INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

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Tape 1 of 2

M: Let's begin by identifying you. You're James Thomson, and you held several different jobs in the foreign policy community during the Kennedy-Johnson years. You were first special assistant to the president in the Kennedy period; then you moved to the State Department as special assistant to the assistant secretary for Far Eastern Affairs in 1963.

T: No, no, no. Can I correct you?

M: Sure, by all means.

T: My first Washington job, which is not pertinent to your line of inquiry, was as special assistant to a congressman, Chester Bowles, on Capitol Hill in the calendar year 1960. What happened then was that Bowles was made under secretary of state under John Kennedy.

M: Right.

T: And he served as a foreign policy advisor to Kennedy. I then came in as special assistant to the Under Secretary of State, Mr. Bowles, in January of 1961. There ensued a roller coaster of ups and downs, because Mr. Bowles was fired in November, 1961. I, as did several of his old staff, decided to stay with him through fairly thin months when

he became what was known as "The President's Special Representative and Adviser for African, Asian, and Latin American Affairs." I stayed with him until he was rehabilitated. He actually resigned or tendered his resignation in the spring of 1963, and Kennedy said, "Don't go. Become ambassador to India."

So then, as he moved to India in July of 1963, I moved back to my first area of interest, Far Eastern Affairs, and became a special assistant to Roger Hilsman, who was the then-assistant secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. Mr. Hilsman, however, was eased out some ten months later.

M: That's a fairly euphemistic phrase for it.

T: He was fired.

M: Okay.

T: With some delicate, subtle, gentle cover for the firing in about March, February, 1964.

M: Right.

T: I then inherited, as a boss, William P. Bundy, his successor. I'd been on the verge of being transferred to the staff of McGeorge Bundy, thanks to some work I'd been doing with Michael Forrestal on the Bundy staff, and Mike needed help. Once Bill Bundy became Hilsman's successor, Mac Bundy said he was fairly loath to steal people from his brother. So I had the difficult job of proving myself competent to Bill Bundy, but not indispensable. That took about two and a half months; by July, Bill had decided I was sufficiently good to move to his brother, whatever that means, and I moved to Mac Bundy's staff in July, 1964.

I stayed on his staff and on loan from State till he, in due course, pulled out and I inherited Mr. Rostow. But just about the time, coincidentally, of Mac Bundy's decision to go to Ford, actually coincident with his going to Ford, on March 1, 1966, I accepted an offer to return to Harvard the following September. So I stayed only briefly under Mr. Rostow.

M: The way you described it, you had no way of having had contact with Lyndon Johnson prior to 1960, in the fifties.

T: Prior to 1960, no.

M: What was your earliest acquaintance or contact with him?

T: That's hard to recall. I saw him [when] I was at the Democratic convention in both 1956 and 1960. One milled around in corridors and receptions and shook the hands of the great men. I do recall meeting him, both times probably. I was very nearly delegated by Mr. Bowles, the under secretary, to travel with Vice President Johnson on his famous trip to Asia.

M: Very nearly, but not quite.

T: Very nearly. I begged off. There was some illness at home, and I didn't want to be out of the country that long. So, though Mr. Bowles proposed me, and I think I was accepted on the list, well, at least on the tentative list, I asked to be permitted to bow out. So I had a close call with the President-to-be.

M: Did you ever talk to him when he came back, debriefing or anything of this type, after that trip?

T: No, as I recall, it was also suggested at one point that I be--

Now you're bringing back memories I'd totally forgotten. State was about to create, to bring the Vice President more into the foreign affairs swim of things, [a plan for] one or two State officers to be assigned to his staff, and one of my friends, either Bill Brubeck or Luke Battle [of the State Secretariat] asked me if I'd be willing to do that. At the time, I didn't want to move from what I was doing. So again I missed the opportunity of contact with fate.

M: Near call. Did somebody ultimately get appointed to the staff?

T: Yes, there were at least two. One, Frank Meloy became the deputy ambassador--DCM--in Rome, I do believe, as the reward for good services.

M: But they did, then, brief the Vice President regularly?

T: Yes.

M: As a matter of policy.

T: Yes. This happened, as I recall, after a lapse of some time. It was not an immediate decision of the Kennedy Administration, but there was the sense that the Vice President had been left out in the cold a bit and I think he probably shared that sense. So State did decide to assign at least one full-time officer to his briefing.

M: Did you first get involved in the general Indochina problem, and particularly Vietnam, when you went to work as Hilsman's assistant

in 1963?

T: Well, I got involved as a watcher and worrier the minute we came into office, when I worked for the Under Secretary. What was burning then was Laos, and I must give you my vantage point.

My vantage point was as a China missionary offspring, who had been brought up in China, on and off, and had gone back to China for that sort of turn-about year, 1948-49; had watched the McCarthy-McCarran period of tragedy that ensued, and had gone on to study China formally at Harvard University. My interest in China policy, my obsession, was somehow getting back on a better track with China. Therefore, I had the positive aspects of being centrally engaged with China and, I think, having flexible views. I had the negative aspects of regarding Southeast Asia as tedious, unimportant, post-colonial, a waste of any power's time. This is what is known as great nation chauvinism. I have a sort of Sinocentric view of Southeast Asia, which I think, in due course, was the sound view, but it had--

M: Not too many adherents in 1963!

T: Partly based on Chinese sense of superiority. I thought "the action" was with China and Japan, and this post-colonial appendage was of no interest to us. It had been badly mauled by the French and indescribably badly managed by the French, and the last thing in the world we should try to do was go in and try to pick up the pieces. So that was my cast of mind from the Laos crisis onward and had been before I got into government. I would say that until I was lassoed by Mac Bundy increasingly, and by Hilsman before, into having to focus

some attention on Indochina, my main effort was to avoid the whole subject, to hope that it would go away, and to have contempt for those who thought it was worth our national time of day.

M: Was it still possible in late 1963 to avoid getting involved, in the Far Eastern Bureau?

T: No. Certainly not, once I moved in with Hilsman in early summer of 1963; the Buddhist crisis with Diem had just taken place in May, as I recall.

M: Yes.

T: We were moving to a new and difficult relationship in which we were sending out Cabot Lodge to be correct and aloof until and unless Diem changed his tack. And I became increasingly interested in this collision course between this somewhat divided Washington administration on the one hand and a somewhat divided Saigon ruling group on the other, to see which one would cave first. Like all the rest of us, having tried to avoid interest in Indochina, I then became quite intrigued with the possibilities of American leverage forcing Diem either to change his policies or to be replaced. And, as you know, that was a see-saw battle. Thanks to Mr. Ellsberg, we have even more information on some of these things.

M: That's right.

T: Though not conclusive, yet. But I watched that see-saw battle very close-up, being part, as I was, of Roger Hilsman's shop, or at least close to him. And some days we would feel we had lost the battle--our President was going to cave in--and other days, we felt that Kennedy's spine was stiffened and we were in fact going to produce the changes

on Diem's part; that Diem would back down, would perhaps fire Nhu, et cetera. We did not foresee the outcome as it finally came.

And I just might add one other thing. In the back of my mind--and this was sort of my last period of thinking that we could do much in Vietnam--was that we had an opportunity to learn from our experience dealing with Chiang Kai-shek in the war and post-war years; that the one thing we should have learned is to call the bluff of our clients. Chiang had led us around by the nose; had lost his own country, thanks largely to his own refusal to take, among other things, strong advice that we gave for reforms across the board. And Diem was about to do the same thing. And if we could, for the first time in my memory, deal toughly and force reform on an Asian client, there might be hope for a different kind of outcome. We would cease being led around by the nose, et cetera. That was my hope. As our administration held firm, and the generals got a signal that we would not resist a coup and, as a matter of fact--certainly indirectly--that we would welcome whatever new government came in, there was a sense of exhilaration in the quarters in which I sat, which rapidly vanished or at least was heavily muted by the reality of the violence done to Diem and his brother.

