INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: DEAN RUSK

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

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Tape 1 of 2

R: Why don't we talk for awhile and then stop and see where we are?

M: That's fine. I suppose the best way is just to get into the outline, the parts where you indicate you have recollections. I think it's useful to get some of the background although it's not directly in the Johnson Administration. How much was Mr. Johnson involved in the decisions that you know about before he was President?

R: Is that running?

M: It is now. I was just indicating that--perhaps as useful background, even though it's in the Kennedy Administration--you were of course involved in Viet Nam from a very early time, and I'd like to get some indication as to how much Mr. Johnson as Vice President was involved during that period.

R: Well, in the first place, he was kept fully informed about everything that was happening in Viet Nam. He attended the National Security Council meetings and Cabinet meetings, and he had a State Department officer on his staff who kept him briefed on the daily reports from Viet Nam. So I would say that he had full information. He did make a trip to Viet Nam, as you will recall, and the historian will have a chance to read his full report on that trip.

M: Did you talk to him about that trip?

R: I talked to him about it after he came back. He was briefed on it before he left. I was present when he reported on his trip to President Kennedy, but I think it would not be correct to say that Vice President Johnson participated in the detailed decisions that were made by President Kennedy on Viet Nam unless President Kennedy talked to him privately about them because the key decisions were made not at formal meetings but informally by President Kennedy in consultation with his key advisers.

M: And Mr. Johnson was usually not present at that.

R: He was not regularly present at those special meetings that were called.

Now the most important decision that President Kennedy made was to go beyond the levels of troops that were in effect permitted by the 1954 agreements, and greatly to augment our advisory position in South Viet Nam. Under the Geneva Agreements the French had been permitted to leave about six hundred and fifty people in South Viet Nam as a military assistance group. By agreement with the French, we later substituted Americans for those French, and so we had about six hundred and fifty people there who were ordnance people, and quartermaster people, and signal people, who were there to advise on the use and employment of American equipment that was being supplied under the military assistance program. It became apparent to President Kennedy that that such effort was not going to be nearly enough to do the job, and so he greatly increased the advisory role out there and moved the complement to about seventeen or eighteen thousand before his death.

Any historian will want to look carefully at what President Kennedy said on the public record about Southeast Asia. You will find a great deal of material in the three volumes of the public papers of President Kennedy. There is no question that he felt very strongly that it was vital to the security of the United States that Southeast Asia be maintained as a free area, that it not be allowed to be overrun by the Communists. That was his policy, and some of the so-called Kennedy people who have tried to portray President Kennedy in a different role just missed the point. I'm not a ghoul, [and] I'm not going to dig President Kennedy out of the grave as a witness to later policy, but I think the historian will want to look carefully at what President Kennedy said publicly while he was President in order to make judgments about what President Kennedy's policy towards Southeast Asia was.

M: You are saying that the commitment was as firm as it ever had been or could be at the time the Administration changed in late 1963?

R: Yes, President Kennedy made the determination that I think any President would have made, that it was necessary for the United States to make good on its commitment to South Viet Nam. Every President since President Truman had come to the conclusion that the security of Southeast Asia was vital to

the security of the United States; that if Southeast Asia with its peoples and its vast resources were to be organized by elements hostile to the United States that would create an adverse and major change in the world balance of power; and that it was in the interest of the United States to maintain the independence of these Southeast Asian countries, particularly those covered by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

So when President Johnson became President, he found seventeen or eighteen thousand Americans in Viet Nam under a policy which was clearly aimed at maintaining the independence of South Viet Nam and Laos and Cambodia and Thailand. Now, the question arises as to whether President Johnson could have changed that policy. As Vice President he was certainly loyal to the policy of President Kennedy. There was no question about that. In a purely constitutional sense President Johnson might have been able to reverse course--

M: But he would have had to do it against--I take it--the more or less unanimous advice of his advisers.

R: There was no advice to President Johnson from any of his advisers that we cut and run in Southeast Asia. President Johnson took office determined to carry out the main policies of President Kennedy. He did that both in domestic and foreign affairs.

In another sense the President would find it difficult, if not impossible, to change a commitment of that sort. When you look at the consequences of cutting and running, the consequence is such that no President is likely to be able to accept. Not only would Southeast Asia be overrun, but the fidelity of the United States under its security treaties all over the world would be brought into question. In Asia we have treaties with Korea, Japan, the Republic of China, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand. If those who would become our enemies made the judgment that our participation in those treaties was merely a bluff, then those treaties would have no deterrent effect.

M: Which is one of their chief purposes.

R: That's quite correct, and the effect would be that there would be those who would be tempted to move into areas which were covered by our treaty commitments elsewhere. To give one or two examples, in June 1961 Chairman Khrushchev produced a crisis on Berlin in his meeting with President

Kennedy in Vienna in June. Chairman Khrushchev in effect said to President Kennedy, "We're going to turn East Berlin over to the East Germans, and you've got to work out problems of access and the presence of U.S. troops in Berlin with the East Germans." The implication was that the East Germans would not permit us to maintain our forces there, and Chairman Khrushchev said that any attempt by the United States to use force against the East Germans would mean war, President Kennedy had to look him straight in the eye and say, "Well, then there will be war, Mr. Chairman. This is going to be a very cold winter." Now, it was of the utmost importance that Chairman Khrushchev believe President Kennedy on that point; otherwise, there might well have been a war.

Coming later to the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy had to say to Chairman Khrushchev, "Now, Mr. Chairman, those missiles must leave Cuba. We'd prefer that they leave by peaceful means, but they must leave." Now, suppose Chairman Khrushchev had said to President Kennedy, or had thought in his own mind, "Don't kid me, Mr. President. I know that your principal newspapers and your key Senators will collapse when I put on the pressure." That's a very good way to have war.

The credibility of the President of the United States at a moment of crisis and the fidelity of the United States to its security treaties are both of the utmost importance in maintaining peace in the world. The idea in the minds of leaders in Moscow and in Peking that they had better be careful because those fool Americans just might do something about it is one of the principal pillars of peace in the world. So the issue in Southeast Asia is not just Viet Nam, it's not even just Southeast Asia. It has to do with the maintenance of peace in a system in which the United States has security treaties with more than forty nations.

M: The world system--

R: So that any decision by President Johnson in 1963 or 1964 to abandon Southeast Asia would have been a decision to abandon the fidelity of the United States under its commitments, and this would have been a very grave thing--not only in Southeast Asia, but in the general world situation.

M: Was there any advice at that time that you could have maybe the best of both worlds and honor your commitments and not cut and run, but still not invest any more resources in the position we were trying to hold there? Was there a

middle-ground that was an option, even at that time?

R: The historian is going to want to make some judgments about the problem of timing in using our forces in Southeast Asia, this question of gradualism. Basically we were on the strategic defensive in Southeast Asia. All we were trying to do was to deny to North Viet Nam its effort to seize South Viet Nam by force. Tactically in given local situations we took the offensive, but strategically all we were trying to do was to prevent something. We therefore responded to what North Viet Nam was doing. President Kennedy put in an increased number of advisers, hoping that those would be able to overcome the effect of the North Vietnamese personnel that were being infiltrated into the South. Then after our election of 1964, North Viet Nam began to send major units of its regular army into South Viet Nam so that--

M: There's no question about that unit infiltration?

R: No, no question about it at all. Not only were they eventually picked up on the ground and identified, but we had intercept material indicating that they were on the way.

M: This was as early as, you said, right after our election so--

R: We began to get information about the movement of these units in December and January after our election.

Coming back to the point of gradualism--looking back on it the question arises as to whether we might have prevented further North Vietnamese efforts against South Viet Nam had we put in more troops sooner. For example, if President Kennedy had put in one hundred thousand men in 1962 as soon as it was discovered that the Laos Agreement of 1962 was not going to work, or had done it in 1963, it's just possible that that demonstration of substantial force at a very early stage would have caused North Viet Nam to pause and decide that the Americans really were serious. But the gradual response left it open to North Viet Nam to speculate that if they just did a little bit more, they'd be able to overcome what the Americans were willing to do. We followed the policy of gradualism in terms of responding to what North Viet Nam was doing partly because we didn't want a larger war ourselves, partly because we were on the strategic defensive and were therefore responding to what the North was doing, partly because we did not wish to stimulate China and the Soviet Union into decisions which might have led to

some active intervention on their part. We were trying to maintain this as a war that would not go beyond Viet Nam, you see. But this is a judgment that the historian will have to make.

M: Did the fact that we had an election in 1964 and that Mr. Johnson was terribly concerned and distracted by that perhaps make it difficult for him to give the attention to Viet Nam that first year that might have produced a different result had he had the time and the concentration to do it?

R: No, he gave full attention to Viet Nam during the campaign and in the period just after the campaign. There was never any inattention on his part. What he was doing during that period was, in effect, coasting along on the decisions that had been made by President Kennedy. The level of forces did not begin to increase significantly until the spring of 1965.

There is one very interesting point about our elections of '64. Again, the historian will want to look into this, particularly if he can get any information available out of North Viet Nam. President Johnson, although reaffirming our commitments throughout his campaign in 1964, made it clear that we were not interested in a larger war. Barry Goldwater, his opposition candidate, talked as though he wanted to make it into a larger war in order to get it over with. Johnson won. It's entirely possible that the fellows in Hanoi said, "Aha, Johnson has won the election. He says he doesn't want a larger war. This means that we can have a larger war without an increase in risk." It was after our election and before the starting of the bombing of North Viet Nam that North Viet Nam began to send the regular units of its own army into South Viet Nam. The 304th Division, for example, was started out for the South very soon after our election, so we've sometimes speculated as to whether Hanoi misinterpreted the election of 1964 and thought that they could therefore increase their forces without running the risk of increasing the United States forces.

M: Although that had come after the Tonkin attack when we'd demonstrated our policy of retaliation before the election.

R: Yes, but they might have decided that that was an isolated episode and that this was not a matter of general policy, because there were some other attacks that had not led to retaliation.

M: Right. And that was one of the questions I wanted to ask you. Was there a reason why we followed a policy of retaliation at Tonkin, and then at Bien Hoa and other instances we didn't do so?

R: Well, I think that the main difference was that in the Tonkin Gulf incident there were attacks on American ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin and the issue there was whether or not--

M: There wasn't any question of the facts? I don't mean to interrupt you, but the facts were quite clear with the people who were considering the policy that this had in fact happened?

R: I never had any doubts about the facts. Certainly, no one has seriously challenged the first attack. There has been some doubt cast on the second attack. But the commander of the ship and all the intervening commanders had no doubt about it, and I was impressed with the intercept material which we picked up from North Viet Nam because my impression at the time was that North Viet Nam had no doubt about the fact that they were attacking these ships, you see. And they were the ones who would have the best means of knowing.

M: The critics have made a point of what our ships were doing there, supporting apparently covert operations by the South Vietnamese. Had the policy--or allowing or ordering that support--been discussed at the Cabinet-level?

