

INTERVIEWEE: GENERAL MAXWELL TAYLOR (TAPE #2)

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE MC SWEENEY

DATE: February 10, 1969

M: General Taylor, this is our second interview, and today is Monday, February 10. We are again in your offices. We had been talking about Viet Nam in our first interview. I would like to continue with that area and ask you, first, about our bombing of North Viet Nam. Of course, this begins with the Gulf of Tonkin incident. I'd like to have your assessment of it and your activities regarding the bombing of North Viet Nam.

T: Well, with regard to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, my role was really nothing. I was simply a very interested by-stander and observer from Saigon, where I was the Ambassador. Also, of course, I was impressed with the Congressional resolution which followed the Tonkin Gulf incident with the very sweeping authorization it gave to President Johnson in the use of American military forces in Southeast Asia. But I had no part in it other than observing it.

With regard to the bombing of North Viet Nam--going back to my visit in 1961 at the behest of President Kennedy, the report which I submitted upon my return to Washington included a reminder that the day might well come when it would be necessary to strike the source of aggression, which was North Viet Nam. We did not recommend it in 1961, hoping that we could settle the issue of aggression within the confines of South Viet Nam without going to the North. However, by the time I got there as Ambassador, following a disastrous political upheaval in the wake of the assassination and overthrow of President Diem, I became convinced early that bombing

of the North should be undertaken fairly soon--I thought about the fall of 1964--in order to pull the country together; give it a feeling that they did have a chance against the enemy of the North who had been at their throats then for some twelve or thirteen years. So as Ambassador I began to recommend that this be done following an evacuation of our American dependents in South Viet Nam.

Then in the fall--November 2, as I recall, of 1964--the enemy mortared our big air base at Bien Hoa with considerable damage to our airplanes and some loss of life. This was the first time the enemy had deliberately attacked an American installation, and it indicated a clear change of tactics on their part. I immediately recommended a reprisal strike against appropriate targets in North Vietnam. This was just on the eve of the American presidential election. It was a most untimely recommendation as viewed from Washington. I'm sure it was received with very little enthusiasm.

M: How did the Vietnamese leaders feel about this? Were you receiving their--?

T: They, of course, were anxious all through this period to start striking North Vietnam, even though many of them were Northerners themselves. After the bombing started I would take around the target list to show the then-Prime Minister Quat where we were going to strike to get his concurrence. He would say, "Well, that's interesting. That's only about thirty-five miles from my uncle's farm." But he was perfectly happy about it. In fact, he was convinced that it was indispensable that we use our air power against the North.

After the Bien Hoa incident, on Christmas Eve the Viet Cong blew up the Brink Hotel in the heart of Saigon--again an attack at the Americans. Again I recommended reprisal. It was not accepted. But in the

meanwhile the debate was getting very intense in Washington. It was quite clear that they were going to have to take this step, reluctant as the leadership was to do so.

It was actually in February--February 7, I believe--that the next major attack on our installations took place. That was in Pleiku, again with considerable loss of life and damage to American planes. By pure chance McGeorge Bundy was visiting me in Saigon at the time so that both of us got on the telephone to Washington and reported, "Now this is the time we feel we must strike back." Plans had already been made, and strikes were off in the course of the next twelve hours against military targets in the southern part of North Viet Nam.

President Johnson announced why he did it. He had three reasons. They were valid then, and I think they're valid now. The first was the point I've already mentioned--the need to raise the morale of the South and give the people of South Viet Nam the feeling that for the first time they were striking the homeland of the enemy. Second, to use our air power, insofar as air power could be effective, to limit and slow down and restrain the infiltration of men and supplies from North Viet Nam to South Viet Nam. And then finally, to remind Ho Chi Minh and his advisers in Hanoi that they were no longer sitting in a sanctuary directing a war without paying a price for it. And that little by little, by the graduated use of our air power we could destroy everything of military value in North Viet Nam which was above the ground. That was the story of the initiation of the bombing and I think the general reasoning behind it.

M: There has been a lot of controversy around the bombing as it has continued

over the years. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of it?