M: Was Mr. Johnson involved in any of this, as vice president, that you recall? Any of the conferences or meetings or draftings?

T: My impression was that Mr. Johnson did sit in some of the White House House meetings. I was not present myself. This resulted from my debriefings of Hilsman. The Vice President did sit in on those White House meetings--perhaps many of them--to deal with this ongoing

crisis. My impression was that he was regarded, not only by those inside State but also elsewhere, as being an opponent of any dumping of Diem. He had, of course, in his trip in 1961 termed Diem a Churchill--had he not?--of the region. Was it May or March?

M: Spring.

T: Spring of 1961. And my recollection, never having heard the Vice President speak on the subject, was quite clearly that he was on "the other side" in this internal combat in our government as to whether or not we were to stand up to Diem.

M: Is that what happened to his relationship with Hilsman, the fact that he . . . ?

T: Yes, I'm sure. I'm sure that that was a major ingredient as I saw what happened to Hilsman. Both through Hilsman's viewpoint and his tactics, and I would say that the tactics were infinitely more important than the viewpoint, he had put himself in a position of having offended the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor--

M: There's not anybody else!

T: And the Vice President. As I recall, in those dark days, he had a strong sense that his one friend at court happened to be the President.

M; President Kennedy?

T: Yes. And as long as President Kennedy was alive and as long as Mac Bundy was, incidentally, a sort of benign go-between, Roger Hilsman

felt confident to exhibit his bright ideas, as well as his brashness. Or should I say his brashness as well as his bright ideas? But once his one friend at court was killed, his days were numbered.

M: So in the Johnson period, Hilsman was never really an important player.

T: He barely lasted into it.

M: Yes, through his--

T: This was November 22, President Kennedy was shot, and we had basically the month of December to pull ourselves together. Hilsman is off on a trip to Australia . . .

M: That's right.

T: . . in early January, which surprised me rather. Some of us suggested that he'd be more deeply involved in the development of new policy under the new administration if he stayed around. Clearly, I assume, although he's never leveled with me on the subject, he must have got some message before that trip to Australia that he could use the trip to think about a new career.

M: Were there any important decisions by default in that immediate interim period when, as you just said, you were getting yourselves together in regard to the Vietnam conflict, or anything else in Asia for that matter?

T: Well, I saw things through the eyes and ears of Hilsman and his traffic, and therefore.. . . We were also all fairly numbed by what had happened. So all I know about, in terms of decisions at that point or what I've read about since, Ambassador Lodge's return and

the report of . . . .

M: He was in town right after.

T: Right. And President Johnson's message that we would firmly back up the new regime, et cetera. But all that, I know second-hand. I did not participate, to my knowledge. I don't think any major decisions were taken at that point. I can anticipate some lines of your questioning, because I have my own feeling; it hasn't been very much shaken by reading the documents that have been released recently, which I have not read closely. [My own feeling] was, basically, that President Johnson, having fallen into this appalling new responsibility, used the first quarter of 1964 to find out how to be president, and the second, or further half--or three-quarters--of the year to try to become elected.

M: Sort of not really engaged in the problem.

T: Vietnam was very much put aside. The major decisions on Vietnam were emphatically put aside during that period for very good reasons. They were decisions that would catch up with him and be forced upon him later. But either valuable opportunities for letting Vietnam go quietly or other types of opportunities were certainly passed up during that year. My impression was that it was a holding operation.

M: Certainly shortly after Bill Bundy became assistant secretary, a whole series of major reviews of the problem began. You must have participated in one way or another in those.

T: The main thing I participated in was-- See, I was sort of, at

least on the Bowles staff and the Hilsman and Bill Bundy staff, special assistant without portfolio. As problems came up that required special attention, I would be asked to move on them. I made it a clear contract with all these people who knew my background and interests that I would have an overriding interest in China and China policy, and also "the waifs and strays," as I once called them in my one formal meeting with President Johnson--which we can come to--when he asked me what my watching brief was. I replied, "Well, it is China policy but also the waifs and strays." And he asked me what I meant and I said I meant the Burmese, and the Cambodians, and the Indonesians, and all those other people.

M: Nobody else knew we were there.

T: No one else knew we were there, in our rather heavy obsession with Vietnam. So it was. I did not have a clear and defined function in focus that would have made me privy to all the Indochina planning, except as and when an assistant secretary would want to bring me in on it, for one reason or another. Hilsman used to keep me very well briefed because we became close friends; that's one way he operates, sort of an after-hours club. After-hours meaning sort of seven to eight at night for a drink, you know: let's look over what's gone on today and where do we go tomorrow. Sitting in his office before we all took off.

M: Bill Bundy doesn't operate that way.

T: Bill Bundy didn't operate that way in any degree whatsoever. He was much more closed, tight. I would say nervous, but also prudent,

a banker's banker, a lawyer's lawyer, a bureaucrat's bureaucrat.

M: A professional.

T: A tight-assed professional.

M: Okay.

T: But my first assignment from Bill--which, apparently, I performed well because he was very complimentary and I now regret it--shortly after he assumed office was to draft a speech. For some reason they decided it was time for a full dress Vietnam speech and Bob McNamara was chosen to make it. It was to be a March 25, 1964, speech. Bill's terminology always sort of surprised me. I took a while to catch on. He said, "Jim, come in." And I said, "Yes, what can I do?" He said, "Jim, we're flat out on the speech." And I said, "Oh, you mean it's cancelled?" He said, "No." I didn't understand that "flat out" is an accelerator going through the floor. (Laughter)

M: Okay. Full speed ahead.

T: Full speed ahead. And in parting Bill said, as I recall it clearly: "The main point of this speech is to shoot down the canard once and for all that this is a civil war in Vietnam." I didn't know Mr. Bundy that well, at that time, and therefore, I hesitated, but as I was leaving with my marching orders, I turned and said, "Well, you know, of course, in some ways it <u>is</u> a civil war."

And he flushed quite red, visibly angry, and said, "Don't you play word games with me!" Which was one of my first and many run-ins with the difficulty of communication with Bundy on serious issues. So I then went off and in fact did do I would not say the major

drafting. There was a man at Defense, whose name now escapes me, but I can look it up, who was very good, who did the major drafting of the McNamara speech which was the first full dress "Why Are We In Vietnam?" effort under Johnson. Perhaps even under Kennedy. Bill Bundy has reminded me in recent months that in his research, he discusses--

M: In a book he's writing --

T: He discovers that there was no full dress speech on Vietnam or virtually none under the administration of John F. Kennedy by anyone. And he regards that as perplexing. As I think about it, and as I told him, I regard it conceivably as salutary. Because once you make a full dress speech, "Here we stand," in a Luther-like pose, it's hard to back down. If you do it sort of a little bit here and a little bit there, you can always say we never said it. Once you do the McNamara route, which became the Johnson Administration fashion of full dress statements on Vietnam, a process takes over, which I've written about in a piece I've done, that I would term rhetorical escalation. The war and the place became important because you've said they're important.

Anyway, just to finish up on the McNamara speech, I did not do the first draft. A gentleman in Defense, as I say, did. I went over that and fought hard for many changes which were made; fought for many that weren't; sat in on one or two sessions with John McNaughton in a speech review of the McNamara statement in which some of the points I made, which I made as State's points, were actually my points. Some were actually State's, but I found--this for the benefit of future biographers of McNaughton--a curious

ambivalence in the man: a law professor who sort of understood the undercurrent of what I was saying, and a law professor whose Socratic method also would respond with some wit every now and then to some of these points like, "You don't really think we should be there?" And I said, "Well . . .