R: These vessels were not there in support of any coastal operations by the South Vietnamese. They were not there in that role. They were there on missions that were more like the Pueblo mission. They were on an independent intelligence-gathering mission in the Gulf of Tonkin. Of course, since it was high seas we expected to maintain our capability of being present in the Gulf of Tonkin, and we weren't going to be driven off the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin just because of a scrap going on in South Viet Nam. But it is not true--and Secretary McNamara testified to this--that these vessels of ours were there covering or, in a sense, associated with some South Vietnamese coastal operation.

You see there had been a little guerilla war going along on the coast back and forth across the DMZ between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese were using coastal waters for infiltrating men and arms into the South, and the South Vietnamese were

retaliating. But the destroyers that were attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin were not there to give cover to operations of that sort.

M: Was this policy of retaliation already decided upon prior to its event, or was it one that you met and decided upon after the attacks occurred?

R: It was decided upon after the attacks occurred.

M: Was that a meeting in which the President personally got involved?

R: Oh, yes, he was very much involved in this one.

M: What about the degree of advice at that time? Was it still pretty much unanimous that this was something we couldn't allow, or were there important objections?

R: I don't recall any significant objections from any of the senior advisers. I think the advisers to the President were unanimous on this point.

M: That we should retaliate?

R: That's right. There was some discussion about how many points and what kind of targets and things of that sort, and it was decided to limit the retaliation to the bases from which these torpedo boats had come out and basically retaliate against the nature of the attack rather than to attack Hanoi and Haiphong and more general targets.

M: What about the Resolution that grew out of it? Was that something that also arose at that time, or was that a matter that had been discussed previously and decided upon?

R: Fairly early in his Administration, President Johnson came to the conclusion that at some stage he was going to ask Congress to associate themselves with the effort in Viet Nam.

He had remembered very clearly that at the outbreak of the Korean War that Congressional leaders had advised President Truman not to ask for a Congressional resolution and suggested to President Truman that he use the powers of the President to conduct the Korean operation. Well, President Truman accepted that advice and did not ask for a resolution, and then some Senators, particularly Senator [Robert A.] Taft, later attacked the whole operation on the

grounds that he should have asked for a resolution.

President Johnson, remembering that, felt that at some stage he wanted to associate the Congress with him in the effort in Viet Nam. Since that was known, various efforts were made to see what a draft resolution would look like. I never participated in those directly because I never thought the time was ripe to ask the Congress for a resolution, so that I am not familiar with the details of some of that preliminary staff work that had been done.

Then when the Gulf of Tonkin came along and the President consulted with the leadership of the Congress, he discussed with them whether this was not the time now to go for a resolution putting the Congress behind the United States policy on Viet Nam and making it clear to North Viet Nam that we were serious about it.The Congressional leadership encouraged him to do so.There was practical unanimity among Congressional leaders on the desirability of a Congressional resolution, and so we had our hearings, and promptly the Congress passed the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Resolution with only two dissenting votes in the Senate.

Paragraph II of that resolution, which the historian will be able to see, of course, was not about the Gulf of Tonkin, but was about Southeast Asia, and it simply affirmed that the United States is prepared as the President determines to use whatever means are necessary including the use of armed force to assist the states covered by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in the defense of their liberty. Now, there was no question at all at the time about the meaning of that resolution.

M: The critics--Mr. [J. William] Fulbright particularly, has later said that he didn't understand it to mean what it was later said to mean. Were there questions at the time?Was he given some kind of assurance at the time that has led him wrong?

R: I think the historian will want to look at the discussion on the floor of the Senate on that resolution in order to make a judgment on that kind of point, because as I recall one Senator asked Senator Fulbright whether this resolution would encompass the dispatch of large numbers of forces to South Viet Nam. Senator Fulbright said, "Yes, the resolution would cover that."He hoped that it would not be necessary to take such steps, but that the resolution would cover it. So that there was no question at all in my mind at the time that the Congress knew what kind of resolution

they were passing. Some of them later changed their minds, and when they changed their minds they tried to throw some cloud upon the resolution itself.But there was no doubt about it at the time the resolution was passed.

M: And no one was fooled who didn't want to be fooled.

R: No, it's very simple language.These Senators are all educated men. It's only two or three short sentences.They knew exactly what they were voting for, and the floor discussion in the Senate brought out all of these aspects. Senator Morse, for example, who opposed the resolution, told the Senate very frankly what this resolution meant, and because it meant that he himself opposed it.It was a very far-reaching resolution.

In the testimony, by the way, Senator Fulbright told me at the close of Secretary McNamara's and my testimony that this was the best resolution of this sort that he had ever seen presented to the Senate.I noticed that that particular sentence was deleted from the published text of the testimony.

M: That takes on considerable irony in the light of later events.

R: I will never forget Senator Fulbright's remark in that regard. He was all for it at the time.He urged the Senate to give it immediate and unanimous approval.Perhaps we made a mistake in not calling it the Fulbright Resolution.

M: I keep asking you about whether or not anybody was opposed because I think it is important to get it into the record that there was, if it seems there was, unanimity through this period on these decisions that sometimes the critics later forget about. It's a little repetitious for me to keep asking you, but that's why I do it.

R: President Johnson briefed the Congress on Viet Nam more extensively than any President has briefed the Congress on anything. When he first became President he used to have briefing sessions at the White House for Senators and Congressmen. He brought them down in groups and he'd have the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State give them a full discussion and gave them a chance to ask questions [and] make comments and I think he went through the entire Congress at least twice in this course.There was not evident at that time in those briefings and the reactions of the Senators and Congressmen to those

briefings--there was not evident any serious opposition to what we were trying to do in Viet Nam.

It was not until the costs of the war increased, it was not until large numbers of Americans got out there and the casualties went up, that in 1966 and 1967 there began to be second thoughts in the Congress about our commitments in Viet Nam.

M: Some of them then forgot how they had reacted to your--

R: That's right, and they forgot that they passed the Southeast Asia Treaty with only one dissenting vote back in 1955, with only Senator [William] Langer [R-ND] opposing it. Senator Morse voted for the Southeast Asia Treaty; Senator Mansfield signed the Southeast Asia Treaty along with Mr. Dulles and Senator [H. Alexander] Smith [R-NJ] in Manila when the Southeast Asia Treaty was first brought into being.

M: At the same time all of this was going on, during the summer, there were some I suppose you could call them peace initiatives being made. Can you add anything on things such as the Seaborne mission as to what we were trying to do at that point, the sort of guarded approaches we were making?

R: Let me make some general observations on so-called peace initiatives. On our side some of us had remembered that other crises had been resolved by preliminary secret contacts before any publicly known discussions got under way. The Berlin crisis of 1948 was resolved by private contacts between Ambassador [Philip C.] Jessup and Ambassador [Hakov A.] Malik in New York, and the matter was pretty well settled before the fact that talks were being held even became known.

The Korean War was put in the course of settlement by some very private contacts which have never been in the public record involving Ambassador [George] Kennan on the part of the United States, and that led to the negotiations which brought the Korean War to a conclusion.

So we were always ready to explore the possibility of private contacts which might give the clue to a solution of the problem. We were not interested in prolonging the war, we'd like to wind it up as soon as possible on a satisfactory basis, and we didn't want any possibility that the absence of machinery or the absence of contact would be an obstacle toward bringing the war to a conclusion. So we took a good many initiatives ourselves in stimulating such

things as the [J. Blair] Seaborne mission. We were interested when third-party governments tried to get into it--the Canadians, the Soviets, the Poles, the Hungarians, the Rumanians--or when individuals like U Thant or private citizens tried to play a role in one way or another. We were always ready to try out those various channels to see whether or not there was any indication on the part of Hanoi that they would be interested in talking about peace.

One thing that the historian will discover if he looks carefully through the record is that so long as I was Secretary of State there was never an initiative from Hanoi that could be described as a peace-feeler. The initiatives always came from somebody else, either ourselves or third parties. I cannot recall a single instance in which there was an initiative from Hanoi that could be described as a peace-feeler. Again the historian may want to make a judgment on whether we tried too hard in these peace-feelers and these various contacts--that by the frequency in which we probed for some possibility of peace and by the numbers of bombing halts and things of that sort that we might have misled Hanoi into thinking that we were irresolute.

M: The same criticism one might make about not starting the troops.

R: That's right. So it may be that we have--by our concern to be sure that no obstacle stood in the way of making peace--that we confirmed in Hanoi's mind the idea that we were ready for peace at any price, and therefore caused them to be more obstinate and more stubborn than they might otherwise have been. That's a judgment that the historian will have to make.

M: Did we have a well-conceived negotiating position at that time or were you just really trying to talk to them--to make contact with them as opposed to picking out what the negotiation would look like if indeed they got started?

R: The basic negotiating position was really very simple. The problem of peace in Southeast Asia arises because there came to be more than fifty regiments of North Vietnamese troops in South Viet Nam, because more than forty thousand North Vietnamese troops were in Laos contrary to the agreement of 1962, because North Vietnamese-trained guerrillas were operating in Thailand, because Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk had publicly charged that Hanoi and Peking were giving assistance to the guerrillas in Cambodia-the most neutral of all neutralist countries. We were aware of the fact that

men and arms were being infiltrated across the northeastern frontier of Burma out of China, and the Governor of India has made public the Chinese involvement in the tribal areas of Eastern India.

The problem of peace in Southeast Asia arose because Hanoi and Peking were doing things outside of their own borders that they had no business doing, so our negotiating position was basically that they stop doing it and that they take their troops back home and that the South Vietnamese be allowed to work out their own future for themselves; that the Laos Agreement of 1962 be given full effect; and that things like that North Vietnamese infiltration of Thailand be stopped.

There are some people who would call that asking for unconditional surrender. We weren't asking Hanoi to surrender anything, not an acre of ground, not a man. We weren't trying to destroy Hanoi. We weren't trying to seize them. We weren't trying to support the South Vietnamese in overrunning North Viet Nam. All we were trying to do was to get the North Vietnamese to stop doing what they were doing outside of their frontiers against their neighbors in Southeast Asia, so our negotiating position was relatively simple on that point.

There were possibilities [that] if the North Vietnamese wanted elections, if they were ready for some political determination by the people of South Viet Nam as to their own political future--there were things of that sort that could be agreed to. We never had any problem about devising a negotiating position, but the point is that we sent out signal after signal after signal and never got any return from Hanoi.

M: None at all during this whole period.

R: None at all. There were some people, particularly private citizens, some third parties, who did not understand the lingo of the discussions between ourselves and North Viet Nam, and they would go to Hanoi, or they would meet some Hanoi representative at some third capital, and they would hear something that they felt made a significant difference. They'd come back seven months pregnant, thinking that peace was about to break out, and that they were going to be responsible and maybe get the Nobel Peace Prize for it. Well, when we would check these things out against what Hanoi had been saying and what they were saying privately and what they were saying to us, we found nothing in them.

So we had a frustrating experience in so-called peace initiatives.

M: Does this include such things as, say, the U Thant one?