T: I think the greatest testimonial has been the screams of anguish from North Viet Nam, and the fact that they mounted a worldwide campaign for over two years to get the Americans to give up the bombing. To them it was a catastrophe. From that point of view I would say that it met generally the three points which I indicated as being the justification.

I think most of the skepticism has been directed at the fact that obviously it did not stop the infiltration. The answer to that is that the infiltration would have been much greater, much easier, much cheaper, and much faster had it not been for the bombing. So I have no question in my mind that it was justified, was necessary, and I regretted very deeply that we gave it up so cheaply.

M: This is for the negotiations as of recent date?

T: This is under the present conditions.

M: We had several bombing pauses in there--

T: Yes, I know that, and I was against those for the reason that it turned out that they failed. They failed, but at the same time they gave the enemy the hope that, if the Americans can be talked into a pause, they can be talked into a suspension. And if they can be talked into a suspension, they can be talked into a cancellation."

Your next question bears on very much of a related matter--the introduction of American ground forces which took place just a month later. We started the bombing in February of '65 and the first troops--the first Marine element--landed in Da Nang in March. That was a very tough decision also, and I must say that I had doubts. I had no reservations about recommending the bombing. I did have reservations about the

introduction of ground forces because it was quite apparent that once we started, no one could predict what would be required--how far we would go. But it was the judgment of our military leaders in South Viet Nam that by the spring of 1965 the military situation had changed so adversely, that General Westmoreland could no longer guarantee the safety of the great base at Da Nang against attack.

It was in December 1964 that for the first time, so far as we know, North Viet Nam began to send to the South the tactical units--regiments and divisions--of its own Army. Our commanders in the north sensed the fact that they were being hit by forces well beyond the strength of those which had been present previously. General Westmoreland became very much concerned about Da Nang. It was for the purpose of defending that base that the first Marines came ashore.

In the course of the next couple of months the whole situation was seen more clearly as more critical than we had anticipated, and General Westmoreland also asked for troops to go into the Saigon area to protect Bien Hoa and the many installations in the Saigon vicinity. There were three purposes--three missions--given those troops. The first was to be responsible for the close defense of important American installations. The second was to control the immediate environment of these bases so that they could not be mortared--or at least mortaring would be made more difficult; and finally, to provide some mobile reserve of combat troops that could be moved by our helicopters quickly to enter the ground battle to assist the South Vietnamese when they had engaged an important target.

The necessity for it was the fact that if we hadn't done something,

we would certainly have probably lost the northern three provinces. After that loss we'd either have had the harder task of rooting out the enemy after they got in, or conceding the North to the enemy. And that consideration accounts I would say, for the troop build-up through '66 and '67. It was really to match the increasing escalation of the other side.

M: Did you at the first introduction anticipate the number it would go to?

T: I beg your pardon?

M: When we first committed our ground troops there, did you anticipate the size of the commitment it would go to?

T: No, I did not. I don't think anybody could. Nobody did. Always, as is appropriate, the military staffs in Saigon and in Washington had contingency plans--in other words, the plans to put in ten thousand, twenty thousand, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, and so on--simply a catalog of plans so that they could be implemented rapidly if the decision were taken. But no one undertook in those days to try to estimate what the requirement would be because it depended so much on how far the enemy was willing to go.

As to the appraisal of the military leadership and strategy in Viet Nam, I'm not sure whether you refer to the American, or the Vietnamese, or a combination.

M: Primarily the Americans, but I'd like to know the Vietnamese, too.

T: I would say that the American forces performed well beyond what anyone had a right to expect when they were thrown into action in a distant country against a very elusive enemy. But fortunately, beginning in 1962 under President Kennedy, our Armed Forces had been directed to prepare themselves for this kind of combat. Hence they entered Viet Nam

with an excellent training ground preparation for this kind of war.

I think their performance over there is testimony by itself. I don't have to praise them. They've achieved far more with fewer forces than anyone ever anticipated in a guerrilla war where the enemy has open frontiers and the possibility of retreating into sanctuaries to which we cannot follow him. Our American leadership, I think, has been superb. I don't know of any improvement that anyone could make to the general tactics and the strategy, under the ground rules which have been decided for the Armed Forces.