M: Now that you mention it.

T: . . . now and then, no." Right. And he said, "Well, let's not record that part." But he was a man whose style was to say, "I'm from Pekin, Illinois, and I want you to tell me why we shouldn't bomb the hell out of Peking." So you had this sort of bluff and bluster, a Corn Belt exterior covering a lot of wit and nuance. I never knew what to make of him.

And as I left government in 1966, I was offered a job by John McNaughton to stay on in Defense on his staff, and I told him the many reasons I couldn't and wouldn't, but one of them was that I was a through and through deep-dyed peacenik. And he said, "Do they know it on the outside?" And I said, "No, I don't think so." He said, "That's all we want. What we need here is peaceniks, but not if they're known as peaceniks."

M: I guess his shop locally was more or less the center of dissenters within, by the late period.

T: Yes, yes.

M: Was it your impression, from the place where you were and that qualification that you already made--this is mainly in the light of some of the Pentagon Papers recently published--that some

pretty basic military decisions were in fact made in that period, early 1964, up into the summer of 1964?

T: I would say much contingency planning was done. A go-ahead for contingency planning of an escalatory nature was given. One had the impression it was given at the presidential level. All that did was encourage those of the military and Mr. Walt Rostow's persuasion who had believed in such things all along.

M: Including it ahead of time. [?]

T: Right. Was to encourage, was to give them marginal encouragement that the Chief of State might well be on their side or at least end up on their side. I have no impression that any formal presidential go-ahead for the bombing of the North was ever given prior to the election of 1964, and my further impression, sitting on the Mac Bundy staff--which is moving ahead a little bit--was that the President himself delayed and agonized over the I believe it was December 1, 1964 joint recommendation from the Interagency Planning Staff.

M: Now that was the William Bundy review group. Did you work on that?

T: Periodically. [The President] agonized over it. Although Bill Bundy, I think, believes that the President approved the recommendation in principle, it seemed clear to me that he was thrashing around from December 1 until the first week of February 1965.

So I belong more to the school that sees the President trying to thrust aside the escalatory recommendation that comes at him so heavily endorsed by, I think, a consensus of people who played very falsely with their responsibilities. Again, I've written about that. But it

strikes me that almost as a result of the vacuum on Vietnam that characterized the year 1964, a consensus, a rolling consensus for escalation, was permitted space in which to eventually dominate the President and prevail over him.

On the other hand, I also have a sense that the President's instincts were fundamentally more escalatory than John Kennedy's; that the President's desire to rebuff military recommendations of a highly military activist nature, his resistance, was far less developed than John Kennedy's. Kennedy had gone through the Bay of Pigs and also must have been very suspicious of the French Indochina experience. Mr. Johnson had been heavily focused on domestic issues and was a relative newcomer to these matters.

M: What you said a while ago: that you began to help Mike Forrestal some, and that was your bridge into the NSC staff. One of Forrestal's projects in the spring of 1964, apparently, was the drafting of what later was to become the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Did you work with him on that?

T: I didn't hear much about that until Bill Bundy asked me to work on or put together pages and pages of questions and answers that might be required in terms of our people going to the Hill to support a congressional resolution. That was in late May or early June, I can't remember. I accompanied Bill Bundy over to see Mac in late May or early June--early June, I think it was--to look over these questions and think over the route of a joint resolution. What developed, according to my memory, was a decision, a two-fold thing.

First, it struck me, at the time, that a desire to go for a congressional resolution was a desire to keep Indochina out of politics, presidential politics, if and when some unforeseeable event took place that might require an American response in the course of the election. It would be a bad thing to divide the country and, of course, bad politics to undertake an administrative response that did not have the look of congressional authorization. Ergo, it struck me as relatively sane and salutary to try and get some general congressional mandate to tide us over. I, therefore, had not in the past belonged to the school that feels it was all a put-up job building toward the provocation of some incident and then an all-out response. I do recall the reason--I think the Bundy brothers at the time agreed that the reason why the resolution route should be dropped was because you would just get too much Senate-floor flak out of Morse and Gruening, and you would end up with a bigger debate and a more divided Congress--and conceivably country--than not even having the resolution would have produced. So it was put aside. And I did not work with Mike on that. Incidentally, my work with Mike had been . . . Previously Mike was an enthusiast for changing China policy, and I had done a lot of work on the Roger Hilsman December 1963 China speech which, I think, was a major turning point; which speech, incidentally, as far as I know, was only given because it was inadequately cleared.

M: (Laughter) It would have been stopped otherwise.

T: And as the man responsible for the clearance procedure, I can say that

in all good conscience--but I don't know if you're interested in that aside.

M: Well, I'm interested in the China thing. I'll get to the policy.

T: We'll come back to that.

M: You moved over to the White House in June, July, that framework of 1964.

T: July 4th weekend of 1964. Mike Forrestal called me; he said he had just been told by the President to move over to State to chair an inter-agency Vietnam group and that I'd better get my ass over to his seat before it was filled by someone else, because Mike and I had been doing this back and forth between the Bundy brothers, which was a very difficult maneuver. Mike wanted me over there. Mac wanted me, but Mac is always allergic to expanded staff, and then there's the Bundy fraternal relationship, which is to me extraordinarily obscure. Therefore, it was on again, off again for several months.

M: How much did that affect policy making, the fact that the brother relationship existed all through this time? Was it an important consideration?

T: All I can say, and I've not thought it through beyond a staff complaint level, is that it was very difficult for those of us who worked for Mac and those who worked for Bill to have a clear impression, as you were supposed to if you were an effective staff, of what the signals were and of what the marching orders were when we were dealing with men who not only were friends, but were brothers and therefore

had, one assumed, private communication as well as a series of other types of private hang-ups that only brothers can have over long years. I do wonder, now that you raised the point, whether Mac Bundy was a little more constrained in dealing with the bureau, the Far Eastern end of State and before that, in dealing with ISA, but particularly, in the Far Eastern end of State, by the fact that the chief Far East man was his slightly older brother.

M: That was really why I was curious on that point.

T: I wonder, too, to what degree Bill was constrained. I would think the constraint would have worked a little more in influencing Mac. I think if Mac had felt the stupidity coming out of FE, stupidity in the lack of imagination in FE, he would have come down very, very hard on a man who was not his brother. I'm sure he would have been more muted in his response to his own brother.

M: I don't mean to interrupt you. Then you simply took Mike's place.

T: Well, it was musical chairs for a while. I took Mike's place, and I was all over the landscape. It turned out that I was, at least for the initial period, under the friendly tutelage of Bob Komer. I therefore had a watching brief over Mike's old waifs and strays, Vietnam having heavily moved with Mike over to State. I picked up Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and the like. Bob Komer, meanwhile, in Mike's increasing involvement in Vietnam over the months, had begun a kind of expansionism. He'd taken over Korea, and he had a continuing interest in Taiwan, and Bob Komer was also deeply

interested in Indonesia and Malaysia. Bob, however, was spread all over the rest of the world and, I think, welcomed some assistance on Korea and Indonesia, as well as Taiwan. And so I did a lot of work with and under him, as well as some of Mike's other staff, for [what] came to be a fairly brief interval because I then went on a week or two vacation in late August or early September--and then received a phone call after the Democratic Convention saying that Senator Humphrey wanted to have me loaned to his staff for the duration of the campaign to work on foreign policy speeches and statements.