R: There were a great variety of initiatives that would have to be characterized as something less than constructive. The Poles, for example, had the idea that their job was to find some face-saving formula by which we could save our face and get out of Viet Nam; whereas, we were not trying to save face--we were trying to save South Viet Nam.

The Hungarian Foreign Minister [Janos] Peter and I engaged in some serious talks over a period of time about an initiative which Peter was supposed to be taking. That turned out to be a fraud.

M: What was the defector's name--later--

R: Radvanyi.

M: He confirmed later that that one was a fraud?

R: Yes. When Radvanyi defected he told me that there never had been anything in the Peter approach, that Peter was not in an effective contact with Hanoi, and that they had had no encouragement from Hanoi about the things that Peter was saying to me. Radvanyi told me that he tried to convey that to me by an expression on his face when he was coming in at the request of his government to report on one or another aspect of it, he was trying to give me a signal that what he was saying was not true. He was accompanied by a member of his Embassy who was a member of the Secret Policy so he couldn't tell me straightaway, but that was an instance that was just a plain fraud.

The Rumanian initiative was a serious one.

M: That was a very late one, wasn't it?

R: That's right. That was at a later stage when [Gheorghe] Macuvescu, the Deputy Foreign Minister, went to Hanoi at least on two occasions; and they were serious and sober, and although nothing came out of it, the Rumanian part in it was a responsible and reasonable part that we appreciated.

As far as U Thant's alleged initiative was concerned, it's very unfortunate that the principal witness to that transaction, Adlai Stevenson, died before we could get the

matter fully put down in the record, but a mistake we made was that we did not conduct that transaction in writing at all times because we found U Thant to be an unreliable person in regard to it. We got the impression that U Thant's channel was the principal Soviet representative in the Secretariat of the United Nations. We thought we knew that this fellow was a KGB man, so we were immediately alerted to the fact that this KGB man might be representing his government--the Soviet government--in stating that Hanoi would be willing to meet in Rangoon if we were prepared to do so; or he may be conducting a black operation. He may be trying to deceive us in some way.

I had several talks with [Andrei A.] Gromyko immediately following that episode, and there was never any indication from Gromyko that he was aware that Hanoi wanted to meet with us in Rangoon. Had this been a Soviet government affair, there's no question that Gromyko would have said something to me about it because we had some very private talks on the whole subject of Viet Nam.

To clinch the matter, I asked the Soviet Ambassador, Mr. [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin, about this transaction, because it had gotten to be public and gotten to be something of a little minor scandal. Dobrynin, on one of his trips to Moscow, searched the records in the foreign office and talked to his colleagues in the foreign office and came back and reported to me that there never had been a message from Hanoi, and that their man in the Secretariat had never been given any instructions to say to U Thant anything whatever on the subject. Dobrynin's speculation was that maybe their man in the Secretariat had made some casual remark at a cocktail party or in some other way, and that U Thant had seized upon this and run with the ball without having anything in mind.

M: This was all after the event?

R: This was all after the event. Now U Thant never gave us any message which he had sent to Hanoi, or which Hanoi had sent to him, about the possibility of a meeting in Rangoon. We never had any messages in front of us on which we could make a judgment. We simply had a very closely guarded hint from U Thant that if we were prepared to meet in Rangoon that Hanoi was willing to do so. We could never confirm that. My own present judgment is that this was something that U Thant had done, but that there was nothing from Hanoi on which he could base it.

M: What about the charges made by the publicists, like [Eric] Sevareid [Look, Nov. 31, 1965] and Norman Cousins, that somehow this got stopped purposefully before it got to the White House, or that it was not fully considered or fully checked into at the time of the event itself?

R: Again, let me point out that nothing of this sort developed in my talks with Gromyko.

M: And they were at the time--?

R: And they were at the time. They were at the United Nations and in Washington at the time. Had there been any Soviet knowledge of Hanoi's willingness to talk in Rangoon, it certainly would have come out in these talks with Gromyko. So we were skeptical about the authenticity of this all along. I personally suggested to U Thant that he use whatever channel he had to follow up on it and develop the matter further before we made a final judgment on it, but he never did that, never reported back to us on it. Just before his death--the very week of his death--Adlai Stevenson was in London and was on BBC, and he was asked about this. He said, "Well, I was never very clear about with whom the talks were supposed to be held and what about," so that on the public record Adlai Stevenson's own skepticism on the matter was registered.

I have no way of judging the Eric Sevareid story because that was a third-hand account. Sevareid himself says that his conversation with Adlai Stevenson was supposed to be off-the-record, but how much of that was Eric Sevareid and how much was Adlai Stevenson, I don't know. Again, it's a pity that we never got this point really straightened out while Adlai Stevenson was alive.

We did not reduce this transaction to writing because U Thant was so insistent upon the utter secrecy of the matter that we respected his request to handle it simply on a word of mouth basis, and it was a little unsatisfactory because the communication was from U Thant to Adlai Stevenson to me. Whatever I knew about it, the President knew; and there was never any concealment of anything that was going on. But we had a deep skepticism about the authenticity of any such idea, and it later worked out that our skepticism was well-founded.

M: That pretty well ended the events of '64, with our election and, as you've indicated, the increased infiltration. Did the military situation change sharply at that general time

period--late '64 and the beginning of '65? Did it deteriorate markedly?

R: In the spring of '65 it was apparent that unless we made some significant reinforcements of our own forces that the increased manpower of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong would likely cut the country in two and could cause very serious problems. We were faced with a serious step-up in infiltration, including North Vietnamese regular units, and I have no doubt that had President Johnson not increased our forces in the spring and summer of 1965 that the situation could have collapsed from a military point of view.

M: That is in spite of the opening of bombing which came in February.

R: That's right.

M: Can you lead up to that and the circumstances which led to taking that action? That becomes one of the main points of attack by critics in later times.

R: I'm not a very good witness on the actual beginning of the bombing of North Viet Nam in February of 1965, because I had gone to the Churchill funeral and had come down with the flu. [I] came back and spent some time in the hospital and then went to Florida for a period of ten days or so. I was not present for the discussions which led to the beginning of the bombing of the North.

I was not opposed to it. I felt that we should do whatever was necessary to affect the battlefield in the South, and the bombing of the infiltration routes in Laos and the bombing of the supply routes coming down from the North were entirely in accord with my judgment as to what the situation permitted or required.

My general attitude toward bombing the North reflected somewhat my impressions from the Korean experience. We bombed everything in North Korea from the 38th Parallel right to the Yalu River and had complete air superiority, and yet with full bombing we were not able to prevent the North Koreans and the Chinese from maintaining an army of five hundred thousand men at the front. They would bring in their supplies piggy-back, and at night, and in bad weather, and build up their supplies and then lunge forward for ten days or so, and then wait and build up their supplies again and lunge again.

So I was skeptical about the direct effect of bombing on the battlefield itself. I had no doubt that the attrition of forces in the infiltration routes made that bombing valuable, and I had no doubt that the limitations on supply routes was valuable. I was always skeptical about bombing up in the far North, in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, because I did not believe that that bombing had much effect on the battlefield in the South--and it was bombing that was very expensive in terms of plans and men lost. Hanoi and Haiphong were two of the most heavily defended areas that you've ever seen in warfare. So I was always in a mood to suspend that kind of bombing if there was any possibility of converting it into a serious peace move.

There were times when we would stop the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong for periods of several days in a radius of five or ten miles of the two cities in conjunction with some peace move that we or somebody else was making. Now, anyone who ever expected the bombing to end the war ought to have his head examined, because bombing just doesn't do that. It makes it more difficult, but it doesn't prove to be a decisive military factor,

M: Was there a disagreement, or a misunderstanding, about what we hoped to accomplish by the bombing in that first few months in the spring of 1965? Did some people have one idea that it would lead to the negotiating table, other people think that it would end the war on a military basis, and other people think that it might just punish them? That became an item that the critics fastened on at a later point, too.

R: Well, in retrospect, I think that it was a mistake to have the bombing of the North run by Commander-in-Chief Pacific from Hawaii rather than by the commander in South Viet Nam, because that tended to mean that there were two wars. There was [Gen. William] Westmoreland's war in the South and there was Admiral [U.S. Grant] Sharp's war in the North, CINCPAC in Hawaii was of the view that if they just continued to escalate their bombing that that alone would bring the war to a conclusion, whereas the effect on the war in the South was minimal.

The bombing was also related to the question as to whether the war would expand and whether Red China would come in. If anyone had asked me in 1963 whether we could have a half a million men in South Viet Nam and bomb everything in the North right up to the Chinese border without bringing in Red China, I would have been hard put to

it to say that you could. One of the effects of a policy of gradual response was that at no given moment did we ever present Peking or Moscow with enough of a change in the situation to require them to make a major decision based on overall world-wide considerations, in terms of intervening in that war. So just as the North Vietnamese infiltrated, so did we and helped thereby, I think, to limit the war to Viet Nam.

M: Is that why publicly the President frequently referred to the policy even after the bombing began as really being no change or not inconsistent with what we'd been doing anyway? Was that pretty well for Hanoi's consumption?

R: That was partly for that, yes. You see, we were trying to limit the expansion of this war. We didn't want to see it develop into a bigger war, and we didn't want the Red Chinese to come in. We didn't want Moscow to come in with any of their own forces. One of the reasons, therefore, that we played down the importance of any particular steps that we took was to play it down from the point of view of the enemy as well.

M: What about the timing of the bombing? Isn't it Charles Roberts of Newsweek, or somebody, who is quoted as saying that Mr. Johnson once told him that the bombing had been decided on back in 1964 and had been waiting for a time--or that's the implication anyway. Was it a matter that was decided upon during that period when you indicate you were--

R: No, the bombing of the North was always, from 1961 onwards, one of the possibilities. It was one of the alternatives that was considered, but no decision was made until February of 1965.

M: It was retaliatory--

R: Yes, but all alternatives were constantly being looked at right across the entire spectrum. Some alternatives were dismissed rather quickly. For example, the alternative of just getting out--withdrawal. The alternative of using nuclear weapons was just brushed aside and put on the shelf because there was no basis on which anyone would reasonably want to use nuclear weapons in that situation. But all of these alternatives were constantly being looked at when any important decisions came up for review, and we established review groups from time to time without having in mind that there would be new decisions, but just to review the bidding--to see where we were, to see whether we could do

things differently, and to see whether there were opportunities that we had overlooked either in the peace direction or on the military side. I would be surprised if the record would show that any decision were made to start the bombing before February 1965, although there was discussion of it.

M: There was the consideration, I'm sure, by everybody that bombing might also mean the necessity for added troop deployment as supports units, if nothing else. Was the connection between bombing and troop increase recognized and fully considered?

R: Yes. You see, the armed forces of South Viet Nam were somewhat fragile during this period. And the political situation in South Viet Nam was somewhat fragile. There had been the overthrow of Diem; there had been a succession of coups--

M: Somewhat of an understatement right at that particular period.