M: What about the Vietnamese leadership and the--?

T: The Vietnamese leadership was very spotty, more or less as was the case in Korea where, as in Viet Nam, we had the problem creating an indigenous army on the battlefield. Leadership is hard to come by in these Oriental countries, particularly a country like Viet Nam where leadership was deliberately retarded or suppressed by the occupying foreigners--the Japanese and the French and the Chinese before that. So it has been difficult to find promising young leadership, to cultivate it and develop it in order to meet the very arduous requirements of combat.

However, I think the record, when it's all over, will be good, considering the great handicaps of training forces in time of war. So they've been getting better all the time, but they're still far from being a modern or a sophisticated armed force.

As to the cost of Viet Nam or the value of Viet Nam, I suppose you would say--I have not doubt in my mind that the historians twenty-five

years from now, provided we end this in consistence with our objectives, will say it was a painful but necessary course of action on the part of our government.

As to how to regard Viet Nam--whether it's a civil war or a limited war--neither describes it. It's a war of liberation, a people's war of the kind which has been announced by Peking, by Hanoi, and by Moscow as the favored technique for the expansion of Communism because it is relatively cheap; it can be disavowed; and it's not risky. It does not risk escalating into large conventional war, or a nuclear war. The spokesmen of all three capitals, Khrushchev, Kosygin, Lin Biao, Giap, Mao, all of them have proclaimed openly: "This is the way we're going to do it." So this is the real test of whether or not this technique, the "war of liberation", will succeed and become available for use elsewhere, or whether it's a disastrous failure--which I hope it will be.

M: Do you think Viet Nam could be considered a mistake in terms of where it was, the political situation--?

T: It's awfully hard to move Viet Nam, you know.

M: Well, for instance, perhaps it might have been in Thailand, or Indonesia, or--

T: You go where the trouble is. In other words, we didn't pick this place. This is where the crisis occurred. It either had to be met there, or not met at all. If it hadn't been met there at all, then Thailand would have gone. Laos would have long since followed, and I suspect the Communists would still be in charge in Djakarta.

The negotiations, of course, represent a new development since last May. I personally think we made a mistake in showing overeagerness for

negotiations, feeling that there's something miraculous in sitting down at a negotiating table. Having observed the long two-year session at Panmunjom, I was far from convinced that it was timely to start negotiations with Hanoi until the conditions were sufficiently unfavorable to the enemy that he would come to the table more or less compelled to negotiate in good faith and with some celerity--without foot-dragging.

I think we have the assets now in the negotiations to come out successfully in the sense that we will eventually get a solution which allows the South Vietnamese to choose their own government, and some kind of, at least, a cessation of hostilities.

The real question, I think, will be whether the of a settlement will be such as to encourage the hoped-for continued stability and peace in the region. It depends upon our own determination here in the United States not to get tired, not to get impatient, and to throw in the hat just because this business gets dull and boring and unpleasant.

Having made a hundred-and-forty-nine speeches on the subject of Vietnam, I'm quite prepared to go on for another hour or so in this discussion, but I think that probably hits the high points of the Viet Nam situation.

M: Let me just ask you a few more things regarding this. I think one thing that has occurred so much is the speculation of how much the President was running the war--what the communications were back and forth. Could you give me an idea of how much, while you were Ambassador, you were communicating with the President?

T: Well, one communicates all the time with the President in a certain sense, because a mission such as ours in Saigon sent off hundreds of cables to Washington each day. In a certain sense of the word, they were messages to the President--not that he read them all, nor should he read them all.

I was charged, when I went there, to write the President each week my own summary of the situation, which I did, and which I always welcomed because I had a chance to be sure I was dealing directly with the President and not with the many officials that lie between the cable head in Washington and the addressee.

In terms of his control of military operations, there has been criticism, I think largely unjustified, that Washington exercised too much control over military operations. I would not agree with that because insofar as the ground war was concerned--the operations within the confines of South Viet Nam--I know of no case where there was anything which I would call undue civilian interference in the conduct of the military affairs.