This, I believe, was largely through the intervention of Tom Hughes, though I knew Senator Humphrey somewhat. . . . Mac Bundy was consulted and gave his go-ahead, and felt it would be useful to have a member of his staff on the vice presidential candidate's staff though it should be well concealed, because it violated some . . .

M: No doubt.

T: . . . law or regulation, perhaps even the Hatch Act. I can't remember.

M: Something.

T: So I then from early September or mid-September on would spend a few hours a day in the Bundy shop but mainly be up on Capitol Hill with Humphrey's staff right through election day.

M: You mentioned your waifs and strays in that early summer period.

That's presumably when the bombing of Laos began, which was, I'm sure, a presidential decision. Did you get involved with the President

on that particular matter?

T: No. I'm sure the decision was taken before the time of my arrival, and I only began to understand what was going on quite slowly.

Oh, incidentally, one of the delights and horrors of working for Mac Bundy is that no one tells you anything. You come on to the job, and there's no briefing as to what you're supposed to do. You're just supposed to be a quick learner and fall in fast. So I would have things come across my desk, sometimes of great presidential urgency and sometimes no urgency at all, and I had to make that decision by feel. There was no preliminary training. There was a message to congratulate Sukarno on his birthday, something highly routine, which I cleared with Bob Komer and signed off on, just at a time when Sukarno was becoming a very difficult customer apparently to our President himself. And so when I then checked with Bundy and showed him the message, he looked at me very grimly and he said, "That's too warm. Get it stopped, if you can." He smiled and said, "Good luck." I then got State to cable the embassy in Jakarta and say, "Stop that message, which should have said, 'Happy birthday,'" and, you know, whatever. I then waited for the embassy's reply, knowing that my job was on the line.

M: All over something that trivial.

T: Right. In a few hours, there was a reply back from Jakarta saying, "Your message received. Other message not yet delivered. Will hold."

I went running to Bundy with this, and he said, "Congratulations, Thomson. We don't have to send you back to State yet, do we?"

M: Didn't take many mistakes.

T: But this is leading into my response about the bombing of Laos. I recall that sometime in that summer there was a gentleman from the Pentagon arriving with top secret charts, plus a cable to clear which Mike Forrestal's former secretary told me Mike normally cleared and I should do, too. So I looked at it, and it was clearly a map of Laos. There were some zigzag lines running up and down, and there were some code words. The gentleman didn't tell me very much when I asked him and I didn't want to sound too ignorant; but it was apparently a scheduled route for some airplanes to take, with words sprinkled around like "armed reconnaissance." I called over to Bundy's office and said that the gentleman was here, and he said, "Well, if it looks okay to you, why don't you clear it." So I cleared it but sent him a copy. I guess I asked Bromley Smith how to do it. He gave me that advice. No, he checked with Mac; Mac said okay if it looks all right with him, but send us a copy. I only sort of much later realized that what I'd been signing off on was rather heavy bombing of an entire country. But that's about the way it happened.

M: With a lot of foresight and serious consideration and all. (Laughter)

T: Well, clearly some planning had been going on. I was just a cog in the machine. All I was was a junior Eichmann. But I'm amused and

appalled, sometimes, at how bits and pieces of paper that came my way would get the local chop on them without, at least, my knowing--and I daresay it happened in some other offices--precisely what it entailed.

M: Does this mean that essentially when a serious decision such as the bombing of Laos and perhaps the Tonkin Gulf retaliation and others were being taken that they held it at a level above the staff level where you were working?

T: I would think so, sure. Now it is conceivable, again, that Mike Forrestal was in on that kind of decision; it would be something of a question, but he would certainly be informed of it. I think President Kennedy's style as I was told by the leftovers on the staff when I arrived--I never worked under Kennedy there--was much more to deal with all the NSC staff members as staff assistants to the president. Whereas, Johnson's method, at least, in the early days, and for quite a while throughout, was to deal through Mac Bundy and then Walt Rostow, and perhaps [Francis] Bator and a couple of others. But by and large, the rest of us were not clued in at all. Whether Mike was clued in on the decision-making or brought in on the decision-making on the Laos bombing, I have no idea.

M: On things like the Tonkin Gulf retaliation, or the bombing at the time of Pleiku, or the troop buildup in 1965, would you normally be brought in?

T: I would say only by kibitzing. I would kibitz on these later decisions via what Chester Cooper would show me from the take. And he

showed me everything, because he liked to have advice, although, on some sensitive matters, he was told not to show anyone including his own secretary. But Chester Cooper did not sit in these meetings himself either. So he was told by Mac Bundy what had gone on at these meetings.

M: So it was ex post facto.

T: Yes. So all I was was one of a large community of kibitzers. Government is built on one's own construction of one's need to know.

M: But you weren't excluded on a security ground so much as on just internal secrecy.

T: Just keeping the circle small. Sure.

M: Is the same thing true of the various negotiating tracks that took place from, say,1964 on through the time you were serving in Bundy's office?

T: Certainly, certainly, yes. As one moved into that area of dealing, the very concept of negotiation was, for a while, so anathema that any concept of turning down an escalatory track and turning away from it was considered so subversive that Mac Bundy would tell Chet Cooper under no circumstances to put anything on possible peace negotiations in a typewriter, but instead to put it in handwriting, so that there would be no copy. And Chet, with whom I got along very well, would ask me for my ideas, have me read his longhand draft and so forth from time to time. So it wasn't that Mac didn't trust Cooper's secretary, didn't trust me, or didn't trust the messengers. It was that such issues were regarded as so potentially explosive both upward

and outward.

Mac was very sensitive to the President's sensitivities, and the President, apparently, liked to do things very much in the closet and keep them there. There was, on the outside, a growing chorus of those pushing for more dovish stances, and had they known that there were people inside working on semi-dovish routes, it was regarded as something that would strengthen their hand. I'm not sure that's true. That's the way it felt to the higher-ups.

M: In your opinion, of those that you knew about, were there any of the sort of tentative channels that were opened in that period that were really hopeful, given our position regarding negotiations generally?

T: I thought there were things that were hopeful at the time, if we had been willing to be imaginative, to pick them up and use them. For instance, those famous Pham Van Dong eight points or whatever--I can't even remember how many points there were--five points, four points. When they first came in our direction in April 1965, both Cooper and I were strongly of the view, "Why don't we, say, let's use them." The key words came through in several translations: one was "the only basis," another was "the correct basis," a third was "the best basis," et cetera. "Why don't we do the old kind of ploy they did with Khrushchev over the Cuban Missile Crisis, and take the wording that we like best, like 'one good basis,' and say, 'Fine. That's your basis; it's a good one to discuss; let's sit down and talk about your points, and we'll throw out our own points in the course of our discussions.'"

This was absolute anathema to all those on high, with the possible exception of George Ball. Mr. Rusk was the worst offender. When Lyndon Johnson in his John Hopkins speech spoke of "unconditional discussions," Mr. Rusk took the press aside afterwards, I was told by many newsmen, and informed them that that did not mean "negotiations." It was a completely different concept of word.

M: How did that get . . .

T: He played semantical games. And only in the President's July 25 press conference in 1965 did the President himself, not in his prepared statement but in an additional answer, use the word negotiations. Mr. Rusk reluctantly came around and accepted the word because he couldn't take it out, but he sure didn't mean it. Mr. Rusk didn't mean it and I don't know whether the President meant it or not.

M: Did you have anything to do with that Johns Hopkins speech?

T: Well, some of us had been pushing from the beginning of the escalation. From the time Mac Bundy got back from Vietnam--

M: That was the February of Pleiku, yes.