R: That's correct. So if bombing would lead to a larger war, that is if the North Vietnamese were to shoot the works and put all of their regular forces against the South, then the question is whether the South Vietnamese and the forces that we had there were capable of standing up to it, you see. Some of us wanted to be careful about what we did militarily until there had gotten to be a stronger situation in the South, both politically and militarily. Otherwise you might start something you couldn't see through. So bombing the North itself required that the situation in the South be strengthened because it could be anticipated that the North would make a larger effort in response to the bombing of the North.

M: So really the beginning the bombing and the troop decision are part of the same thing?

R: Yes.

M: In this sense when you decide on one you know you're deciding on the other at the same time.

R: The bombing undoubtedly greatly increased the length of time it took to infiltrate men and material into the South. We picked up a lot of prisoners who reported on their experiences on the route south, and it's quite clear that the bombing was a harassment that they didn't like at all,

and that the attrition, morale and otherwise, on the infiltrators from air-bombing was very considerable.

M: Was there important opposition within the government at high level to the bombing at the time it was undertaken?

R: No. As a matter of fact, George Ball recommended it as Acting Secretary. You see, I was away at the time, and he would have been one who later might have been expected to oppose it, but he made the recommendation.

M: And the fact that Mr. Kosygin was in Hanoi and not considered important enough to delay it when the Pleiku attack occurred?

R: At that time the bombing had nothing to do with Hanoi. It was on the southern part of North Viet Nam. It was on the infiltration routes and just across the DMZ. Initially it started out as simply pinpoint attacks on a limited number of targets and did not start out as a systematic bombing of North Viet Nam.

I think there were those who--there were some--who felt that it might be better to wait until Mr. Kosygin got out of town, but the Pleiku attack was delivered while Kosygin was in town. So you've got to have some sort of sense of balance and reciprocity on these things. If the North Vietnamese laid on a particular attack in Mr. Kosygin's presence, we didn't see any reason why we couldn't lay on a responsive attack while he was still there. But there was never any question about his personal safety because the bombing didn't go up there at all.

M: The responsive nature of it was incidental? It was understood by everybody that this was the beginning of what would be a continuing policy, not a one-shot response.

R: That is correct.

M: Let's begin by talking about the pauses. There were two publicized ones at least in 1965, the one in May for six days, I guess, and the more prominently displayed one at Christmas-time. What was the purpose and the results of those actions?

R: The point had been made that North Viet Nam would never talk so long as bombing was going on in the North, and so on several occasions we stopped the bombing either partially or entirely in order to find out whether contact would indicate

any readiness to talk on the part of Hanoi about serious matters.

In May of 1965 we stopped for six days but saw no indication of any desire to talk or any change in their situation on the ground, and so we resumed that bombing. Then later on that year it was hinted to us that that bombing pause had been too short; and that there had not been time for other governments to turn around with Hanoi and explore the situation--develop what might be done.

Ambassador Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, told McGeorge Bundy--whether on instructions or not I don't know--but told McGeorge Bundy that if we could stop for a longer period, say two to three weeks, that that would give the Soviet government a chance to make contact with Hanoi and see if something could be done. The President was skeptical of this and was skeptical of the idea of bombing [pauses] because he had seen no indication from Hanoi that they were interested in peace. We came up to the Christmas bombing pause which was traditional--to stop a few days at Christmas--and the President decided, on my recommendation and others, to extend that bombing pause for a further period in order to see whether or not Dobrynin's remark to McGeorge Bundy had any substance in it, and to give other people a chance to make contact with Hanoi if they wished to do so. So we stopped for thirty-seven days, but on about the thirty-fifth day Ho Chi Minh made a statement which was very negative indeed and made it clear that a longer bombing pause would not do the trick. So the bombing was resumed.

I think what we have been up against here, and I'm now speaking in September of 1969, is the fact that North Viet Nam has not yet made a decision to give up its desire to seize South Viet Nam by force and incorporate it into North Viet Nam. Ho Chi Minh's will, which was published at the time of his death, makes that very clear. The reunification of Viet Nam under Hanoi was always a consistent and permanent objective of Ho Chi Minh.

The North Vietnamese might have cooperated with any face-saving device by which we would simply abandon South Viet Nam, but bombing pauses, and intermediaries, and peace initiatives, and all the proposals that were made over the years ran up against that hard fact that Hanoi had not abandoned the decision that it had made back in 1959-1960 to go after South Viet Nam and unify it by force if necessary.

When you have a bombing halt there are always those who say, "Well, if you will just stop the bombing a little longer, something good might happen." So whether it was six days or whether it was thirty-seven days, or whatever it was, you see, there would always be critics who would like to make it permanent. We did make it permanent in 1968, and even then the attitude of the North Vietnamese negotiators in Paris showed that they were just as hard and implacable as ever, and that a full stop of the bombing on a permanent basis did not produce the desired result.

M: So really we were making tactical changes when actually they would have to make a strategic change of giving up a major objective before there was any hope.

R: That's right.

M: Was there a major debate in our government about that bombing pause of Christmas of '65, or was that something that was decided on fairly narrowly by just the very top advisers, with the President playing a personal role?

R: There was no great debate about it. There was a recommendation from me and others that we extend the Christmas bombing pause for another period, chiefly to find out whether the Soviets would be able to do anything in Hanoi that would be constructive. There was no great fight about it, so I would think that it was dealt with in a fairly relaxed manner.

I must confess that President Johnson's disappointment in that thirty-seven day bombing pause made a lasting imprint on him, because he was very skeptical from that time onward that anything could be done by way of peace initiatives, and probings, and bombing halts, and things of that sort. I think that he might feel that he was badly advised to go through that thirty-seven day bombing halt, because nothing came out of it, you see. But it was a calculated risk and a calculated possibility, and those of us who recommended it felt that it was worth the try since no great damage was done on the military side by a thirty-seven day pause.

M: What about the Russians? Did you, in your mind, at that time operate on the general assumption that they were really trying to be helpful?

R: I don't agree with those who think the Soviets want us to be engaged in a war in Viet Nam. I think they would be glad to

see this war brought to a conclusion, but on the other hand they have reasons of their own for not wanting Hanoi to be driven into the arms of Peking. This would be something of interest to them in their problems inside the Communist world.

We never found that the Russians were prepared to step out in advance of Hanoi and take positions that were not already agreed to by Hanoi. They would refer points to Hanoi simply as messages from the United States, and they would make general statements that if the bombing stopped something good would happen--something of that sort. But we never got Moscow to step out in advance of Hanoi on any significant point. I think this was because Moscow had become something of a satellite of Hanoi--because of Moscow's fear that if they weren't careful Hanoi might just align itself fully with Peking with all that would mean for the Soviets in the Communist world.

M: What about the display of public diplomacy? That doesn't sound like something that the professional diplomats would conceive. Did Mr. Johnson conceive that idea himself, sending Harriman and Bundy and--

R: Arthur Goldberg.

M: --Arthur Goldberg around the world on that tour?

R: That was basically President Johnson's own idea. He wanted to get maximum public opinion effect from the bombing pause, and also to increase the possibilities that there might be some response from Hanoi in some fashion. If Hanoi felt the pressure of world public opinion effect from the bombing pause, and also to increase the possibilities that there might be some response from Hanoi in some fashion. If Hanoi felt the pressure of world public opinion, they might be more responsive than if they did not feel that pressure.

My own view was that Hanoi is fairly well insulated from world public opinion. They pay it very little attention. They don't really care about it and therefore, generalized world public opinion doesn't mean very much to them. I doubt very much that Hanoi pays much attention to advice from Moscow. I think Hanoi has been very stubborn about its own private attitude towards these matters.

M: Did that really accomplish very little, in the way of meaningful--?

R: No, I think the visits that you refer to did do something to help in the attitudes of other governments and world public opinion generally, but it didn't have any impact on the actual war itself.

M: One thing I notice that struck me about the Norman Cousins' story, and of course he is one of those whom you indicated as an example--one of the people who thought in a pause--if you just let it go two or three days longer something would happen. His contacts that he mentions on this were White House staff people who were not really concerned primarily with National Security affairs.They were Moyers and Valenti, as I recall. Had this become a problem--people outside of the normal areas such as State and Bundy involving themselves in Viet Nam affairs and trying to play a role perhaps they weren't qualified to play?

R: Viet Nam is a subject in which everybody gets involved in one way or another. If they're not called in to be involved, they tend to involve themselves in it. Valenti and Moyers were both very close to the President, but they did not have any direct responsibility for Viet Nam.

During that period I don't myself recall any of those private contacts that reflected any real movement by Hanoi--that is, during that thirty-seven days pause. Had there been any such movement we would have known about it, and we would have been very alert to it because we were looking for it. But wishful thinking plays a big role in these matters, and a lot of times people just rely upon their hopes rather than upon evidence as to whether any movement had occurred.

M: What about the resumption of it--the physical decision to resume bombing. Did a debate of some substance occur at that time, as to whether or not to continue it?

R: Not very much, because Ho Chi Minh had made his attitude very clear on about the thirty-fifth day of the bombing pause, and we waited another two or three days before we started the bombing, but there was no indication that the thirty-seven day pause had made the slightest imprint on Hanoi.

M: Going back to my old standard question here, had dissent against what we were doing in Viet Nam become widespread at all in the executive branch by, say, early 1966? Were there beginning to be opponents in high places by that early?

R: The historian will want to look at some of the oral histories done by some of those who were supposed to be dissenters to check on this, but it was my impression that there was much less dissent than the newspapers were reflecting.

In the case of George Ball, for example, he did not argue vigorously inside the government for a substantially different point of view. He was named by the President as the Devil's Advocate to take an opposing point of view, in order that the President would have in front of him different considerations so that the President would be sure that all aspects of the matter were in front of him when he made his decisions.

M: Named by the President?

R: Named by the President. He was asked by the President to be a Devil's Advocate, and it may be that George Ball convinced himself in the process. But George Ball didn't come into my office every other day saying, "Look, we've got to do something radically different in Viet Nam." He was extraordinarily helpful in working out the details of these various peace maneuvers and contacts and procedures and things of that sort. He managed those very well.

M: I guess things like the [Edmund A.] Gullion mission were pretty much his operation, weren't they? He was the--

R: Yes, in general the senior advisers to the President were generally unanimous in their recommendations to the President on matters involving Viet Nam.

M: And that still was true--

R: Once in awhile the President would have to make a decision. For example, there might be differences of view about whether a particular target should be taken under bombing.

M: A tactical matter.

R: That sort of thing, and whether a particular factory or particular bridge near a populated area, or something of that sort should be hit. But on the larger questions, the President's advisers were generally unanimous.

On that point, the historian will want to look carefully through the notes of the Tuesday Luncheon meetings because those meetings were crucial in terms of the

decisions that were made about Viet Nam.

Long before historians get to this particular record, they will know all about those Tuesday Luncheon meetings because they undoubtedly will appear in books and things of that sort. There the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the [Joint] Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, and the President's Special Assistant on National Security matters--Walt Rostow and before that McGeorge Bundy--would sit down at the table and talk in complete confidence and candor about the matters that were up for decision.