But the bombing of North Viet Nam was a different thing. It was moderately risky because we didn't know at the outset just how the Communist world would respond. Conceivably this could have broadened the war in a way that certainly would have been undersirable from our point of view. It didn't turn out that way, but responsible leaders in Washington naturally wanted to proceed cautiously to sense the enemy reaction. And they did.

Actually the bombing of North Viet Nam was the use of a military tool for political purposes. We were trying to influence the mind of the conduct and behavior of the political leaders in North Viet Nam. That was the primary purpose. Hence it was only reasonable that the President would want to know just exactly how we were doing, what kinds of targets, and so on. So there was detailed control of the air war in North Viet Nam, but no place else as far as I have ever observed. And I

felt, because of the sensitivity of that air campaign, that a large degree of control was justified. I think perhaps there was too much control, but that's clearly a question of judgment. The fact that control came from here was entirely justified.

M: We've had growing dissent and criticism of the war, and think it was topped off with the TET offensive of last year.

T: Because of a complete misunderstanding of the TET offensive. The TET offensive was the greatest victory we ever scored in Viet Nam. We said so at the time, but there are too many people here who wanted to find defeat. They wanted to drag defeat from the jaws of victory.

M: What do you think has been the effect of all the criticism and dissent in the United States?

T: I think it's very unfortunate. It made it awfully easy for the enemy and encourages him to hang on. It's exaggerated in the press. The impression is greater than the actual fact. This all works against the interests of the United States. There's no question about it.

M: I have read that President Kennedy did not believe in the domino theory of overthrow in that area of the world. What do you think Mr. Kennedy would have done in this situation? That's sort of speculative, but do you think we would have gone this far? Would we have committed troops? Would it have developed the same way?

T: I think you should go back and read what he said in the time he was President. He made some very, very strong statements over and over again. I often quote as one of the most eloquent of his statements--one made in 1961 to Congress--where he points out that "the hopes of the people of the emerging nations are going to be resolved in Asia, and, for that reason,

in the struggle for freedom in Asia (and he was talking about Southeast Asia). We Americans cannot afford to stand aside." Over and over again he made very strong statements on this subject. Just go read the record.

What he would have done--I would never attempt to say I have been very impatient with some of his former friends who now pontificate on what Mr. Kennedy would or would not have done. I think it's unjust to his memory to undertake such speculating.

M: Just one more question on this area. What has been your assessment of our pacification efforts there?

T: It's not our pacification effort. It's the pacification effort of the South Vietnamese which we assist. It has been very hard, very difficult, because pacification, which really means rebuilding the nation in the rural areas, depends upon the degree of security. We found that in our frontier days we couldn't plant the corn outside the stockade if the Indians were still around. Well, that's what we've been trying to do in Viet Nam. We planted a lot of corn with the Indians still around, and we've sometimes lost the corn. So there've been ups and downs in the whole pacification program resulting largely from the ebb and flow of security. As security becomes greater, as it is now, pacification will move along much better. But it necessarily lags behind; in point of time, the military operations which are necessary to attain security.

M: Do you think we still could have a military victory in Viet Nam?

T: I beg your pardon?

M: Do you still think that we could achieve a military success in Viet Nam?

T: What does that mean?

M: Stabilize politically and militarily the country with a military force.

T: Not with military force in itself, but you can't do it without military force. This is a combined effort in which we utilize our military resources, our political, our economic, our psychological resources. All have to be used. No one will do it by itself. No one ever suggested the possibility of a pure military victory. This is a straw man that the opponents of the Vietnam policy erect over and over again for the pleasure of knocking down.

M: I think I was thinking in the terms of there not being negotiations.

T: Yes, it's entirely possible, but that doesn't mean a military victory. You can have a tacit peace in which the other side simply fades away and never admits he has been there. They still deny in North Viet Nam that they have any North Vietnamese forces in the South, although we happen to know that they've had seven to eight divisions. We have prisoner-of-war stockades filled with their troops, but they still deny it.

M: What do you think has resulted in the U.S. standing in world opinion with our commitment in Viet Nam?

