it might have had to lead to some military action then, which in Kennedy's case would have been from the sea side and air. He was very clear, as you can see from our memoranda to him, that he would have been reluctant to use a lot of ground forces. He would have [used] maximum sea and air. In any case, if he had said, "Look, this is just going to make great trouble, and you've got to live up to your agreement, and I'm going to go after these guys," I think the Russians would have insisted on it, at that time.

G: At that time?

R: Yes.

G: Later perhaps it was too late?

R: Well, you see, once you let, by common law, the thing build up--a number of times we reminded the Russians of their responsibilities and that if they had honored their responsibilities, we wouldn't have that war. They never denied it, never. I think it was a grave error. I tried to explain why I think--it would have been tough to do from a

standing start, but I remember [how] that memo ends, by saying, "If you don't"--when Mikoyan was there--"if you don't do it now, in a relatively good position, you'll face this problem in a waning situation." And that's what Mr. Johnson faced, exactly as I feared. In any case, I explained that.

"Unable or unwilling." Well, unable--they might have been able to if we had been tough, if they had said, "Look, we don't want a war down there, we don't want the United States mining your harbors or bombing you or blockading or whatever they'll do. And you've just signed this, and you can't do it. Cool it, boys." But they had no leverage over them.

G: Because they had an alternative.

R: They had an alternative with China.

G: And they were very good at playing that--

R: That was their whole game. We used to get charged with all sorts of--people would say, "Ah, you didn't understand. You still thought this was a monolithic bloc." The truth is the split between China and Russia made our task in Southeast Asia a lot worse, as you can see right now with the Russians having come in to Southeast Asia in a very serious military way, with naval bases and air bases commanding the South China Sea. But the split didn't make life easier for us.

G: No. I can see that.

Concerning the whole Laotian settlement, did that serve in our thinking later as a kind of precedent?

R: No. No. No, it didn't. Because we wanted a straight non-communist South Vietnam to be decided by a vote, and we had no doubts how the votes would go, and neither did the communists. There was never any question about the voting. That's why they never would stand up and have an election.

G: What about Eisenhower's famous remark, oh, back in the mid-fifties about the 80 per cent--

R: Now, I want to just see how good you are. What did he say?

G: It's tricky. I believe what he said was "If we had the election tomorrow"--

R: Yes, "my experts tell me."

G: --"my experts tell me that 80 per cent of the vote would go to Ho Chi Minh."

R: Do you know who was then the ruler in South Vietnam, what period that was?

G: That was Bao Dai.

R: Correct. I don't know whether the experts were right even then, but it was the Bao Dai period, not the Diem period, and that was all used in the debates of the sixties as if this was the time of Diem.

G: Before there was a real national figure in Saigon.

R: That's right, that was before they had their independence. Bao Dai was a puppet, a French puppet.

G: Bad reputation.

R: That's right. I became the world's greatest living expert on the tricks of the debates of that period, because I--I didn't mind doing it, and I talked to all sorts of groups and ran into all this sort of stuff. Okay.

G: The next question you, again, partly answered. I asked you to plot the course in a very rough macro sort of way of South Vietnam since its independence, and I gather that you would have drawn an upward--

R: Well, there's no doubt. It slowly--it took [Diem] time to consolidate his rule. He had to deal with the sects and the thugs in Saigon, and he had all sorts of things. But there was no doubt an upward curve. Then it began from 1958-59-60 to slowly disintegrate. 1961 was a bad year. 1962 was improvement. Communists admit that was a good year. Then you go down with brother [Ngo Dinh] Nhu and the rise of Nhu in 1963, and then starting with the Buddhist thing it just disintegrates down to whenever it was that Thieu and Ky came in. Then there's a slow revival--a bottoming out, and the beginning of a stabilization in 1965. 1966-67 are good years. It dips down as they begin, in the autumn of 1967, the movement of their forces in for the big Tet offensive. It was under pressure. Then comes Tet, and then a very sharp rebound and a little setback in May, not bad, and then a big, big improvement in 1969, 1970, 1971, tremendous improvement.

G: As they move back to the countryside.

R: Oh, yes. Well, they got 90 per cent control. By that time the guerrilla element was almost gone. It was a straight North Vietnamese war without a fixed front. And then comes the big offensives of 1972, which they manage. They rebound in 1973 and then comes Watergate and the cutting of the aid and the Congress kills them. But that's the story.

G: Right.

R: [General Edward] Lansdale.

G: Lansdale is of course--there's an awful lot of speculation surrounding his role in the later period. Now, he's told us what his role was in the early period when he was there as a personal advisor.

R: It's a good book.

G: It's extraordinary. He was an extraordinary man.

R: He is an extraordinary man. First-class man.

G: And Diem asked for him--

R: Yes.

