INTERVIEW I

DATE: APRIL 29, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: GERARD C. SMITH

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Mr. Smith's office in State Department

Tape 1 of 1

M: Let's begin simply by identifying you for the purpose of the transcriber here. You're Gerard C. Smith and your current job is Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

S: That's correct.

M: Your last official position prior to this job was, on two occasions, as Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for MLF negotiations. But prior to that you'd been Director of the Policy Planning Staff, as it then was, from 1957-1961; prior to that Special Assistant for Atomic Affairs to Mr. Dulles, from 1954-1957; and then prior to that you were with the AEC from 1950. Is that right?

S: Yes. From '50-54.

M: I left out publishing Interplay magazine, which is a pretty good sized job, for the last several years. You said you had one early acquaintance with Mr. Johnson. I wonder if you could describe that one, perhaps.

S: Well, first let me just recall the tremendous dependence that Foster Dulles had on Lyndon Johnson's legislative judgment. I can just hear Dulles saying time and again, "What does Lyndon Johnson say?" whenever there was a crisis or some problem. It was quite a refrain:

"What does Lyndon Johnson say?" I never knew a figure in another party that seemed to depend so heavily on the political judgment of a member of the opposite party in the Congress as Dulles [did on] Johnson.

The only experience I had with Johnson in that period was in 1957, when there was some prospect that we were going to make a disarmament agreement with the Soviet Union. You will recall that Harold Stassen was the U.S. representative, and he was pretty gung ho, and it looked for a week or so as if something was in the wind. Dulles asked me to go up and talk to Johnson about it. I didn't know him, and Bob Hill, who was the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, went up with me. Johnson, in effect, said that some of his boys, meaning the senators, had their bags packed. They could hardly wait to be sort of in on the kill, to have their names associated with this great disarmament breakthrough that was supposed to happen but didn't. My only recollection of him was that he took one look at me and said to Hill, "Can this fellow keep a secret?" It was as if I was an office boy or something. I thought I'd been handling highly classified matters for about seven years at that point, so I confess I didn't get a very good initial reaction to the Senator.

I didn't see him again until I was working for the Kennedy Administration as a consultant, adviser to Rusk on multilateral force negotiations.

M: Well, Mr. Johnson was always on the Joint Atomic Energy Committee when he was in Congress and [was] very interested in its operation. Did you not encounter any of that when you were with AEC?

S: I don't recall ever seeing him attend a Joint Committee meeting. In fact, I'm surprised to hear you say that, because I was up before the Joint Committee many times, but I never saw him there.

M: Well, now, he left it at some point. It could be that your experience with it started just as he was going off of it. I've forgotten what year he left it.

S: Maybe so. There were some Senators like Russell who used to be on the Committee, but as far as I know never showed up for [meetings].

M: There was a major act in '54, wasn't it, the Atomic Energy Control Act?

S: Yes. It was amended in '54 and again in '58.

M: One of those, the first one I think, involved a filibuster. And you don't recall Mr. Johnson as Minority Leader getting involved in breaking that? I think the Democratic liberals were the opponents in that.

S: Oh, I can remember Hickenlooper's role in that, but maybe I was looking at it from a different optic.

M: Right. Hickenlooper was a sponsor, I guess, of that bill.

S: The only contact I really had with President Johnson and it wasn't for more than an hour or two, was in connection with the MLF. His basic problem, this was in April of 1964, was whether or not to go ahead with the basic Kennedy policy of trying to establish some

trans-Atlantic nuclear force.

M: You said basic policy. Now don't let me interrupt that train of thought, but one of the questions that's important is what the status of it was at the time of the assassination. Was that a basic Kennedy policy, you believe?

S: Yes. I have heard and read a great many reports that this was not a basic U.S. policy, that a number of zealots in the State Department had pushed this concept and Kennedy had sort of let them have some rope to see what would happen, but he was not committed to it. The fact was that in the winter of 1963 I sat in a meeting with the President and a definite decision was made to go to the German government and say to them, "Look, if you will accept this proposal for an MLF, we will go ahead with it." In fact, the President said, "Well, why doesn't Smith go to Adenauer and put this proposal to him?" And the reason I didn't was that on the previous trip with Merchant, I was his deputy at the time, I had gotten flu in Rome and hadn't gone up on the German part of the trip. I told the President I thought that he ought to get somebody that Adenauer knew who wouldn't just be a perfect stranger to him. So, as a matter of fact, Bill Tyler, who was Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, was given the job. We drafted a communication from the President to Adenauer. Bill talked to him at some length, explained the American policy to him. The Chancellor finally came back in a couple, I think, it was two or three weeks, and said, "All right."

M: This was in the spring of '63 by this time?