T: --from Pleiku onward, Cooper and I had worked very hard to suggest ways in which negotiations might begin, or short of that, ways in which the President might look and sound more peace-making. And we had pushed him hard.

M: Pushed Mac Bundy hard.

T: Right. And the precursor of the Johns Hopkins speech was a press statement put out in the President's name. I think it was drafted by Bill Moyers.

M: Was Moyers an ally of your and Cooper's viewpoint by this early?

T: I sort of learned so in this instance. That was a one-page press release, a statement of the President's views; I don't think it was attributed, in words, directly to him, but it had a very favorable response. And it had to do with, particularly, the economic development side. We were stressing the Mekong--giving new life to the Mekong Valley development plan--plus the possibility of postwar rehabilitation of North Vietnam. These ideas, I was told, were further pushed on the President--and your archives would reveal far more than I know--by Tex [Arthur] Goldschmidt, who had been pushing the Mekong stuff for a long time, and also by Barbara Ward, who some said had spent the weekend previous to the Johns Hopkins speech with the President and had turned his mind even further in this direction of a conciliatory tack.

M: Do you know whether this viewpoint that you and Cooper and others held was getting to the President? Did the President know that within his NSC staff there were those that had serious doubts about the basic strategic premises on which we were operating in Vietnam?

T: If these views got to the President, they only got to him through Mac Bundy. I think it was hard enough for us to decide when, and where, and how to bend Mac Bundy's ear either in writing or in person. It was easier in writing, because his personal tolerance for such things was short unless you could be precise, concise, and have a "Here and now, what do you want me to do" recommendation. He, by temperament and by the demands of his job, was very impatient of rambling

reflections on why are we here.

M: Philosophy wasn't his interest.

T: Yes. Well, he was a super-pragmatist: "The fact of the matter is: We're here, and what do we do tomorrow?" If you begin to suggest reconsidering the whole, unraveling the entire ball of yarn, you're in danger of being viewed as a sorehead and a long-winded fool.

M: So you don't have positive knowledge that your doubts did get [to the President]?

T: That's the problem in dealing with Mac who is incidentally the most interesting, exciting employer I ever worked for. But if that is the problem of getting to Mac, then who knows how much of what one gets to Mac gets, then, on to the President, because Mac has to pick and choose his own style and timing? So what he tells the President about his own doubts or other people's, I don't know. And one of the things he may well feel that the President doesn't need is to know that there are some guys with subversive ideas on his own staff. Here is a man beginning to be in a state of siege. That's one of the terrible problems of the presidency: that once you move on a track like that, you want everyone to say, "Aye, aye, sir."

M: What other tactics were open to you? Did you make creative use of newspaper leaks, for example, to get your viewpoint pushed, or was there just nothing much else you could do?

T: Well, we had friends. All of us who had been around at all had friends in the press. One had to be very careful. There was some . . . leakage is not quite the right word in this regard, because what one did was wring one's hands with those fairly wise and sound and

knowledgeable members of the press who shared one's views and who knew that you shared their views. You would work both ways. And in their sort of think pieces as opposed to any direct leakage, they could begin to raise questions. You could give them some help in raising fundamental questions about the rightness of the tactics, the track.

M: But you better not be caught doing that, is that [right]?

T: Well, of course, you'd better not be caught doing that. Although that's not being caught doing anything special. The White House is much more sensitive to the leakage of the name of the next ambassador, the impending ambassador to New Zealand, than it is to a Max Frankel piece wondering if Southeast Asia is really important. Max Frankel already has that wonder, you see, and all you do is make him feel he's not alone, that even people inside can have the doubt, and that may make Max or others write a little more, show a little more bravery in what they say.

M: What about the two pauses in bombing that took place in 1965? Is that something that involved your level? Either the short one in May or the long one of Christmas 1965-66?

T: I don't recall my personal involvement. I did, I should again stress, try to stay out of an activist Vietnam role at the White House. Mac tried to honor that by not asking me to do much on Vietnam, except when Cooper was overwhelmed; and when he became too overwhelmed, they brought in a guy from CIA named Don Ropa, who helped out Chet full-time. So it was only when Chet asked for help or ideas, and periodically when Chet was so overwhelmed that Mac would ask me, that

I would be pulled informally into Vietnam. Being desperately worried about the issue, however, I used my NSC access to the traffic just to keep abreast as much as I could--an enormous flow of traffic. You can't do it full time.

M: You have been credited with writing--in fact, maybe even in your own writing, you mentioned your authorship of the script for "Why Vietnam" in the fall of 1965.

T: Oh, yes.

M: How did that happen?

T: That's one of those moments when Cooper's too busy or on vacation, and Ropa, if he's doing this, is barely keeping his head above water. As I recall, Mac Bundy told me that the President wanted to put out something in the next couple of weeks that would put together what he had said, what Rusk had said, what McNamara had said on three aspects of the war: the diplomatic, the military, and the sort of peace-making or international development aspect. Mac wanted me to take over the job of putting this stuff together; here were the materials, which I could get from Bromley Smith next door; here were some ideas about a format; and there were two guys who would help me out from the public affairs area at State. I went back that afternoon--it was a Friday--to look the stuff over and think about the next two weeks. And on Saturday morning, Mac called me and said that the President had just got word that the Republican National Committee was coming out with a "white paper" on Vietnam on Tuesday right after the weekend . . .

M: Three days later.

T: . . . and the President wanted his paper out on Monday, and would I take this two-week job and have it out on Monday. So I went into the White House and worked all day Saturday, all Saturday night. My State friends were working with me. Went home; got a little sleep; came back Sunday noon; put the thing in final form. It went to press Sunday night at the Government Printing Office for the fastest job in its history; and we had the first two copies on the President's breakfast tray on Monday morning.

M: Did he have any reaction to that?

T: I was told he was pleased. Yes, they were congratulating themselves on Monday on their pleasure, the President's pleasure, the speed, and the fact that the Republican white paper had not yet come out.

M: You mentioned the one meeting with the President. Is there anything further on that?

T: I did say incidentally, in what I wrote, and only partly facetiously, that I tried to follow the title "Why Vietnam" with a question mark because I thought that it was more of a question than an answer. I lost out on that and the question mark was dropped, because it was clearly an assertion and not a question.

M: Right. Is there anything more to your meeting with the President than you mentioned a minute ago?

T: That Cabinet Room meeting where we talked about waifs and strays?

M: Right, right.

T: I, incidentally, sat in on a number of meetings with the President--mainly, as I recall, the first Sato Japanese visit, when I was brought in as White House staff notetaker. I sat in on several meetings, or at least more than one, with the President; participated in all those festivities; was his sort of White House man on that visit. I also brought poor Howard Jones, who was the outgoing ambassador to Indonesia and bright-eyed Marshall Green, who was the incoming ambassador to Indonesia, into what they thought was going to be their one-hour briefing with the President as to what to do with Sukarno, and we were kept waiting a very long time. We were then brought in, photographed, and ushered out in about two and a half minutes, to the intense surprise of both Mr. Jones and Mr. Green. But it was a hard day, and the President really didn't know what to do about Sukarno.

M: It didn't take but two and a half minutes to tell them. (Laughter)

T: All I can recall his saying to Marshall Green was, "Well, you've got a tough assignment, and I wish you luck."

M: At least, Marshall Green landed on his feet.