T: In the immediate vicinity in the countries which have the greatest stake, our standing has gone up enormously. In those countries that have no stake, it has become a political football in which we've been unjustly criticized. Although I must say that many times the criticism of the foreigners has simply echoed the criticism of our own press here at home.

M: The phrase "credibility gap" has so much centered around our Viet Nam war, and the public's lack of understanding of it. To what would you attribute this?

T: I'm never quite sure what it means, but I assume it means the uncertainty as to the accuracy of reports we're getting on the Viet Nam war. I quite

agree that some reports are highly inaccurate, but most of them do not come from official sources. I don't say that necessarily critically of the press and the publicity media, for the fact is the country is divided into forty-four provinces. In every province the situation is somewhat different. So a thoroughly accurate report in Province A may paint one picture which is correct, and a different report in Province B may also paint a correct picture. Both are reported to us, and we don't know which to believe. We assume somebody is misleading us, yet both happen to be telling the truth. It has been a very difficult war, from that point of view, to report accurately, without bias, and avoiding dangerous generalizations. It is easy to acquire one or two facts and then assume they apply everywhere, where actually they do not.

M: Do you think the fact that we've had such massive coverage of this has perhaps increased the dissent and criticisms?

T: Oh, very much so. Because the very magnitude and the volume of the reporting add to our confusion. We turn on our TV. We get a sequence of pictures all different and apparently talking about different things. I think most of our good citizens are not necessarily pro or anti-Vietnam policy. They're just confused, and just give up trying to understand something that seems incomprehensible.

M: That about covers--I know very superficially--what I had in mind on Vietnam unless you have any further--

T: No, as I say, I can hold forth for some time, but I think you've brought out the principal points very well.

M: Did you have any activities regarding the Dominican intervention?

T: Not in the slightest. I was not involved. I was away most of the time.

Middle East--again, I had no role to play. While focusing my attention largely on the Far East as a consultant to the President, I was very much interested in the Middle East, but I played no part in it.

The Pueblo incident you might want to talk about. There again, I was very much an interested observer, particularly in my role as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. I was, of course, thoroughly aware of the kind of ship the Pueblo was, the kind of mission it performed--a very important mission that needs to be done. And that was about it.

When I read about the hijacking, I was, of course, surprised that North Korea had engaged in piracy of this sort, and had a strong suspicion--which I don't think has ever been verified--that it was related to the TET offensive which occurred about the same time. In other words, that they were making signals to us that if we weren't careful that there would be a new front opened in Korea. As I say, this connection has never been established, but that was certainly a suspicion I had at the time.

With regard to the Intelligence loss of the equipment, I thought it was very serious. As to the conduct of the crew, I would not make any comment. There's a court-martial going on at this time to determine the facts.

M: I'd like to go into some more general areas. As you said, you've primarily been working in the Far East, but I did want to ask you about over the years about our relations with Russia and Communist China--perhaps emphasize Communist China.

T: Well, those subjects are so broad really I can't do justice to them in

this short period of time. Communist China, of course, is the dominant power in the Far East in terms of manpower and potential. The cultural revolution, which seems to be dying down, has certainly set back the progress in Communist China to a great degree. One of the China watchers in Hong Kong, whom I talked to only last week, feels that they're about where they were now at the start of the Great Leap Forward. In other words, they're now lagging six or seven years behind what might have been called a normal schedule of development had the cultural revolution not taken place.

M: You mean the first Great Leap Forward they had?

T: Yes.

M: That was in '57?

T: Approximately. I'd have to check my figures.

M: And they would be five or six years behind that now?

T: Well, they're about back to that point in terms of gross national product per capita, levels of food stocks, and things of that sort.

M: I know this is your area. What brought about this cultural revolution, as they called it--this upheaval in China?

T: It was, so the experts say, primarily Mao's feeling that the revolution, of which he was the father--that its purposes were being nullified by the new generation which was moving somewhat in the direction of the Soviet relaxation and readjustment of attitude. He felt that the goals of the revolution were being sacrificed and would be lost unless he intervened and threw the rascals out, which he proceeded to do--the rascals meaning many of the senior Communist leaders who had been his associates throughout many of the years before.