They were invaluable occasions because we all could be confident that everyone around the table would keep his mouth shut and wouldn't be running off to Georgetown cocktail parties and talking about it, and so great candor was possible. We had a good deal of very lively discussion and the notes on those discussions will be extremely helpful to the historian in making judgments about who advised what and what the issues were.

M: About that same time period, say early 1966, at least in your own mind what were the prospects? How did things look at that point? Did it look like we were going to be able to accomplish still with a reasonable investment of resources the goals that you'd set out to accomplish five years earlier?

R: I never had any doubt about our ability to deny Hanoi a forcible seizure of Viet Nam. I never had any fear about the possibility that the North Vietnamese armed forces could achieve a military victory in the South, nor did I believe that the North Vietnamese would be able to generate real support among the South Vietnamese people.

There were many reasons for that view. One was simply a military judgment about who had the muscle to accomplish what they were trying to do, but I was impressed with the fact that we had thousands of Americans in South Viet Nam out in the countryside in groups of ones and two and threes and fours living among the South Vietnamese people and completely at their mercy. While I was Secretary of State I don't think I can recall a single incident of treachery on the part of the South Vietnamese people with respect to those Americans. I don't recall that any of them were turned over to the Viet Cong by their South Vietnamese colleagues. If the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were making any headway among the people of South Viet Nam, or if

the South Vietnamese people really wanted what Hanoi was trying to do to them, you were bound to get a lot of incidents of treachery with respect to these Americans that were living out in the countryside completely at their mercy, and this just didn't happen.

M: These were <u>civilian</u> Americans too--not armed--

R: Civilian Americans, not armed, and just wholly dependent upon the South Vietnamese people in the countryside for their own personal security.

We did find it necessary to build up our forces out there as the North Vietnamese built up theirsAnd there could have come a time in 1965 and '66 when the North Vietnamese might have had enough force in the country to achieve their purposes had we not built up our own forces, and had not the South Vietnamese not built up their forces as well.

M: I think one of the things that has bothered some of the critics maybe had been the fact that the government always seemed to see the situation in terms as you've described, and the non-official reports from South Viet Nam always were so much more pessimistic. Did you ever try to find out why your information and the information that the press got didn't seem to be the same, or why they interpreted it differently? Did the government take into consideration this other kind of intelligence that was coming back from nonofficial sources?

R: One of our leading publishers, a man of great reputation, visited South Viet Nam and came back shaking his head about the reporters out there. He said that there were too many reporters out there playing the role of Secretary of State.

M: We had lots of Secretaries of State during your years.

R: There were too many reporters who had their own view as to Viet Nam and the outcome and who did not accept the basic commitment of the United States and the basic interest of the United States in an independent Southeast Asia.

Also, bad news makes more news than good newsIf you had two thousand acts of kindness on the parts of South Vietnamese to American soldiers in the course of a day, and you had one instance where an American sergeant in a bar would get into a scuffle with somebody, it would be the American sergeant's scuffle that would be reported rather

than any one of these two thousand acts of kindness. It's in the nature of news that the negative is more news than the positive, and so we did have some problems about the nature of the reporting out there from time to time.

M: But you were confident enough in your own sources that you were pretty sure that what you were getting was accurate in contrast to what the public was being sometimes told?

R: Well, in the middle of a war there are always problems of marginal inaccuracies in terms of casualties, in terms of the extent of pacification, and things of that sort. You always were in the position of leaving a margin for error of five or ten percent, or whatever it might be. But the general accuracy of our official reporting, I think, is well-founded, and the historian will find that it was in good shape.

M: The first major event of that year, I guess, was the Honolulu conference. Was there anything about the background of that, or the accomplishments there, that you can add perhaps to the documentation?

R: I don't think that there's anything that I can add to that that is not fully in the record, and the historian can get that out of the record.

M: The timing of that during the first of the televised Foreign Relations Committee Hearings--was this a decisive element in deciding to have it right then rather than at some perhaps other time?

R: I don't think so. I think that was a matter of mutual convenience to have it at that time.

M: Shortly after that, you've indicated earlier you might just mention something specific about the [Chester] Ronning initiative, which comes in the spring of 1966, I think, the Canadians--

R: Well, that was again one of those efforts that we made to establish contact to find out whether there was any possibility for a peaceful settlement. Ronning was a very competent diplomat and had access to people in Hanoi. At least we thought he would have access to them, and we simply briefed him so that he could pursue the matter a bit and explore the possibilities, but he produced nothing.

M: Just a blank still, pretty much similar to the '64-'65

times.

R: That's right. We drew many blanks. That was one; the Gullion mission was one. There were many efforts that were made that simply showed no response at all from Hanoi.

M: Did the Canadians agree with that? Were the Canadians not unhappy that we had slighted them in some way?

R: No, I think that they realized that this was a vaccination that didn't take.

M: What about then from that time on into the balance of 1966? Are there any unpublicized efforts that were of consequence during that period that we put some faith in at the time?

R: I don't think so. I think, and when you talk about putting faith in them, we made the effort even though we did not expect that any miracles would occur, but we made the effort so that there would never be any possibility that the problem was lack of communication or lack of a channel. We thought it was important always to maintain a channel between Washington and Hanoi of some sort, somewhere, through some means, so that if Hanoi ever came around to a change of mind it would be possible to register that fairly quickly and easily and in confidence.

M: What about the initiative that they call in print now, "Marigold." Was that of a different order at the end of 1966, one that had more substance to it than just a contact-type thing?

R: This was a rather strange exercise because the Polish member of the ICC in Saigon had some talks with [Henry] Cabot Lodge and then went up to Hanoi on a visit. After spending some time there [he] came back with a formulation of the U.S. position. He didn't come back with a formulation of Hanoi's position, but he came back and presented to Cabot Lodge a series of points which he considered to be his interpretation of the U.S. position. Well, now, this was a rather strange procedure because we would have expected he would have brought back something that reflected Hanoi's position, but he indicated that he thought Hanoi would talk on the basis of that stated position.

M: How different was that from anything that Lodge would have given him?

R: We would not have formulated our position that way; it had

some similarities, but it also had some points needing clarification. Despite the fact that this was all very strange, we told the Poles to say to Hanoi that we would talk on the basis of these points although some clarification would be needed. The Poles objected very much to the phrase "some clarification would be needed," because they wanted us simply to buy those categorically without any opportunity for really discussing them and we had to make it clear that we would have to discuss points of detail with Hanoi if we got into conversations with them. What message the Poles sent to Hanoi I don't know, but Hanoi refused to talk on that basis.

M: The Poles couldn't produce the North Vietnamese at the--?

R: That's right. The Poles simply were unable to produce the North Vietnamese. We were ready to--. We had men all set to be in Warsaw, ready for the talks, but the Poles were unable to produce North Vietnamese warm bodies.

M: Do you think the bombings of Hanoi that the critics have made so much of played any part in this inability of the Poles?

R: I think that was more of a pretext than a real reason. Among other things, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were bombing Saigon at that time, in terms of reciprocal--I was in Saigon at about that time and they bombed the airfield at which I landed the day before I arrived, and while I was in town they tried to bomb the big bridge that leads northwest out of Saigon. But even then when the Poles said to us, "Oh, your bombing is terrible and gets in the way of these talks," we stopped the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong and told the Poles we were stopping the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong for a radius of ten nautical miles--and that's three hundred and something square miles--and told them that if that was the problem then we would cure that particular part of it. That made no difference. My guess is this was all a pretext on the part of Hanoi, who did not want to talk.

M: One of the accounts of that makes a lot of the fact that the bombing was coincidental and accidental, and maybe we wouldn't have done it had the coordination been better. Is it possible that that lack of coordination did exist?

R: I suppose one could make that point, but the bombing that was involved was several miles from the center of Hanoi, and it was no more serious than the bombing which they were

doing in Saigon. I mean if there was any real interest on the part of Hanoi in peace and in these proposals, they would not have let these bombing incidents get in the way. This was simply a reflection of the lack of seriousness of interest on their part.

M: What about the Manila conference which was the next major gathering of the chiefs of state and all the people of consequence? Does it have some significant accomplishment or some details that you can add that are important?

R: You're referring now to the summit conference?

M: Yes.

R: I think the Manila Conference was a very useful meeting of the chiefs of government of the countries with troops in Viet Nam, and it made it possible for us to get pretty definite agreement, not only on the military measures which were required but also on the approach toward a peaceful settlement. It was there, you recall, that a formula was worked out for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Viet Nam if North Vietnamese forces were to be withdrawn and the level of violence subsided. No, I think, it brought a pretty good meeting of the minds with the chiefs of government with troops in Viet Nam, and I think it was a very useful exercise.

M: The reason I ask is that Secretary [Clark] Clifford later on will make quite a lot of the lack of enthusiasm that our allied governments expressed to him in the summer of 1967 when he toured around, but there wasn't that lack of enthusiasm--the six or nine months later?

R: I must say that at Manila the other allies did not come rushing in with offers of substantially more troops. One of the burdens we've carried in Viet Nam is that more countries have not participated with more muscle. Korea has done a valiant job with the large number of troops they have down there. Thailand has done a respectable job taking into account the jobs that exist in Thailand in the northeast there where the Thai armed forces are engaged against guerrillas in their own country, but Australia and New Zealand could have done more. The Philippines could have done more. Britain could have done more--Britain did nothing in the military side.

We needed more international effort here in a matter in which many countries have a stake, and this has been one of

the burdens that we've had to carry. We have not found it possible to let the attitude of other countries determine what the United States does because we've got our own vital interests at stake here and we can't subject those to the unwillingness of other countries to pull their share of the load. So we've carried a heavier part in Viet Nam than we ought to have carried if others had done their fair share of the job.

M: But you weren't reading that, at the time of the Manila Conference, as being a question by them of the necessity of our action?

R: No, there was none at all on that, and of course the Manila conference did help in increasing the number of troops somewhat put in by others.

M: By that time, had the matter of peace initiatives been organized in your department in such a way that it's accurate to isolate something like the Harriman group, as I notice some accounts are now doing. Was there a specific task force sort of thing organized under Mr. Harriman to follow up all the peace initiatives?

R: Yes. He was, I think, Ambassador-at-Large, and was given the responsibility of probing for any kind of possibilities of peace, and that was his full-time job. We tried our best to find ways and means to establish contact in a way that might lead to peaceful settlement, but again we ran across the adamant attitude of Hanoi at every stage.

M: And people like the famous Harry Ashmore and William Baggs trip which comes early in 1967--they were just wishful thinking that there was some kind of movement on the part of Hanoi?

R: Yes, they didn't bring back anything that changed the situation at all.

M: Did missions like that contribute anything positive, or were they negative forces insofar as you were concerned?