T: Marshall Green landed very much on his feet. I'm just recalling meetings with Johnson. There was a previous meeting; that's one that remains in my mind fairly clearly, because I thought it was August or September of 1964 and I still think I'm right, but it could have been November, difficult to check. It was a meeting which I was asked to attend in the President's office on the progress of planning

for Vietnam options. I was the notetaker for that meeting. As a matter of fact, this I can easily check in my own papers which are off in the National Archives. But my clear impression from the meeting with the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Mac Bundy, Bill Bundy, maybe a couple of others, was that the President gave clear instructions that all options should be carefully staffed out, explored, aired--all options across the spectrum for what to do about Vietnam. After the election--

M: Including the extreme: get out, cut your losses and make the best of it?

T: I'm not sure I ever heard him use those words, but I sure heard no holds barred on any option.

M: That would sort of substantiate your views as to his sincerity on it.

T: I took notes and I sent my report of the meeting to Mac. I do recall the President also said, "I want to know what the military are thinking. It's terribly important to have them brought in. I want to be sure they're aboard." But I read that, and you read any meeting, with your own cast of mind. You often hear what you want to hear, but I heard there a marching order that I felt was not carried out. I felt that all options were, in fact, not staffed out; that the shortest shrift possible was given to the toughest option of re-examining why we were there and if we found no good reason, getting out, figuring out how to get out.

M: How about the negotiating track? Was that staffed out fully?

T: I don't think any negotiating track was staffed out at all. Negotiation

was what might happen if our bombing brings them to the conference table; you know, if they turn tail and run. We never talked about what we would negotiate.

Now, I have a pet hunch about this that comes only from my years in government, but that is that virtually no American government can ever set out an agreed negotiating position prior to a meeting if it's on a very sensitive subject. Because in order to obtain such inter-agency agreement, you will run head-on into the worst of the hawks and the worst of the doves, the disagreement will come right out into the press, or whoever is the loser will take his case to the Congress or the press through leakage. Ergo, no American delegation on a sensitive subject, I believe, can ever negotiate its position, except in the duress of the conference or on the airplane going to the conference.

M: And it's too late to [do it right then]?

T: That's what I always felt would be the problem with Vietnam, and I think was the problem. There was no genuine and usable negotiating position staffed out, beyond covers for surrender by the other side.

M: You mentioned the Sato visit. Sitting in and watching that, what was your impression of Mr. Johnson's ability or lack of it as a personal diplomat, which he was forced to be in a visit of that kind, a state visit?

T: Well, he sort of could be turned on or turned off. Sometimes his attention seemed to wander. He was bored. He wasn't interested in the issues. He wasn't interested in the people. On the other hand, he could really put out and give the warm press of the flesh, the

warm handshake, and really charm people. I think he had a very good relationship with Sato that developed very, very fast.

M: Did his homework?

T: Did his homework. Some of it took homework. Some of it just took natural politician's electricity. If the chemistry worked, it worked. It was never a highly precise, lawyer-like exchange.

M: Not with Johnson.

T: But that may not be appropriate to heads of state.

M: Before we leave Vietnam, are there any other instances where you were brought in on a major decision matter that you had insight on, or had contact with the President on any[thing else]?

T: I was going to say that, aside from these bits and pieces of sessions I sat in on when the President was meeting with others, there was, in perhaps May or June of 1966, Mr. Rostow's effort, once he had succeeded to and inherited the Bundy chair, to bring his staff and introduce them to President Johnson. President Johnson had never known, really, who these characters were out there. And if they weren't communists, they might at least be Republicans; he didn't know what they were. So Walt felt it would be useful to have a sort of jawboning session, and we sat around the big table. To my surprise, after the President told us how valuable we were, he then went around the table to ask each of us to give a few words about what we did, and that's when I talked about China-watching, plus waifs and strays. I believe it was at that meeting--it also came earlier--that I got some impression of his feelings about China, which we may get

into later.

But the other thing that came out right then when I talked about waifs and strays like Burma, Cambodia, and so forth, was his response: "Now Cambodia," he said, "I just don't understand why we can't get along with that little prince. I keep asking those people at State to do me a paper on why. He runs a wonderful country, he's a great little man, little fellow, and I just don't see why we can't find some way to get along with him. So I want you to do me a memo on how to get along with that little prince, and I want it here soon." (Bangs table) I said, "Yes, sir. I'll be glad to." That was the only sort of executive charge that came out of this meeting.

Afterwards all my NSC friends were congratulating me on this great breakthrough. And I did in fact feel excited. Bob Komer said, "You better have it there by two o'clock this afternoon." And I said, "I'm going to take two days, and I'm really going to staff this out." And I did then. One of the virtues of having served at State and having heterodox views is that you discover allies all through the bureaucracy--people buried here and there who have bright ideas, even though they may not be the number one desk officer. And I got and put together virtually every bright idea that had ever been thought about, and some others; put them in sequence on what to do about the Cambodia relationship; sent it off in a memo through Walt to Johnson two days later. And that thing came steaming back, to my great pride and joy, with each page covered with underlinings, exclamation points, and

enthusiastic comments. And each one of my recommendations were actually read. At the end of each, when I'd say, "Yes or no," he'd check "Yes;" and add, "Loud and clear;" or, "yes," underlined, plus "Right! Right on!"

M: Hardly.

T: Not "Right on." Take that out! But the covering page said something like, "This is great stuff. I'm really proud!" Exclamation point. Well, I just got a glimpse there--I'm not doing this to sound my own own trumpet--a glimpse of a man in a stage of siege trying somehow to find, as I felt he also tried with China, some non-violent, different Asian peacemaking look and role that he could assume.

I think he was obviously very deeply troubled by the unending slaughter in Indochina and by his own dilemmas as to how to get out of it; and if we could find some way of patching up relations, having the warm embrace, the hand of friendship with Prince Sihanouk, we might begin to look better as a nation, he might look better as a president, and maybe move on to better things. I think China similarly bugged him. But that kind of glimpse into his frustrations interested me very much.

M: Going to China. You mentioned the Hilsman speech in 1963 which you got cleared. There were other instances during the Johnson Administration.

T: Incidentally, I might just say, on the clearance of that speech: the wondrous combination of things was that, given Roger Hilsman's

considerable bravery in giving a speech that conciliatory--and it won't even look so today, if you look back at it, but it seemed very conciliatory then--the speech could only have been cleared as a result of inattention in high circles. Because, although Rogers thinks that he had a go-ahead from John Kennedy, I've never been able to ferret out precisely how specific that go-ahead was and when Kennedy gave it.

Roger wanted to give a speech in September, and the State Department produced a very bad boiler-plate draft. We then took another draft and I worked very hard on it. That's the speech that Roger gave on December 13th, 1963. But our good fortune was that Mr. Rusk was about to go out of town to a NATO meeting. Roger asked to see him to talk about the speech. Mr. Rusk said he had about three minutes, what was it about? Roger gave him a brief rundown and showed him a copy. Rusk glanced at it, raised a question about the report that De Gaulle might be about to recognize Communist China--we shouldn't give him encouragement--but the Secretary basically said, well, it sounded all right. Then he got on a plane and went off to NATO.

I was asked to clear this with the White House. I sent a copy to Mike Forrestal. Mike called back and said, "I'm really disappointed in you." I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "This doesn't go anywhere near far enough. It's just very slow stuff, and I'd hoped for more from you." And I said, "At least can we have a White House clearance?" And he said, "Of course. No problem." He added, "But I'm disappointed."