He did this by an alliance between his own power group in Peking, the Armed Forces which have been rather surprisingly loyal to Mao--in other words, there have been no internal splits within the Armed Forces; and then the militant youth have been utilized--the Red Guard. The result has been a turmoil, a turbulence, a chaotic condition which certainly must be a matter for deep regret on the part of Mao, who is an old man and undoubtedly wants to leave his country better off than when he found it.

I think that we outsiders, we simply have to watch these developments, hoping that we can domesticate Red China to some extent--bring it back into the family of nations; but certainly that objective is relatively far off now.

M: Sir, in your career, have you ever had occasion to speak with Communist Chinese leaders?

T: Never.

Now, NATO is a subject in itself, and I think you'd better drop that.

I'll just comment on SEATO. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization was established, you'll recall, in 1954 at the time of the Geneva Accords. It reflected our lack of confidence in the Geneva Accords and in the ability to tranquilize Southeast Asia on the basis of those Accords. It has been a target of criticism during our involvement in South Viet Nam because as a treaty organization it has not taken part. This results from the fact that its membership does not coincide with the realities of national interests in that part of the world. You'll recall that the United Kingdom, France, and Pakistan are members of SEATO. No one of the three has any intention of making any commitment of any value to the support of the present objectives of SEATO in Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, the fact that we've had the treaty has allowed us to work freely with as important a country as Thailand in connection with our operations in South Viet Nam. So it has been of indirect value, although certainly as a coalition it has done nothing directly to assist our purposes in Southeast Asia.

M: Do you think that it's going to have a future of strength?

T: I would hope that in the review of foreign policy which I am sure Mr. Nixon's Administration intends to make that we would look SEATO over and decide whether we need that particular coalition. I doubt it in its present form. Or whether it would be possible and desirable to put together a new coalition of those countries that really have a commonality of interest and are willing to put something on the line; in other words-- a changed membership.

Now I'm afraid I'm going to run out of time if you're not careful here. Again, national security is such a broad subject I wouldn't be able to deal with it here.

M: Let me just ask you then--what do you think our position should be on deployment of ABM systems?

T: That, again, is a matter that I would have to study a great deal. I've not believed in the so-called "thin" deployment against the Chinese threat. I think if I restudied the arguments and examined the technical feasibilities that I would still feel that there is a justification for an anti-ballistic missile system and deployment, but one primarily directed at improving the deterrent capability of our strategic forces rather than that uniformly thin kind of protection which is implicit in the present plan.

19

M: Part of this proper mix of nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities that I was asking about, of course, reflects some of your own work on which you--

T: Well, that's very true. The answer is that we need both. It's a question of judgment just where the right balance lies. I certainly felt that under the Eisenhower Administration the emphasis on nuclear capabilities was out of balance--over-balanced--in that direction. I felt that the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations brought it back into about as good balance as I personally could recommend.

I think we're losing the idea that we can talk in terms of superiority in nuclear forces. Some of our public men still seem to think that we can say we're superior or inferior in strategic weapons. I don't think so. I like the term sufficiency. If we get enough, we ought to stop regardless of what that number is in terms of the number we think the other side has. But the question of how much is enough is perennially the most difficult question for the Secretary of Defense to answer, and also for the President--not only for nuclear weapons, but for non-nuclear weapons, for anti-submarine warfare, for all the categories of military forces.

M: The phrase "massive retaliation" is being brought up again in terms of perhaps we should have more massively, if not nuclearly, committed ourselves in Viet Nam.

T: Who said that?

M: I think I've just been reading it in the papers. What is your impression of that?

T: I think there's a very good point for a part of the question. I mentioned that we used our air power slowly, gradually, giving Ho Chi Minh ample time to reflect on consequences. There was a certain logic in support of that gradualism. On the other hand, the military commanders would

certainly say that's not the way to use air power or any other kind of power. Once you decide to use your military weapons, you should use them rapidly with maximum effect and with the benefit of surprise. I think there's a real question of whether we might not have achieved our end of shocking Ho Chi Minh into submission had we had all our bombing in one month rather than in three years. However, with regard to unclear weapons I would say I know of nobody with any responsibility ever suggesting that this was a place for nuclear weapons.