R: I think that they sometimes confused public opinion because they'd come back and pretend that there was some sort of a peace initiative which was not there. This was some of the same sort of confusion that attended Bob Kennedy's visit to Paris. It also may have helped convince Hanoi that we were interested in peace at any price because there were so many of these various efforts by intermediaries--or self-styled

intermediaries--trying to probe for the possibilities of a peaceful settlement. My own guess is that if Hanoi realized without any doubt at all that we were committed and we were going to stay there, we were going to see it through, that they would bring themselves to a decision to make peace sooner rather than later.

But as of September 1969, I think that it would be fair to say that Hanoi now realizes that they cannot win what they want by military means.That it's beyond their capabilities. But they may also judge that if they just stay with it that American public opinion will collapse and that they will win on the home front in the United States rather than on the ground in Viet Nam.

M: By early in 1967 we were talking to the North Vietnamese for the first time, I assume in Moscow--the Trang and John Guthrie channel.

R: Yes.

M: What led up to that, and what were its consequences, if any?

R: I think this was another attempt to establish a channel of communication that was discreet, that would not become public, so that if there was any message that the North Vietnamese were willing to give, that there would be a channel through which it could be given.

We did a number of these. There was the Ed Gullion attempt and there have been others, some of which have never been in the record; but I would suppose that there were literally dozens of efforts to establish a channel somewhere so that we could be in direct contact with the North Vietnamese. Again, the North Vietnamese weren't interested in talking seriously about peace.

M: They didn't talk back at all in that channel?

R: No. In general I would say that the North Vietnamese proved themselves on various occasions to be willing to listen. They would be willing to hear what we had to say, but they wouldn't send anything back on the return channel.

M: We could talk, but that was a one-way--

R: That's right, and so they would just probably analyze under a microscope what we were saying to see if there was any change in our point of view, but we never got anything back

except a harsh reiteration of their public positions, their four points, or the Viet Cong's ten points, or whatever it might be, as a basis for settlement in Viet Nam.

M: This is the time that we were proposing, as I understand it, what's called the Phase A-Phase B formula.

R: Right.

M: Proposing it, at least on one occasion, through Harold Wilson to Mr. Kosygin. That's a very confusing episode--the whole Chester Cooper mission to London and so on. Can you straighten that out, particularly in reference to its relation to Mr. Johnson's letter to Ho Chi Minh which coincides in time?

R: Well, the Phase A-Phase B concept was that we could stop the bombing in Phase A if there was a Phase B in which other things would begin to happen on both sides. This was simply a small device to get around the North Vietnamese contention that nothing could happen until we stopped the bombing. So we thought we might be able to put together a package in which stopping the bombing would be the first step, but then there would be some previously agreed second and third steps which would move the situation toward peace in Viet Nam. What we were interested in was knowing what would happen if we stopped the bombing and no one was able to tell us. The Phase A-Phase B was an attempt to negotiate on that particular basis.

I think in the Wilson-Kosygin exchanges--they worked out on the spot some actual language which was not precise enough for President Johnson, and which was generally in line with the kind of briefing that Chet Cooper had given to Prime Minister Wilson. But since in these matters every syllable, every comma, is important, Wilson concocted some language and gave it to Kosygin without clearing it with us first--that is, not clearing it with the President first. When the President got this proposal--the message--in front of him, he realized that he ought to give something to Kosygin which was consistent with what he, the President, had just gotten through giving to Ho Chi Minh. So Johnson insisted that Kosygin be given a type of message which vas consistent with the message which the President had just sent to Ho Chi Minh in a letter.

M: Well, did that reverse the Phase A-Phase B offer?

R: No, it didn't, but it made it clear that we expected to have

something in return for stopping the bombingI think the record will show that and show how the various drafts came out and what the President's final draft wasIt was unfortunate that Harold Wilson gave Mr. Kosygin some language which had not been cleared in advance with President Johnson. That was the basic cause of the misunderstanding.

M: I want to ask you a couple of more questions about Mr. Johnson's letter. Let's let this tape run off.

INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: DEAN RUSK

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

DATE: September 26, 1969

Tape 2 of 2

M: In regard to the letter to Ho Chi Minh, I've been told on several occasions that that was a fairly personal matter with Mr. Johnson and yourself.What were the circumstances of that?

R: President Johnson was a man who instinctively tried to put himself in the shoes of the other fellow and tried to figure out what was on his mind, and he wanted to be sure that the other fellow also know what was on the President's mind. So President Johnson felt that it would be desirable to have a direct communication with Ho Chi Minh so there would be no misunderstanding through intermediaries or anything else. He just put to him the proposition that we would stop the bombing in exchange for some reduction of the war and as a step toward peace. I think it was President Johnson's idea that he send the letter directly to Ho Chi Minh.

M: That's something he wanted to do?

R: That's right. [It was] something he wanted to do, because he wanted to be sure that the top man on the other side knew what was in his own mind. So we drafted that letter, and he made some changes in it and then sent it on.

M: You say "we"--the Department drafted it, and Mr. Johnson edited it?

R: I think it was done with the Special Assistant for Security Affairs, Walt Rostow, and myself doing the principal drafting on it.

M: Did it go through several drafts over a considerable period of time, or was it a fairly--?

R: No, it was done fairly quickly and fairly simply. It was not a long letter.

M: No, as I recall the published version--

R: It was a fairly short letter.I was really thinking in terms of whether or not the letter had been drafted before Cooper's instructions had been made to send him to London--so that he would have had an opportunity to know--

R: He didn't know anything about the draft of that letter.

M: He wouldn't have known about that--?

R: No, he didn't know about that letter.

M: Is that the normal course of affairs that he wouldn't have known that?

R: As a matter of fact, I think he went to London before the letter was finally drafted.I'm not sure, but I think the letter was sent while he was in London.

M: So he wouldn't have had an opportunity to see the draft of it.

R: That's right, but he would not have been in on that letter anyhow had he been in Washington.This was handled by a very small group.

M: Did it represent any kind of change as far as the President's position was concerned?

R: No, none at all.

M: No hardening, or something of that nature, as some have maintained?

R: That's right.

[interruption]

M: We were in the middle of 1967 and you had, I assume, talked about the whole letter. Is there anything you think of to add?

R: I think I have nothing more to add on that.

M: In the summer of that year, or right at the beginning of fall, the major event is the San Antonio FormulaDid this represent something different on our part?

R: The San Antonio Formula represented one advance on what had been said before. You will remember that I said that the Phase A-Phase B formula anticipated that we would stop the bombing first on the basis of agreement as to what would happen in Phase B--in which both sides would agree to do various things. In the San Antonio Formula, we stated Phase B as an assumption: "We assume, of course," said the San Antonio Formula, "That the other side would not take advantage of our cessation of the bombing." We had in mind that what we meant by that would be the subject of negotiation and discussion with Hanoi. Naturally, we did not want them to build up infiltration and attack across the DMZ and go all-out militarily if we stopped the bombing, but stating it as an assumption was again an effort to find a way to let Hanoi proceed despite what they had been saying on the subject. Again we ran across the completely negative attitude of Hanoi in dealing with it.

M: There wasn't any disagreement among the President's chief advisers as to what was meant by "not taking advantage?" I know Mr. Clifford later on makes the statement to the Senate committee, I think, that it meant, you know, not that they'd stop infiltration but that they wouldn't increase it.

R: No, there was no disagreement among the President's advisers on it. I personally regretted Secretary Clifford saying that before the Senate committee because that is something that ought to have been left to negotiation. That tended to undermine our bargaining position in a negotiation. It [negotiation] ought to try to spell out what we meant by the assumption that they would not take advantage of it, you see, so that what was wrong with it was not the substance of it, but the fact that it was <u>said</u> in advance of an actual negotiation.

M: Reducing an option that a negotiator might have had.

R: That's right.

M: During that whole period of time there were a number more of these individual channel contacts that you've mentioned several times. Mr. [Henry] Kissinger undertook one in the summer. Mr. Harriman pursued one with the Rumanians, I think, later on in the fall. Were these any different than the earlier ones, or were they again a repetition of the same?

R: We took seriously the Kissinger and the Rumanian channels because we thought they were both serious as far as the

intermediaries were concerned, and Kissinger handled it very well. He was responsible and accurate, and accuracy in these matters is of the greatest importance. Both of them came to nothing because there was nothing coming back from Hanoi.

M: So, except for the nature of the channel, they weren't any more substantive than some of the earlier ones?

R: No, they didn't produce any more than the others did.

M: What about the Viet Nam elections which came in that same fall? Did Mr. Johnson play any special personal role in arranging those or carrying them out?

R: No, we were very pleased to see them move to elections. We had pressed them to do so because we thought that the government of Viet Nam would be stronger if it were on an electoral basis, and we also had more confidence than some of the South Vietnamese did as to the results of such an election. We did not believe that the Viet Cong would make any appreciable dent on the elections despite their threats of terrorism and their propagandizing against the election itself. But we tried to leave that as much as possible to the Vietnamese processes. They had an electoral commission, and they worked out their own rules for the elections.

Of course, there has been a great tradition in Viet Nam for elections at the local level. The village elections have been historically a part of the Vietnamese scene. That was true during the French period. It was true even during Japanese occupation. The villages of South Viet Nam have their own village democracy, and so the idea of an election was not all that strange to them.

We felt that if the government would just take its courage in hand and hold an election that they would get a mandate from the people which was stronger than anything they had up to that point, since they rested more or less on a coup. We were very pleased to see the election and were pleased with the general conduct of the elections. We thought they were pretty fair. We had all sorts of observers there. There were hundreds of press people looking over the elections. They found very little fault with them in terms of fairness and procedures, and we felt that the election greatly strengthened the government of South Viet Nam.

M: It wasn't a matter of our forcing the South Vietnamese

government to hold them?

R: No. We advised them to, and we encouraged them to, but we didn't force them to.

M: It might be a good time to make a comment on that general problem. Many of the critics seem to me to always have assumed that we could at any time call the turns for the South Vietnamese government. What was your feeling as to how far we could go in reality to control what they were doing?

R: Well, we can't make and unmake governments in Viet Nam. We just don't have it in our capability. It would be silly for us to take steps that would cause the South Vietnamese to turn around and start shooting at us. There are limits beyond which you can [not] go in imposing your will upon somebody. You can give advice, you can persuade, you can cajole, you can sometimes put on pressure, you can sometimes threaten. But at the end of the day, these decisions have to be made by the South Vietnamese themselves because, although we've had a substantial military presence there, we can't take over running the affairs of seventeen or eighteen million people. There are limits beyond which you simply can't go.

M: So the idea we can <u>make</u> them do something, as far as you're concerned is false?

R: And, particularly, we can't make and unmake governments. That's something they have to decide.

M: How much importance in settling something like Viet Nam can you expect from the kind of personal diplomacy that Mr. Johnson at least engaged in to a certain extent in such things as Glassboro that year?

R: By the time this material is available, Mr. Johnson will already have published his books in which he covers Glassboro in some detail.

M: He does cover it in detail?