G: --as a personal advisor and we didn't agree.

R: Well, I explained that in here, in *The Diffusion of Power*.

G: Well, you say that the reasons were that--if I'm quoting you correctly, or paraphrasing--that the Ambassador and the chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group didn't want another American between them and Diem. Now, did they mean any American--

R: Yes.

G: --or did they have particular objections to Lansdale?

R: No, I just think that they felt Lansdale--it was one of those orderly bureaucratic decisions which was a disaster, because if there was anyone who could have saved that government and provided a transition to the new generation, it was Ed Lansdale. I describe why I was so disheartened at the end of the mission with Taylor after Diem put these questions to me, and I got his response. But I thought that if there was any chance, Ed could do it. And the unwillingness to accept a bit of bureaucratic disorder--and I think it was a

mistake for the State Department not to tell the President, and for Mr. Rusk not to tell the President that we needed a man like that in there.

G: A charismatic sort of individual?

R: Well, the point about Lansdale is this. He dealt with people in developing countries in ways that made them feel dignified, and that was because he deeply respected the seriousness, complexity, the problems and dilemmas they faced, and he would not come marching in and say, "Mr. President, this is what you've got to do." What he would do is sit down and let him talk it out, and they'd talk about a problem, and by the end of it, what he thought the right solution was had been adopted, and it was that man's choice, the President's choice, and not some foreigner telling him how to run his country.

G: Which is what we kept saying we needed to do, but couldn't quite carry off.

R: That's right. Ed is a man--I've met a handful of people in my life who have this particular genius for dealing with human beings in ways that make them feel dignified. It springs from an authentic respect, self-respect, and a respect for the other fellow's situation. The most unlikely man, if we're talking about Lansdale, who also has that gift is Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker.

G: Really?

R: Yes. You know, you couldn't think really of two Americans superficially more different, but they both have a genius dealing with people from developing countries, which springs ultimately from their own qualities of character and sensibility.

G: Do you think that's why President Johnson picked Bunker for the Saigon post?

R: No, I don't know why he picked him. President Johnson had--if it weren't now regarded as a sexist thing to say--a feminine intuition about human beings and their complexities. But I think he picked him because everything he did, he did first-rate.

G: The Dominican--

R: Yes, whatever. I think he was very much impressed by the Dominican thing. Extraordinary reputation.

G: Now, we've talked about Lansdale and you've mentioned Ambassador Bunker. How about another figure that keeps cropping up in a similar context, and that's John Paul Vann?

R: Well, Vann was a field man, he was a man out in the field. But no, Ed Lansdale was not a--Vann was a marvelous character and a great--but also a great egoist, something of a Patton. But he dealt with the Vietnamese well and threw himself into their war, into their life, into their problems, and was extraordinarily good. But this was a field operation. Now Lansdale had been a field man working with [Philippines President Ramón] Magsaysay, *et cetera*. But I wouldn't put--Lansdale's ego was under total control.

G: So they were quite different people?

R: Very different people.

G: And of course they paid a different price. Vann paid the ultimate price eventually.

R: That's right.

G: If we can sort of freeze things for a moment. Right before the Buddhist crisis breaks out--

R: Now you're coming into a whole area where I have nothing really to tell you.

G: Well, I understand that you were not in the direct policymaking line during this period--

R: Yes, but I was only following it--I read the cables, the conventional--I didn't get the weekly summaries from ambassadors. I used to talk to Taylor and my other friends back in Saigon, my general--but from here on, you've just got to go back. I reconstructed what I think happened in *The Diffusion of Power*, but that's a historian's reconstruction, because--remember what I was doing in this period. I was a planner and I was working on all manner of different problems, and I gave very little to this. I followed it, but I gave very little to it, because this was a major concern of the operating part of the government. I worried about it, but I don't recall very well. Before the Buddhist crisis I think that the general view was--I think that there was growing anxiety even before the Buddhist crisis about the rise of Nhu and so on and the growth of frictions, but generally down to that period you have the improvement of 1962 moving into 1963. Now when in 1963 anxiety began to rise, I don't remember.

G: It's hard to pinpoint.

R: The State Department viewed 1962 as a pretty good year. "How did the Buddhist crisis affect that picture at State?" I don't know the answer to that, nor to all of that question. "How did this lead to the controversial cable [of August 24, 1963]?" All I did was read about that controversial cable.

G: The way the rest of us learned about it?

R: Yes. "Did you agree with those who asserted that Diem had been creating his own problems?" I'd say the biggest problem was brother Nhu and the rise of Nhu, because--they were prepared to take an awful lot of guff from Diem, because he had earned his

legitimacy by his having stood out against the French and pulled the country out in 1954. He was an awfully burdensome administrator, the way he ran things, but the military and the civil establishment kind of accepted him. But when he began to push Nhu forward, that's when you began to--

G: In other words, Diem had acquired legitimacy by dint of achievement, and Nhu--

R: Had no legitimacy.