So, at the third clearance point, I sent a copy to Bill Sullivan, who worked for Harriman, who was then an under secretary. Sullivan read it and said it looked all right to him. I said, "Could we have an under secretary's clearance?" And he said, "Sure." Then Sullivan left town. So when the fur began to fly, the day the speech was given, when it was out to the press, and the press had discovered that it was a very important speech, George Ball, who was acting secretary, asked who the hell had cleared it, as did Harriman. (Laughter) And we were able to report the Secretary of State cleared it himself, in person, before he went abroad. And he was incommunicado on an airplane, so they couldn't do anything about that. I was able to report White House clearance, though. A few minutes later Mike Forrestal called up the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs and said, "Do not report that there was White House clearance on that speech." (Laughter)

M: Trying to cover his own tracks.

T: Right, right, because he obviously hadn't checked it with Mac or the President. Averell Harriman said, well, he'd never seen the damned thing and we were able to assure him that his assistant, Mr. Sullivan, who was now airborne, had cleared it. That's the end of that story.

M: That's great. Now, there was this occasional . . . Goldberg made a fairly conciliatory speech at one point. Humphrey--what was it?--containment without isolation phrase, and LBJ's own something about hostility. But nothing happened, or did it?

T: No, I can give you the whole scenario as briefly as possible.

What happened after the Hilsman speech was multiple. First, the new administration was trying to get its footing. Then De Gaulle did recognize Red China., We were very anti-De Gaulle to begin with, and we thought this was another way of his pulling the ground from under us. Then Hilsman was fired. His successor, Bill Bundy, was trying to get his footing; had no particular interest in the China question; and was deep into Laos coups. And then everyone was deep into Vietnam planning. So China, basically, went by the boards during 1964 and almost all of 1965, despite the best efforts of several of us; we kept fighting both at State and the White House. The number one obstacle, however, to any action on China was the views of Mr. Dean Rusk.

M: He was just a zealot.

T: He was an absolute zealot on this. From early 1961 on, we tried two or three times a year to get a China travel package up to the White House for approval. It always got up to the seventh floor. It never got past Mr. Rusk, because he did not want to move one inch on China policy. In fact, late in the game he said to one of his assistants who was trying to get him to look at the China-related Mongolia package, which used to come up every other six months--a proposal for recognizing the Mongolian People's Republic--"You know, there are some young men in this government who think we're going to change our China policy, and I can tell you they're dead wrong." Now, that's the only direct quote from Rusk that I ever heard of via one of his staff people that indicated that he knew what the battle was all about. But clearly,

he did.

A further indication of the nature of that obstacle came clear when we finally made our first crack in the ice. Dr. Paul Dudley White sent a personal letter to President Johnson in August, 1965, a handwritten letter--do you know about this?--saying roughly, "Mr. President, I'm deeply concerned about our deadlock with Communist China. I have had contacts with the Russian scientists over the years and some Chinese, and, in fact, was invited to visit China two or three years ago, but could not do so. I would like to be of help in trying to break this deadlock and undertake any mission, however hazardous, in order to be of assistance to you. Sincerely yours, Paul Dudley White."

This, then, comes with a note from President Johnson to Mac Bundy, a typed-out note from his secretary, an oral comment transferred to the typewriter, "This interests me. What should we do?" Mac Bundy, then, knowing of my obsession for the past several months and years, calls me over and says, "This is it, Jim. Take it and run with it."

And we had about two minutes of talk about what to do and what we'd end up doing. Mac saw it, as I did, as a very useful way, a rare moment, in which we could outflank Mr. Rusk, end-run Mr. Rusk. And what we ended up doing, to make a long story short, was that I called Paul Dudley White, told him the President had read his letter, was very grateful and interested; that Mac Bundy was interested and grateful, too; that it would help us immensely if he would be so good as to write a letter to the Secretary of State proposing an easing of the

travel ban, with particular reference to people in medicine, public health, and related fields, and would he please send us, simultaneously, a copy of that letter. That then happened.

Mac then, before Dean Rusk had even read his mail, called up either Rusk or his secretary--I think it was Rusk--and said, "The President has seen Dr. White's letter to you. He is very much interested in this. Can we have your recommendations?" This must have happened in September, but it took us until December 31, from August to December, to break through the holding action of Mr. Rusk and a few others.

And on December 31, we announced, for the first time since 1950, the first easing of the travel ban with China; expressly stated that this was done at the personal suggestion of Dr. Paul Dudley White, President Eisenhower's physician--you see, to drape it in the cloak of respectability for Republican consumption.

The roof did not fall in. Mr. Rusk knew he had been outflanked. And by March, under further pressure, State eased travel regulations toward China several more degrees. But it also happened that March was the time of the Fulbright China hearings, nationally televised, with a very good reception; all sorts of senators who had previously been very hawkish on this subject spoke at the hearings in a conciliatory fashion. And President Johnson I was told--in these months I began to know Moyers and his people better--was rather pleased. We briefed the President. I was asked to send up a note through Moyers about these these Fulbright sessions.

M: Through Moyers, not through Bundy.

T: This is now an interregnum.

M: Early 1966.

T: March.

M: Oh, okay. After Bundy is gone.

T: Mac has left.

M: He left in February.

T: March 1. March 1 was his final day.

M: His final day of employment, right.

T: And there's an interregnum, and Moyers is trying to take over the Bundy role, and has also moved in as an Indochina peace watcher. Bob Komer is tentatively sitting in Bundy's chair, but that's not very formal. So, through Moyers, I send briefings on what the professors are saying on Capitol Hill. And the President is, I'm told, rather surprised--and pleased that they're not all against him on Vietnam. They're talking about China as a rather separate issue, and they are sort of making some good sense about it.

Meanwhile, I am told some private polls authorized by Moyers, Lou Harris type stuff, tests out the water on China. Goldberg, in the previous autumn, as you say, had made a fairly conciliatory, a more conciliatory speech; and we began to sense--I never talked to the President personally about this, but through Moyers, I got the sense that, here again, there was effort to sort of reach out and find a trans-Pacific act of statecraft that could serve to deflect attention from the unpleasantness in Indochina and maybe move toward a great new peace possibility.

This builds toward what I think is a remarkable speech--I say so with some pride of authorship, President Johnson's July 12, 1966, speech which was basically a Moyers-Thomson speech.

M: This is the "cooperation, not hostility" [speech].

T: "Reconciliation" is the word, the key word. There are two key words. Well, there are "cooperation, not hostility," but also, he comes out for reconciliation with China. He comes out for the "free flow of ideas and people and goods" in our relationship with China, and he even sounds as if China should eventually be in the U.N. That speech was an outflanking not only of Dean Rusk, but of Walt Rostow.

M: Rostow was of Rusk's persuasion on this issue?

T: Hard to say where he was. I don't think he would have gone that far for a minute, but Rostow had early on proposed that we offer food to China on a quid pro quo basis. His response to the Hilsman speech was that it had left out one central thing: namely, if China will leave its Southeast Asian neighbors alone, we will see to it that China gets food and provide them with either the grain surpluses of Southeast Asia or our own, or something. But what happened on the July 1966 speech--again to make a long story brief--was that the President wanted to give, on a Tuesday night, a big Asia speech. I hadn't been informed. My relations with Rostow were for some reason not terribly good.

M: This was right about the time you were going to leave.

T: Right, right, a couple months before I left. But my relations with Bill Jorden were worse, mainly, because Bill Jorden as a new boy coming in, inheriting the Cooper slot, I think, was trying to sort of

keep, as one does bureaucratically, everything in his own hands, to establish where he was. And there were some leftovers like me. I've never known exactly where and when he stood, and why, on Vietnam, but he had become fairly hawkish, by that time, it seemed to me.