R: Yes. At Glassboro, President Johnson gave Mr. Kosygin a formulation to send to Hanoi somewhat along the lines of the San Antonio formula. It involved stopping the bombing as a step toward peace, and assuming that the North Vietnamese would do some things in reciprocity for stopping the bombing. Mr. Kosygin took it and indicated he would send it

to Hanoi, but again we never got an answer from Hanoi. We never got an answer through the Russians.

M: So you don't know--

R: So we don't know. In the first place, we don't know that the Russians actually sent it to Hanoi. We suspect they did, but we assume that Hanoi's response was negative because we never heard from the Russians on it. But Mr. Johnson will have already covered that in his books.

M: Late in that year they had the first of--and this I suppose gets part of 1968 as well--first of what the press has since called the "Wise Men" meetings. I think it was in October or early November of 1967 that group met first.

R: Yes.

M: Was that a technique of getting advice that Mr. Johnson frequently turned to, or was this something new and different for that occasion?

R: Governments frequently call upon people outside of government for advice and Mr. Johnson followed that procedure. We thought that it would be useful to get together a group of very distinguished and very experienced men who had not been involved in the day-to-day operations in Viet Nam, who were somewhat removed from all the detail and all of the theology of the subject, and get their general review of the situation.

M: Who decided who would come to that meeting?

R: The President and I and the Secretary of Defense primarily decided who should be invited, but it was almost an obvious list. I mean, if you looked at the names of the people there--Arthur Dean--

M: What Richard Rovere [The American Establishment, New York, 1962] called the "Establishment"--

R: That's right. They were the names that were almost self-nominated if you assumed that you wanted to constitute a group of that sort. It was Dean Acheson and Jack [John J.] McCloy and Arthur Dean and Robert Murphy and a good many others whose names the historians will have in front of them. In that first meeting the group was pretty nearly unanimous that we were on the right course. They had a strong sense of our commitment. They felt that it was

necessary to see the thing through--that we should proceed in the way we were going and do what was necessary to bring about a successful result in South Viet Nam.

It's interesting to see that that same group met in the spring of 1968 after the TET offensive, and it was interesting to note that the TET offensive had made a major impression on some of the members of that group.

M: That is what made the impression?

R: I have no doubt about it myself, just as the TET offensive made an impression on a lot of people here in this country. Although the TET offensive was a military disaster for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, it had a considerable propaganda and psychological impact, and clearly shocked people here in this country and caused them to feel that the situation was getting to be hopeless. So in the second meeting of these same "Wise Men" there were a number of them who had been so impressed by the TET offensive that they were not nearly so sure that we ought to proceed as we were doing, and that we ought to sort of make the best peace we can. They were about evenly divided in the second meeting, but the first meeting was very clearly a very strong impression that we were on the right track and should proceed.

M: Was the nature of the briefings that they got different essentially?

R: They were not intended to be. Of course in the second meeting the briefing reflected the setback in the countryside of the TET offensive because, although the North Vietnamese suffered enormous casualties in the TET offensive, it did interrupt the pacification program in the countryside rather significantly in some areas because the South Vietnamese forces were drawn back into the provincial capitals and in the district towns to give close-in defense to the populated areas that were being attacked under the TET offensive, you see. That left some sections of the countryside pretty exposed to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. I think that was the type of briefing that seemed to be discouraging to some of these wise men.

M: It wasn't a panicky-type briefing?

R: No.

M: --intended to be the same type briefing that as before?

R: [We did] try to make it as factual and as direct and as realistic as possible and not try to flimflam them by false optimism or anything of that sort, but [to] give them a true picture of what the situation seemed to be.

M: Had Secretary Clifford's growing disillusionment with some of the things we were doing by that time--did that make a difference between the two meetings?

R: No.

M: How much of a difference was there between State and Defense by Febuary of 1968 and March?

R: There was no significant difference between State and Defense by February and then March at that time.

M: Mr. Clifford's views hadn't reached the point at that time--as they have apparently later become--that we should have begun turning back military action and--?

R: That's correct. Mr. Clifford came into office as Secretary of Defense with the reputation of being a hawk, and it was not until some time later that he began to change his own views on these matters.

M: Was that during the period of the drafting of the President's March 31st speech then?

R: No, as a matter of fact, I'm not a very good witness as to just when and how Secretary Clifford seemed to change his mind on some of these matters because he never brought these matters up at the Tuesday Luncheon, never argued with us about it in any formal way. It was just an informal kind of thing that came about through an erosion of his point of view rather than through actual proposals he made. He didn't propose, while he was Secretary of Defense, the point of view that he reflected in his Foreign Affairs article that he wrote after he left office. He never made any such proposals to the President or to me.

M: You found out about those then, in print?

R: Yes, sure.

M: What about the drafting of that speech, and particularly the decision to put in it the partial bombing halt north of the nineteenth or twentieth parallel?

R: Well, in the spring of 1968 the President wanted to review the military requirements in Viet Nam, and he invited the Chiefs of Staff and General Westmoreland to--excuse me, it was General Abrams by that time--to indicate what they considered the situation to be and what their requirements were from a military point of view.They came back with the suggestion that, in certain contingencies, it might be desirable or necessary to add another two hundred thousand men to our forces in Viet Nam.

It was not a hard recommendation.It was simply some contingency planning--some possibilities that were being discussed--and so we had some discussions in Washington in February and March about whether we would move in that direction. It would involve calling up the National Guard and Reserves. It would involve, in effect, the declaration of a national emergency. It would involve many more billions on the Defense budget, and it would be a very substantial step.

Early in March, March 4th or 5th--along in there--and President Johnson will have covered this in his book--I suggested that, as an alternative to adding substantially to our forces, that we consider a very serious bombing halt, at least in those areas of North Viet Nam that were not directly involved in the battlefield in the South.

M: This goes back to your old opinion on the bombing.

R: That's right. My own idea was that if we bombed only south of the twentieth parallel, that we would do that kind of bombing which was necessary to defend the area around the DMZ and the northern part of South Viet Nam, [we] would give our Marines the full protection of tactical bombing in that area, but that we would not bomb up in the Hanoi-Haiphong area--which was very costly to us anyhow, and [would] try to use that as a device to try to get some talk started with Hanoi.

When I made that proposal, the President thought about it a few minutes and said, "Get on your horses; let's get something ready on that."And so during March we prepared a plan for the cessation of the bombings except up north to the twentieth parallel, accompanied by an offer to have talks with North Viet Nam.

We did not know whether they would talk on the basis of a partial stoppage of the bombing.I personally rather thought that they would because that would be a very

profitable transaction for them in terms of what they were running into in Hanoi and Haiphong on their own. After all, being bombed was not a very pleasant operation.

But the President did not make a decision on that point until just a day or two before he actually gave his March 31st speech, and therefore the earlier drafts of his speech did not have that particular point in it. When you draft speeches, you don't put things in them that the President hasn't decided on; and so it was only in the last two or three days that that particular part was added to the President's speech. And, of course he added himself his own withdrawal from the Presidential campaign.

M: So the dramatic meeting in your office that was described by the Washington Post and Newsweek and others is really sort of an anticlimax. It's really not that drama-charged at all.

R: That's correct.

M: That work had been going on for some time.

R: That's correct.

M: What finally decided the President on it? Did the "wise men's" meeting finally make the President make this decision, do you think?

R: No, I think that he wanted to move the situation to start another chapter in Viet Nam if he could, and he also probably thought about it in relation to his own personal decision about whether to campaign for the Presidency. He felt that if he was going to withdraw from office that he might try this on to see if he could move the matter further toward peace while he was still President.

M: Did you have any hint that he was going to add that last paragraph on his own?

R: Yes, he talked to me about this the previous year and left me with a very clear impression that he was very seriously considering withdrawing from public life at the end of his first full term. He will have covered this in his book by the time this recording is available, but he had talked to me about the fact that no Vice President had ever succeeded to the Presidency and then run for two full terms.

He referred to the tragedy of Woodrow Wilson, who was

desperately ill while he was still President. Although President Johnson didn't put it in categorical terms, I had the impression he was concerned about his health as far as running and serving out another full term was concerned.

The idea that he was driven from office by Viet Nam is just not true. Long before dissent in Viet Nam had become significant he had talked about withdrawing, and I think he had such advice from his wife. He had had his own views on the matter, so I was not surprised when I was told on my way to New Zealand for a meeting that his speech was going to have in it a final paragraph that would be of interest to me.

M: And that's how you were told?

R: That's how I was told. I knew then that that was what the final paragraph was going to say.

M: Do you think anybody would have given him different advice during that period if they had known that he was definitely not going to run again?

R: I don't know. My advice was not based upon that factor, although I always had in mind the possibility that he would not run again. My advice was based upon an attempt to get the Viet Nam matter into a new chapter, if possible, by getting some real talks started between North Viet Nam and ourselves as an alternative to building up the forces in it. I must say that I always felt during this period that we had enough forces out there to do the job.

I had been a Colonel on War Plans during World War II. I remember General Marshall once saying that his rule of thumb during World War II was to give a military commander half the number of troops he asked for and double his mission, and that that worked out just about right. I had the feeling that the five hundred and thirty-five thousand men that we had in Viet Nam, plus the much larger forces of the South Vietnamese, plus the Allied Forces, were fully adequate to deny military victory to the Viet Cong and to the North Vietnamese. So I didn't see much point in talking about adding another two hundred thousand men, or any significant additional numbers of men, to the forces out there. We tend to luxuriate our deployment of forces for particular missions, and I felt we had enough.

M: What about the imbroglio that immediately began over where the talks would occur? Why did that happen, really? It

seemed to the public at least so much a detailWas that a substantive issue?

R: Well, we had to have a place where the South Vietnamese could come. We had to have a place where we could consult our Allies if they wanted to be consulted, and we thought it was only reasonable to have a place that was reasonably congenial to both sides. The South Vietnamese could not come to Phnom Penh or to Warsaw.

M: They couldn't go to Warsaw?

R: We asked the Poles about that, and the Poles gave us a very equivocal reply. So it was perfectly obvious that, since our object was to get the South Vietnamese at the table along with us as soon as we could, that a place like Phnom Penh and Warsaw were out of the question just as Hanoi would have been out of the question.So with all the possibilities in the world that were open to both sides, we felt that it was unreasonable on the part of the North Vietnamese to stick on Phnom Penh and WarsawWe had offered them some fifteen alternative sights, ourselves, probably thereby ruling out any one of the fifteen as a matter of face and prestige.

M: Had you excluded Paris from the fifteen on purpose for that reason?

R: We left out Paris partly because some of us thought that Paris would be acceptable, but partly because the President didn't want to go to Paris.He was afraid that General de Gaulle would have a negative influence on the talks--given General de Gaulle's attitude toward our role in Viet Nam. As it turned out Paris proved to be very satisfactory as a site because President de Gaulle acted very correctly, and the French did everything they could to facilitate the talks. So as far as a site is concerned Paris proved to be very acceptable.