All right, what would you like me to speak on next here?

M: I'd like to ask you what you think the future trouble spots have been, perhaps incorporating in this what have been, besides Viet Nam, the major defense-related problems of the '60's?

T: I think the history book is pretty clear on that. Today, and throughout most of the decade, in addition to the Far East--Korea and South Viet Nam--we've had the problem of the Middle East, which is still there unresolved. It's one of those areas where even with the wisdom of Solomon and the power of Caesar, it would be very difficult to know exactly what to do. I'm afraid that problem's going to carry over for some time to come.

Meanwhile, there are endless possible trouble spots. We never know where they're going to turn up. The Dominican Republic Affair nobody ever planned; nobody ever anticipated. All the volatile new nations may conceivably become spots for concern. I think one of our great questions that we'll be faced with in the next decade is when to intervene and when not to intervene overseas. Where is there a true American interest, where there is not.

In a certain sense of the word we have some interest in every square foot of

the globe reduced in size as it is by modern communications. On the other hand, we've discovered what it is to try to stabilize one small part, namely South Viet Nam--the cost in men, treasure, and effort, national and international standing. So I think we'll be much more prudent following Viet Nam, but still that problem will be with us.

M: Do you think it has made us wary of this type of commitment?

T: I think so, very much so. Having said that, I will then point out that after Korea we had the cry, "Never another Korea," and that was in '53. In 1954 President Eisenhower signed a letter to President Diem offering him aid in South Viet Nam. In other words, even while the cry was still in the air, "no more Koreas," we were laying the foundation of our commitment in Viet Nam.

M: Sir, some of your earlier works and writings have talked about Defense Department organization, and of course during Mr. McNamara's tenure there was a reorganization and changes. I'd like to have an assessment of that related to your previous--

T: I generally have been a great admirer of Secretary McNamara. I didn't necessarily agree with all the things he did, but he did so many fine things. I think that his balance sheet is very strongly on the plus side.

Mr. Clifford was not in office long enough to leave a lasting imprint on the organization. He kept it the way he found it and left the detailed operations to his very experienced deputy, Mr. Nitze.

M: Can you offer me a comparison of these two men, having worked with them?

T: Well, they're quite different. Mr. McNamara is an organization man, a doer, the operator type. Of course, he had been a Ford official--a Ford

22

president--and was used to handling large organizations. He'd had a good training in cost analysis and systems analysis and that sort of thing which he put to work--perhaps some will say overworked--in dealing with the military problems.

Mr. Clifford's a lawyer--a very able lawyer. He's an expert in public relations. He had very, very friendly relations with Congress, with the public, with the press, and worked at those things leaving the operation of the Pentagon largely to Mr. Nitze.

Mr. McNamara was the other way. He was oriented inwardly toward his own shop, and was reputedly brusque and metallic in his public relations and that sort of thing. So they both had their strengths but in different categories.

M: Do you think the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has changed and improved?

T: Changed and improved. I don't like to say exactly--improved against what? I would just say the Joint Chiefs of Staff role was, and should be, a very strong one under any Secretary--in spite of the undeserved reputation of Mr. McNamara of downgrading the military, as the press would put it. I didn't agree with that at all. He was a very sympathetic listener to the Joint Chiefs. He gave them their day in court. They had a chance to argue their case. He didn't necessarily follow their advice, but he certainly gave them a chance to be heard. How the Chiefs-Secretary relations are at the present time, I'm not really close enough to the present officials to comment.

M: I was thinking in terms of your book, The Uncertain Trumpet, where you had talked about the weakness in the system of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

T: I would say things have improved since then. The great weakness then was that there was no Secretary of Defense during most of the time that I was Chief of Staff of the Army who was willing to decide different issues. So the result was it left the Chiefs wrangling all the time with their disputes unresolved. Important issues were pushed under the rug, as we say, and left there for years at a time.