S: This was probably March by this time.

M: Right.

S: Adenauer said, "All right, we're with you on it." Now at that point I think it was McNamara, at another meeting with Kennedy and ourselves, [who] said, "Well, what you've got to do now is get the British aboard." We took the point that, "This is a little curious to tell the Germans that if they're aboard it's a going concern, and now you say that you've got to get the British aboard."

M: You could do that to infinity, I presume.

S: That was our feeling. But we then went and tried to get the British, and, as you know, the British never showed any great enthusiasm for the proposition. So when Kennedy died that was the status of the thing, as far as I've ever seen a policy, and the United States was wedded to it. The President had told the German Chancellor that this was it. We wanted this. And all of this mythology about it just being some fellows in the State Department is, as far as I can tell, just straight nonsense.

M: I think that is currently the generally published view, however.

S: One of the troubles here was that, as you remember, the Kennedy Administration had pretty much dismantled the NSC machinery. It's my judgment that they went too far in dismantling the machinery, and the type of meeting that Kennedy had was not, I think, adequately prepared for and was not adequately followed up. For instance, Dean Rusk wasn't at this meeting that I'm describing. I think George Ball was. I doubt that there was a very clear action memorandum that went

out to all the parties involved, so that there was reason why some people felt that no decision had been taken. After Kennedy died I felt that the one or two times that we saw President Johnson he was pretty cold on the facts. He didn't really have a good feel for this. But in April of '64 Finletter and I met with him, and here again I don't think that Rusk was present; I'm not even sure McNamara was present. Perhaps his deputy [was].

M: It would still be Vance at that time.

S: Vance or Gilpatric or something like that. The President listened to the arguments, and he seemed especially sensitive to the importance of keeping the Germans on the team. Two or three times at this meeting he said, "The Germans have gone off the reservation"--I think that's the term he used--"twice in our lifetime, and we've got to be sure that this doesn't happen again, that they don't go berserk. This joint force that would bring them closely together with the United States seems like the best solution that we have at hand." I wouldn't represent that he really understood all the details of the MLF, but he seemed to feel, "Well, this is the best arrow that we've got in the quiver. Let's go ahead with it." In effect, he said to Finletter, "You go ahead and get this thing done, and I'll be ready to move the day after election." I remember going back with Finletter to talk to the press about it, and Finletter of course was elated, because he had a firm commitment from the President to go ahead and get the thing negotiated.

Well, several times during the spring and the summer I made the

point to various people like George Ball in the State Department that our Congressional situation was very weak. I had been authorized to go up and talk to a few individual senators. Merchant had briefed the Joint Committee, oh, I guess almost two years earlier and run into a good deal of static. The Joint Committee didn't understand what the proposal was. The ones that were there didn't like what they heard. Scoop Jackson initially was quite strongly opposed to the concept, although I talked to him a number of times later and I think he was very much in favor of it. I even called it the Jackson Fleet, because he had been the first one to propose a missile fleet, years before that. But when I tried to get more attention to the Congressional relations problem I was told, "Well, look, if President Johnson is re-elected with a large majority he can get anything he wants out of Congress. If he isn't, then you haven't got a chance anyway with this thing. So don't worry about Congressional relations."

We did have one session in which Rusk went up and talked to the Joint Committee for two or three hours. They said, "This is a very complicated subject, come on back this afternoon and we'll resume." And Rusk said, "I'm awfully sorry. I've got to go to the NATO meeting tonight and I'll have to prepare for that, a ministerial meeting, but as soon as I get back we'll resume." But we never resumed, and that's where the thing stood. Now this was in May of '64. So the Congressional relations thing was badly handled, I think.

And then when the British came in November I think of '64, just after Wilson was elected, they were quite opposed to the MLF. Neustadt

had been over to take soundings and had come back, I think, with a fairly negative report.

M: Is this the famous memo that was published this year?

S: Yes. Although there were again, that memo of Neustadt's internally gives evidence that the MLF was American policy. If you read it carefully you'll see he told the British and he wrote the President that, "As we want MLF," words to that effect, "we should say this." There was the understanding that this was American policy, and we wanted it. But when the chips were down, the British were over here, and the President started to call up senators saying, "How much arm twisting is this going to take?" I think he found ignorance and unhappiness on the Hill about the concept. People really didn't understand it; it was very complicated. And that, on top of a lack of interest in Europe [hurt it]. The French, of course, were affirmatively against it by this point, although they had started in with a position that said, "Well, if the Germans want this, that's all right; that's their business." They ended up with a position saying, "We may leave NATO if you go in for this," which is what they eventually did, even though we didn't go in for it.

M: Anyway.