G: Had no--I see.

R: No doubt about what I'm telling you is correct. I have no [doubt]. That's a judgment I will give you in which I have real confidence. And they saw that Nhu would be the successor and they were very unhappy about that. I described in here my conversation. Somewhere I have the notes, in some little notebook I had with me in South Vietnam in 1961, of that long afternoon with Nhu. He struck me as . . . a fascinating character, a trained librarian, really a French intellectual. He wanted to centralize things and run it in an orderly French way, and he felt his brother Diem was too soft. I just knew it was going to be disaster.

R: Was, as has so often been said, Diem toward the end a captive of Nhu?

R: That's a mystery to me, because I was not--I do not know by what process he came to push Nhu forward. You'd have to get into it. I just don't know enough about that period, and I've never seen a good account of the process by which he became more and more dependent on Nhu and why. There was some thought that he himself was fading in his capacities. But I don't know. I haven't even gone back and read the--I don't remember what President Johnson was doing [inaudible]. That was in the Kennedy period, so we

wouldn't have the cables here. But I don't have anything in my files. All I have is classified, so I don't know. LBJ's reaction, I don't know.

G: Let me ask one more.

R: There's just not another thing in which I could be helpful to you. We're finished. Really, I'm not fooling.

G: Let me ask you for a personal reaction on the Diem business, at the time of the coup. You have said that--it may not be fair to put it this way, but I get the feeling from *Diffusion of Power* that there was a certain inevitability about the passing of Diem, that he was a phase--

R: At some stage, sure, that this was a generational problem. But it didn't have to happen that way.

G: Oh, the violence of it and the assassination and all the rest, certainly.

R: As I say, there was nothing remarkable. It's very parallel in its essential elements to the removal of--what's his name up in South Korea?--Syngman Rhee.

G: Park? Rhee, yes.

R: He also was a man who acquired legitimacy because he had stood out against the Japanese. He also came from an old Mandarin tradition with highly personalized rule. He also came athwart of these new structured chains of command, military and civil, and he didn't know how to deal with this new generation of technocrats. He didn't have a brother--

G: He didn't have a Nhu.

R: He didn't have a Nhu, but he had the same problem, and at some stage the technocrats were going to take over.

G: The Young Turks.

R: It was just inevitable. Now, there was nothing remarkable about the passing of that kind of a first-generation figure in a post-colonial situation giving way to a more orderly, bureaucratic type of government in a developing country. Of course, it had profound disintegrating consequences, given the fact that the poor little country was being subjected to this enormous pressure and infiltration and invasion.

G: Did you feel at the time of the coup that we were taking a big step into the dark now? I know there were people in Washington who were Diem partisans, and then there were people who said Diem has got to go.

R: I wasn't involved in that. I thought about it, but the point about it is if you're a professional in government and you're not getting the flow of traffic--and there was no reason why I should have the flow of traffic on this every day--you don't go around trying to form a professional judgment if you don't have the information. President Johnson used to say, quoting his father, that a man's judgment is no better than his information. I would add that good information doesn't necessarily guarantee good judgment, but a minimum condition for a professional judgment is to have the best information. I did not have that flow of traffic as the policy planner. There was no reason why I should have had it, and I didn't want it, because I was not operating. This was a highly operational scene. And therefore what was going on in that game was--I wished them well, and I had watched this disintegration with horror over the previous--well, from June on, but there

were very able people involved, and I wished them well. I felt sick at the pit of my stomach that Diem should end up the way he did. That is no way [in which] a man who had done what he had done for his country and had worked with us as a partner for a long time should have ended up. But I didn't know the ins and outs of it, and I didn't know about the cable. There was just too much to do when you're operating professionally to try to second-guess what your friends are doing.

It's very much the way I feel now, incidentally, about sitting here. I don't spend any time second-guessing on foreign policy. There are certain things. I can go and read the CIA reports and see what the relative U.S.-Soviet military expenditures are and get worried, and on energy or inflation or economic things, I think I know as much as anybody, and I can find out and I'm interested, and I have opinions, but . . . .

So I didn't know.

G: Did President Johnson ever express to you his reaction to that whole coup?

R: I have the vague feeling that he thought it was a grave error, but it's only vague. I got that, incidentally, rather more when he was working on the book [*The Vantage Point*] than when I--because I never talked to him about it. You know, we didn't go have retrospective talks, when you're working, running a government from day to day.

G: No time for that sort of thing.

Dr. Rostow, can we leave off here, since I'm about to run out of tape.

R: And you've run out of Rostow, incidentally.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

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