One of Mr. McNamara's great qualities was he insisted on these things being brought up to him, and he would decide them if the Chiefs couldn't. That's all to the good for the general business of the Pentagon.

M: Do you feel that there is good communication between the Secretary of Defense and service organizations?

T: I don't observe that relationship. You're talking now not about the Joint Chiefs, but talking about the Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy, etc. I'm so far away from that area I haven't observed it. Even when I was Chairman, I was only in the JCS area, and not in the service channels, so I was not a direct observer of what went on.

M: Your position now to President Johnson as his special consultant, was it primarily on the Far East? Could you tell me just a little bit--?

T: I received a letter from him that made the world my oyster, but I necessarily decided to bite that oyster in digestible quantities. I spent most of my time on the Far Eastern questions, generally on Southeast Asia. Also, as soon as I got back in '65, I worked on the organization of the federal government for overseas operations. That work has resulted in the so-called NASM 341 organization that set up the Senior Interdepartmental Group and the regional interdepartmental groups, and made the Secretary of State the President's representative for overseas affairs. That was

consummated in March 1966, and has been in effect until the present time. They're tinkering with that now to adjust it to the requirements of Mr. Nixon.

M: And could you tell me what other activities highlight--?

T: Oh, I think that's about all. After that reorganization was accomplished, I attended largely, as I say, to the Far Eastern affairs, making occasional trips out to the Far East; meanwhile trying to run a private business, which has made for a rather complicated life.

M: About how many trips did you make to the Far East in this position?

T: I'd have to get out my diaries. I would say four, perhaps five.

M: Were these in terms of seeing the situation as it was; or was it communicating--?

T: Really keeping abreast. And on one occasion I went with Mr. Clifford. We went for the purpose of visiting the other countries who were contributing forces to South Viet Nam to carry a Presidential message to them, and also to review the situation in Saigon.

M: Could you offer me any sort of a comparison, having worked both with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Kennedy during their presidencies? What is your opinion of how these men compare, or do not compare?

T: I wouldn't compare them in terms of--. It's impossible to compare them in terms of the effectiveness of the Administrations, and so on. We're all too close to these events. As individuals, of course, they were quite different in personality; different in age, background, and outlook on life. I wouldn't say one was better or worse than the other. They were just quite different.

President Kennedy had a great personal charm and, I would say, instilled a great loyalty and inspired team play on the part of his

associates. President Johnson was more difficult to get to know, but once you got to know him, you could see what a strong character, what a determined man he was, and I acquired a great admiration for him in my association with him. He had the reputation, as you know, of cracking whips over his subordinates. I never saw that. My relations with him were extremely pleasant. And I valued my association with him. Of course, I had a particularly warm affection for John Kennedy and all his family.

M: I'd like to just go to this last area of the Johnson Administration and your assessment of it. I think primarily because the Viet Nam war has been such a large part of his Administration that it's almost attached to Mr. Johnson and his resultant unpopularity. I'd kind of like to get your ideas on that.

T: I think we're going to find a great change, and a surprisingly quick change, in the public attitude toward President Johnson's Administration. I thought even in the last weeks of his Administration that the editorial comments and the attitude in many quarters which had been consistently hostile to him throughout his Administration were moderating. I think we all recognize that he carried a tremendous load, almost alone, in adhering to our policy in South Viet Nam, which he was convinced was correct. I'm convinced he was right. I think ten years from now you'll find that the history books given him a very high rating, just as they have given a very high rating to President Truman for his great courage in the Korean War.

In his domestic accomplishments, the Viet Nam war so overshadowed the public attention that we've missed the fact that his domestic program was one of the most extensive, the most

comprehensive, of any President in modern times.

M: General Taylor, do you have any further comments?

T: No. Just thank you for allowing me to contribute, and I hope this will be of some use to the record of the Johnson Administration.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By General Maxwell D. Taylor

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Maxwell D. Taylor, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed

Maxwell D. Taylor

Date

Oct 22 1971

Accepted

Harold J. Middleton, for
Archivist of the United States

Date

July 19, 1974