M: Had the famous statement that's so often used against him that we'd go anywhere any time to talk peace--was that a statement Mr. Johnson added to his speech some time? That doesn't sound like State Department drafting either.

R: Well, that's a matter of rhetoric.We wouldn't expect Hanoi to come to Washington, and we wouldn't expect to go to Hanoi. I myself on occasion said in the previous months "If anybody can just turn up the warm body of a North Vietnamese for me to talk to, I'll be there."Well, that didn't mean

that I would go just anywhere.This is the difference between rhetoric and actual arrangements.

M: After the talks opened and Mr. Harriman and Mr. Vance went to Paris, did the nature of their instructions change during the balance of 1968? For example, there was a spring offensive by the enemy that Mr. Johnson reacted to publicly. Did this tend to harden our position in the early part of those talks?

R: No. In general, I would think that the record will show that the basic instructions to Harriman and Vance remained pretty consistent throughout.Their object was to get the North Vietnamese to accept the South Vietnamese at the conference table, and then on detail to get a mutual withdrawal of forces, to get release of the American prisoners of war, and to get compliance with the Laos Agreement of 1962, and other factors that would involve liquidation of the war. There might have been some changes in detail in terms of how you respond to particular points made by the North Vietnamese.

But again, certainly as of September 1969, although they are physically present and are sitting at the table in what is supposed to be talks, the North Vietnamese have made no contribution of substance to those talks at all.They're completely adamant, and we're having the same experience in the formal talks that we had in all of these preliminary and private explorations with them, so there's no sign yet that they're seriously interested in bringing this matter to a peaceable solution.

M: There was a highly publicized lull on the battlefield in the summer of 1968. At that time did the Paris delegation think that we should do something on the ground in way of reducing activity to perhaps spur talks along?

R: I don't recall recommendations that they made on that point. I've seen some reference to it since then, but I don't recall recommendations by a Paris delegation that cut across their instructions.

M: There wasn't, at least, a major debate in the high places of government about it, or you would recall it?

R: That's right. We had no serious debate about that.

M: What finally did lead to the breakthrough that allowed the President to stop the bombing entirely in the North in

October?

R: A full stoppage of the bombing involved three--what we called basic facts of life. We made it clear to North Viet Nam that if we stopped the bombing, the South Vietnamese were to come to the conference table; that there would be no violations of the demilitarized zones up in the North so that the stoppage of the bombing would not endanger our forces in the northern part of South Viet Nam; and there would not be continuation of rocket and other types of attacks on the major population centers.

M: This was an explicit agreement; signed, sealed, and delivered, so to speak?

R: No, as it worked out we only got a formal agreement on the South Vietnamese coming to the conference table, but we got full understanding by the North Vietnamese that we would expect them to comply with the other two points. We went over it with them eight or nine times in the course of the negotiations.

M: These were in the secret talks now?

R: In the secret talks. We went over these three points with them eight or nine times. We took it up with the Russians and made these three facts of life perfectly clear to the Russians. Before we finally stopped the bombing in October, President Johnson communicated with the Russians and said, "Now here are the three facts of life. We're not calling them conditions. We're just saying that no President can stop the bombing unless these three things are taken into account, unless these three things occur." And the President said to the Russians, "We have some doubt as to whether the North Vietnamese fully understand the importance of these three points." The Russians came back saying, "Your doubts on that score are unfounded," which we took to be a confirmation that the North Vietnamese did understand and did in fact accept these three facts of life as being essential to the stopping of the bombing.

M: Now, what time in frame is this? Is this early or mid-October?

R: We went to the Russians in mid-October, I think it was. By that time the matter had begun to gel, because by early October it began to be apparent that the North Vietnamese were going to accept the South Vietnamese at the conference table.

M: That was the key that had to be overcome.

R: That's right.

M: Well, what delayed the arrangement then from going into effect until October 31st, I think, when the bombing was actually ordered stopped?

R: Well, for one--to pin down these points--it was not until the middle or later October that the North Vietnamese specifically agreed to the presence of the South Vietnamese at the table, although we had had some sort of hints--some reason to believe early in October that they would in fact do so. We had to pin that down, and then there were some problems of timing--the relation between the stopping of the bombing and the timing of announcements, the number of days that would elapse between the bombing [halt] and announcement of a meeting at which the South Vietnamese could be present, and things of that sort. There was a good deal of fussing around about detail, and it took a little time to sort those out.

M: What about the South Vietnamese? Were they explicitly committed to attend at that point?

R: Well, we thought that they were all on board. As a matter of fact, we had an agreed joint communique worked out with President Thieu and President Johnson in which the announcement would be made, but then when we got around to the point of being ready to go with it, President Thieu decided he had to consult people in his own government. When he took it up with his Cabinet and some of his legislative leaders, he got cold feet and decided that he couldn't go ahead with it.

Well, it was too late by then. We had already told the Russians, and we had already agreed with the North Vietnamese, and so we had to go ahead even though the South Vietnamese were not prepared to issue a joint statement and were not prepared immediately to come to Paris. We had quite a fight with them about that.

M: Was there any importance played by the celebrated activity of certain Americans, notably Madame [Anna] Chennault, in connection with her political campaign to try to keep the South Vietnamese from getting on board, or staying on board?

R: It's hard to know with certainty whether the South Vietnamese were playing American electoral politics at that

time. It's possible that they were.If so, this was very reprehensible, I think that there's no doubt that Madame Chennault was trying to influence them not to come to the conference table, and that she probably had electoral considerations in mind. I have no reason to think that Mr. Nixon, personally, was directly involved in this kind of a thing; but it may be that the South Vietnamese on their own felt that if they agreed to come to Paris this would give Hubert Humphrey a big boost and that as between Humphrey and Nixon they would prefer Nixon.Whether they still think so or not, I don't know.

M: They may have had second thoughts, but it's too late now. But there was no connection between Madame Chennault and the Republican leadership--?

R: Well, I just don't know what connection there was.As I said, I never had any evidence that Mr. Nixon himself was directly involved in that.

M: After the talks began in November and December, did Mr. Harriman and Mr. Vance then recommend that we reverse our order to General Abrams that maximum pressure on the ground be exerted?

R: The record would have to show that.I myself don't recall that they did. I would be inclined to think that had they done so, I would have recalled it.But that could be looked at in terms of the cables that came from Harriman and Vance back to Washington.

M: So essentially Mr. Johnson's Administration and your tenure as Secretary of State left the talks open but with no real change in the situation from the time they opened?

R: That's right.

M: Did the new Administration adequately get briefed from the old, in other words, did they come to you for the advice--?

R: Well, during this period of the campaign President Johnson kept the candidate Nixon fully informed of what was going on. I had some briefing sessions with him myself, for example. On this matter of stopping the bombing, President Johnson was in touch with all three of the principal presidential candidates, and, in fact, had them on a conference telephone call before the actual announcement was made to tell them what had gone on.They had all agreed to it about ten days before that, so as far as the candidates

were concerned, this was a national decision.

This was a national action for which the President took responsibility, but on which the candidates were informed. The President did everything that he could to insure that he would not do anything that would be obnoxious to any one of the principal candidates during this period.

M: And certainly, so far as you were concerned, there was nothing about the change of Administrations that necessarily would have changed the nature of the talks or interrupted the machinery of the Paris talks at all?

R: That's correct, and that has proved to be the case since the Administration has changed. President Nixon and Secretary [William] Rogers have continued those talks in Paris in about the same way that I suspect they would have gone on had President Johnson remained in office.

M: There's probably a whole lot of detail that I may in one of our subsequent sessions ask permission to come back to after I've had a chance to read through this transcript, but so far as the direct questions that I've sent you in advance this seems to be about it.

In the line of getting what was in your mind, though--just a sort of general speculative question--if you had known in, say, early 1963 or '64 what the ultimate cost of lives and resources and dollars and public opinion was going to be with our activity in Viet Nam, do you think looking back that you would have advised any differently?

R: Well, every American casualty takes a little piece out of those who carry the responsibility, and I've felt that it was a great tragedy that it was necessary to ask our young men to undertake this fighting after all that has happened in the last four decades.

On the other hand, the overriding problem before all of mankind is to prevent World War III. We learned the lessons from World War II and wrote them into the United Nations Charter and into our great security treaties. The principal lesson we learned from World War II is that if a course of aggression is allowed to gather momentum that it continues to build and leads eventually to a general conflict. This was very much in our minds when we wrote collective security into the United Nations Charter, and when we concluded such treaties as the SEATO Treaty.

Our problem is to prevent World War III. I said we learned the lessons of World War II, but no one is going to learn any lessons from World War III. There won't be enough left, and so the problem is to prevent World War III before it comes about. If I had thought myself that there was no connection between Viet Nam and preventing World War III, I might have had a different view about Viet Nam. But if there is that connection, and the historians will have to judge this, then the effort made in South Viet Nam was very much worthwhile.

There's another point that is highly relevant. Two-thirds of the world's people live in Asia. Half of them are free; half of them are in Communist China. During this period in which we have made a stand in Viet Nam, the free nations of Asia have made remarkable progress, not only in terms of what is happening in each particular country but in the cohesion which has been developing among the free nations themselves in regional activities, such as the ASPAC grouping of Pacific powers, and such as the ASEAN grouping of the Southeast Asian powers, and the Asian Development Bank, and the initiatives taken by Japan to stimulate agricultural production. All sorts of things have been happening out there, so that behind the cover of our resistance in Viet Nam has been a steady strengthening of the forces of free Asia.

Now, they face the prospect of living next to a billion Chinese armed with nuclear weapons and proclaiming a doctrine of militant Communism--militant world revolution. It was my hope that the Vietnamese experience would give them some time in which they could strengthen themselves to be able to survive the implicit pressures of a Communist China and maintain some peace in Asia of the sort that is conformable to the national interests of the United States. Now, this is something that only the historian will have a chance to tell about. That has not worked out as yet. That has not evolved, but if the free nations of Asia ten years from now are surviving as independent nations--making their own decisions about their own national life and their own orientation in world affairs--then the Vietnamese experience will have been worth the tragic price that has been paid for it. If, on the other hand, we are moving down the chute--the chute toward World War III, then at least we can say that we tried to stop it by stopping it in Viet Nam.

I just myself hope in September 1969 that the North Vietnamese will not win on the home front in the United States, and that an internal collapse of morale in the

United States will not give them what they've been unable to win on the battlefield in Viet Nam.

M: I gather you're not too worried about what the historians are likely to decide in twenty years if indeed we do avoid the holocaust--

R: It depends on how the story comes out. It depends upon what kind of people we are. The American people are now in the process of deciding whether we can see this thing through and insist that it come to a reasonable conclusion so that the nations of Southeast Asia can live their own lives and that there can be a situation there that the United States can look upon with reasonable contentment. If the Communists are allowed to overrun South Viet Nam and Laos and Cambodia and Thailand and on beyond, then I think we're on the way to World War III.

M: That's probably a good place to stop for today if it's satisfactory with you.

R: All right.

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