S: I can remember attending a meeting just before the final meeting, and McNamara was there. I was struck with his honesty because he said, "Look, we've really fumbled this one badly." The United States government had spoken out of all sides of its mouth; people were allowed to say, "Well, this is just a scheme we're thinking of;"

other people said, "This is American policy." Newspapermen were given interviews which permitted the impression to grow that this was really not something we were seriously interested in. And yet if you look at the speeches that Rusk made at the time and that Nitze made at the time, the Secretary of the Navy, it seems to me perfectly clear that this is something we seriously wanted.

M: One thing is clear: there's a great number, in all of these articles that you've mentioned, of lists, what they call either the theologians or the cabal depending on who you read, including yourself, Owens, Schaetzel and a lot of the people in the State Department. They never list the enemies of it very clearly. Did it have strong enemies that were important in making sureit didn't get pressed forward to a successful conclusion?

S: Well, that's a good point. I think that skeptics, there were lots of. I think enemies, not in the government, although I have a feeling that Mackie Bundy and his efforts to keep the President's options open gave the impression--I can't document this, but I have the feeling that people got the impression, newspapermen, from talking to Bundy that this really wasn't American policy; this was just one of a number of possibilities that we were thinking of.

M: His opposition was more of trying to keep the President from being committed, rather than in principle against it?

S: I think that was his motivation. When I resigned right after it was perfectly clear that the President was reversing courses, and I didn't feel very useful under the circumstances, I had a nice

letter from Bundy saying in effect, "I think you thought you were following the President's instructions with good faith." But he indicated that I perhaps didn't understand what the position was. Well, if I understand the English language and watch a President at work, as I had for some years, I think I understood what the President was trying to do.

But having said all that, I don't for a minute think that the President wasn't clearly within his normal field of maneuver in doing what he did. The pressures were terrific. The French said, "Look, we're going to leave NATO;" the Russians were making all sorts of cranky noises; there was not enough real support in Europe for the venture. I think we were the cause of that lack of support because we'd given these ambiguous signals. On top of that, you had what looked like a very difficult Congressional problem and perhaps not a success. Maybe it would've been like the ABM situation today. So that I think the President probably made a prudential decision that I might have made myself at the same point. But the lesson of the episode, if there is one, I think is that the organization of the White House, starting with the Kennedy years and it persisted into this period of '64, was just not an efficient one. A signal, a clear signal, did not go out to the bureaucracy after what seemed to me a perfectly clear decision. And I think Finletter, who was the other principal there, hadn't the slightest doubt that he'd gotten clear orders to go ahead.

M: That's true. You mentioned the Russians. Is there a relation between

the MLF and its death to American initiatives that were arising about the same time in the field with which you're now concerned, arms control? Is there a relation between MLF's death and nonproliferation treaty negotiations, for example?

S: There are several relations. One of the reasons I favored the MLF was that I thought it would have a strong arms control effect. We had in mind, although we never published it very broadly, that in connection with an MLF international agreement the European participants in it, like the Germans and the Italians, who did not have nuclear weapons, would take an additional commitment not to acquire nuclear weapons. So in effect this would have been a regional nonproliferation treaty, which would have avoided a good deal of the tensions that the nonproliferation treaty has generated, since it gives the appearance to some extent, at least in German minds, of a ganging up of the United States and the Soviet Union to make sure that the Germans don't get nuclear weapons.

M: And they haven't signed it yet?

S: They haven't signed it yet. There was a feeling, even as early as '64, that the MLF would prejudice the prospects of getting a nonproliferation treaty. I can remember at this meeting in April that I referred to earlier, Bill Foster was present, and after all of the arguments had been made and the President had pretty clearly made up his mind to go ahead with the MLF Bill Foster spoke up. I remember his exact words, he said, "Mr. President, I feel like a skunk in a garden party, but ifyou go ahead with this MLF you must

recognize it's going to make my chances of negotiating a nonproliferation treaty harder." A little later Bill wrote in Foreign Affairs magazine his article about the nonproliferation treaty, in which he pointed out that to get it there would probably have to result in some erosion of our mutual security alliances. And I think that was an accurate prediction. There has been this erosion, certainly not entirely because of our nonproliferation treaty policy, but the Germans certainly find themselves facing an awfully difficult nettle to grasp in trying to decide whether to sign on with that treaty. I think they're going to eventually, probably after the elections.

M: But as an MLF adherent, you didn't feel like your project was traded off for the NPT, exactly?

S: I don't think the government works in that neat a fashion. I think that once the MLF was dropped, then the course was much clearer for the NPT than if the MLF had been a going concern in the planning stage and finally in the negotiating stage. But I think that in retrospect we would be better off in Europe today if the United States and the Germans and the British and the Italians and the Dutch were all participating in a joint operation. That was the thing we were trying to get. What I think NATO is still reaching for is, "How do you get a greater sense of unity of integration and military power?" It might have been translated from Polaris missiles into defensive missiles. We were speculating in those days about that possibility. Now this Navy SAM-MIS system is exactly that, a surface ship defensive missile concept.

M: Did you ever feel that you didn't get a chance to tell your story to the President adequately? Was accessibility difficult for the people who favored MLF?

S: No, I don't think so, although I was not in on the final kill. But at that time here I was a Republican consultant, even though I was working full-time and had very good relations, I thought, with the then-Administration. I didn't feel that I was in the high seats of power at that time, although I was amazed in the earlier phase, under Kennedy, at the freedom of access to the President. I think we had five or six sessions with Kennedy just on this one problem, whereas I just recall the one with President Johnson.There may have been two, but I think it was just one.

M: As a Republican, your departure after that was fairly normal. But what about the rest of the theologians? Was there any threatened retribution against bureaucrats who fight so hard for a project that loses?

S: I don't think so. Henry Owen was director of the planning staff, and he continued to be. I had a little feel that after that he started to diversify his interests; before that he was almost entirely a European. I notice after that he started to take a trip to Japan and started to expand his scope. George Ball, I'm told, had a few rocky minutes, or days, as to what his relationship with the President was going to be. But I think the President had a very high regard for his abilities as advocate of the devil and respected his anti-Administration judgments about the Vietnam policy. So I don't think the MLF thing

prejudiced Ball's relations with the President very much. Rusk had never taken a very affirmative position, although he had made speeches and had never indicated he was against it. No, I don't think so. There were a few others: Bowie was supposedly a member of the cabal, and after that he came down and was counselor in the State Department; Phil Claxton was with us in that office, and he still is up in, I guess, the Under Secretary's office of something; Howard Furnas is Phil Farley's deputy.

M: So that it stayed--

S: Schaetzel.

M: Yes, Schaetzel was secretary, deputy assistant secretary after that.

S: Schaetzel was promoted and has a fine embassy. No, I don't think there was any sign of any retribution.

M: After you left then and were in Washington publishing the magazine, did Mr. Johnson ever call on you? He's got a reputation for having sought outside of government advice in all sorts of places frequently. Did he ever do that?

S: No. No, he never got in contact with me at all. As a matter of fact, my relationship was basically with the State Department. I was brought in because people like Owen and Bowie and Rostow knew me, and we'd worked together.

M: You mention Rostow, who didn't exactly get demoted because of his MLF [support].

S: No. He was a strong supporter of the MLF, and I think in many writings that he does you'll find him coming up very strong. As a matter of

fact, I heard Rostow twice just at the end of the last Administration talking to small groups of people, and he said, in effect, among our greatest mistakes was our failure to follow through on the MLF.

M: That's true. What about the transition? You were one of the few people we'll probably get a chance to talk to who didn't hold a high position when the Administration changes and do now. Was the transition in this agency, the one you had a chance to be familiar with, prepared adequately and smoothly?

S: I think in the normal work of the agency, yes. The records were in good shape, the transition books and all that. There had been some contacts between the last Administration in connection with the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which you recall had been aborted by the Czechoslovalian thing, and there had been a few overtures after the Czechoslovakian thing. I think that until quite late President Johnson had kept alive the possibility of a summit meeting, and there were a few exchanges in the late fall of '68. I had a little, not much, but some difficulty in getting a hold of those papers; they had gone down to Texas. But they were sent up at our request by courier, and I think we have the whole record.

M: These were Presidential papers, or agency--?

S: Well . . .

M: There's some question about what is, I guess, Presidential papers.

S: These were sort of informal papers. They were not signed by anybody, but they had been exchanged with the Soviets about just the general philosophy of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, what their general

scope might be.

M: Of course there was some continuity. I believe you are a fairly close friend with Bill Foster, are you not?

S: Yes.

M: Didn't he recommend your appointment?

S: That's my understanding, yes.

M: Which may make this agency a little bit different, perhaps, than some of the others that went through--

S: Well, there'd been no static at all in that respect.

M: I noticed that Mr. Fisher is still in Geneva.

S: Yes. He's going to unfortunately have to leave us about the middle of next month.

M: Yes, to be dean out at Georgetown, is that right? I don't want to cut you off. Are there any other episodes with which you're familiar that you think would be important to be part of the record?

S: No, I don't think of any. I think that covers it.

M: Your explanation of the MLF thing is as clear a one as I've heard. As I indicated, I've heard several, so I appreciate your help on that.

S: Well, I won't ask you what the others [were].

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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