But anyway I guess I learned that over the weekend an interagency job of putting a speech together for the President had been under way. All these materials were flowing in to Walt Rostow, and a draft had been produced, thanks to Jorden and Rostow, that the President didn't like. I didn't know that. I just knew that a draft was being produced. Ten o'clock Monday morning, I get a call from Bill Moyers' man, Hayes Redmon, saying the President has looked at Walt Rostow's draft and doesn't like it, wants Bill to do an alternative, a different draft, but no one's supposed to know about this, and: "Bill wants you to do it. So even though you're on Walt's staff, could you kindly produce a speech by three o'clock this afternoon?" I said, "What should I say?" And he said, "Say what you would say about Asia if you were president."

M: That's the kind of charge you like.

T: Right. So I don't get it done by three, but I'm given an extension, and I finally get something written out by about seven or eight that evening. I go pretty far on China, but I don't go very far on Vietnam at all. And Moyers comes in from a black tie dinner around nine-thirty or ten; takes over the speech; "Moyersizes" it; "Johnsonizes" it; adds some tough Vietnam stuff; and to my surprise and delight,

although he shortens the China section, leaves in most of the very conciliatory stuff. I come in at seven-thirty or eight the next morning and discover that Moyers has had his revised version of my version retyped and sent in on a breakfast tray to the President. The President has picked up the phone and said, "Bill, I like it." And that has given Moyers his signal; Moyers has belatedly sent a copy over to Secretary Rusk, and has then, almost immediately on the copy's arrival, called Mr. Rusk, saying, "Mr. Secretary, the President has approved this speech draft. Could we have any small changes of yours at once, because we want to run it off?" (Laughter) So we then stand there waiting for the arrival of Mr. Rusk's corrected version. And it is a real mess, because in his terribly harassed handwriting, he scribbled changes all over every page, but not very substantive ones. But we are waiting for the China part, because we know that's where he's going to blow sky high, and it's the two pages before the last one. And on those two pages, there's not one change at all, although there are changes on the last page. So we whoop and holler, particularly over the phrase that got through, two phrases: one is reconciliation; the other, ideas, people and goods -- because goods implies trade. And our explanation, to this day, is either that Mr. Rusk knew he was out-flanked and resigned himself to that development, or that he turned over two pages at once, at the same time, by mistake.

M: A great way for history to be made. (Laughter)

T: This is how history is made.

M: Yes, right. But now that gets in. Does that really, you think,

imply any commitment by Mr. Johnson, or just a reading of phrases that happen to strike him as being, you know . . . ?

T: I have no idea what the answer is. My impression is that he was of at least two minds. One mind was the tough line he was taking from time to time on Indochina. The other line was a genuine desire to reach out to the people of China. I was told by Mike Forrestal, before I ever came to the White House, that I would probably find President Johnson less doctrinaire about China policy--about which, Mike knew, I was deeply interested--than President Kennedy even. Because President Kennedy was a somewhat more precise ideologue, and President Johnson was probably less troubled by Maoism's twists and turns and more interested in how you feed and clothe and give schools and clinics and roads to all those kids in China, all those hungry people who have no long-term reason to hate us. I think Mike was probably right. I do have one very clear memory, though, of a central point, and that is that when we got through the Paul Dudley White travel package--

M: Stop right there for a moment.

Tape 2 of 2

M: Okay, you were starting to say that after the--

T: At the time of our mini-victory in the area of the China travel ban, when we got the Paul Dudley White travel package through State, Mac Bundy congratulated me and I congratulated him. We were having a cheerful

moment and I said, "It's just so disappointing-that we can't get more done and faster on the China front." And Mac said, "Frankly, this president will never move on such a sensitive issue as China, unless advised emphatically to do so by his constitutionally designated chief advisor in foreign affairs, the Secretary of State, and frankly, this Secretary of State will never advise him so to do, and that's the way it is." So I think a different president might have forced Mr. Rusk to be more forthcoming. Kennedy is alleged to have said to those close to him on the White House staff that he would put China off till the second term; that his mandate was too narrow; that Eisenhower had been too tough on the subject when they met after the election; that it was the one subject on which Eisenhower said he would break openly if Kennedy moved. Therefore, China was to be pushed over to the second term. Kennedy, in his second term, with a Rusk, I'm sure, would have gotten Mr. Rusk to do his bidding, if, in fact, he wanted to move on China as he alleged he did. But there's no particular reason why President Johnson, aside from the feel of the thing, would know which buttons to push, which lines to take on China. It strikes me that his attention had been elsewhere for a long time.

M: Shame now with the success that a minimal amount of button pushing has apparently brought about that it wasn't undertaken some time ago.

T: Well, when we came into the State Department in January of 1961, there was in the Policy Planning Bureau a seven-hundred-page paper, as I recall, written by the Edward Rice, who eventually became consul general in Hong Kong, which had within it a list of all the

initiatives which one might take toward China and arguments for them. And most of the things that the Nixon Administration has undertaken--for which the Johnson Administration built a rhetorical foundation, that's I think the achievement of those years, plus a bit in the travel area--most of the things President Nixon has accomplished were all in that package sitting in Policy Planning from 1961 on. It was just a damn shame that we allowed so much time to elapse. There are those who would argue that the Chinese were not ready, and at various times, they were not. Nonetheless, I think we lost a great deal of valuable time and wasted much lives and treasure.

M: How about the rest of the area? The waifs, Indonesia? Any feeling from Mr. Johnson?

T: Yes. One of the things that struck me was that as we moved in the summer of 1965 toward what appeared to be Indonesia's slow slide under Sukarno's auspices into the hands of the Indonesian Communist Party, through a sharing of power and then eventually Communist domination, those of us who dealt with this subject, including myself and Bob Komer, tried to keep the President, through Mac, warned of the possibilities, informed of the possibilities; tried to keep State and other agencies--including, I'm sorry to say, Carl Rowan at USIA--from doing silly and precipitous things to make the break come faster and more violently than it might ordinarily come; to keep our cool, to play for the long haul; to keep our hand in the game. And it was Komer's impression and mine that President Johnson was remarkably

understanding of the Indonesian drift; was not going to panic about it; certainly was not going to intervene; and would, as he should, count on the long-term corrosive impact of Indonesian nationalism on Indonesian communism, if in fact that was the way Indonesia moved.

I had the feeling that he played the Indonesian pre-change-of-power months with great deftness, perhaps, I hope, learning some lessons from Vietnam. We didn't need to tangle in another one of those situations.

M: How much effect were the events in Vietnam having on events in Indonesia?

T: Well, of course, there's a famous theory that developed about this, which was totally self-serving, as far as I was concerned, self-serving by certain elements in the administration: an effort to prove after the coup d'etat and the countercoup--whatever it was, the communist attempt and then the generals' response--an effort to distort history grossly, to prove that it was because of our firm stand in Vietnam that the Indonesian generals had stood up.

M: Who in the administration would have peddled that theory?

T: I first heard it from William Bundy, but it was widespread among certain elements who were trying to find some rationalization for our Vietnam involvement and were clutching at straws. I began to hear it in the press, but we all pooh-poohed it inside the government, and I thought with great respectability, for some months, resisted any internal paper that would say such a thing.

There was no information, there was no piece of paper inside government until, say, March 1966, maybe April 1966, in which one could find any substantiation for that allegation. I mean even the most "back channels" of information--from the Indonesian generals, special intelligence and the like. Nor did I know of anyone inside the administration who believed it, though some people did hypothesize wistfully. And for that reason, some of us kept a very special watching brief, to see if one could find corroboration.

To my amazement, nonetheless, it was bruited about in the press, and to my amazement, I finally found a policy paper going forward from State to the White House in about April 1966 over Mr. William Bundy's signature making the argument that in fact--it was a paper on Indonesia, an Indonesian country paper--it could be further stated that our strong stand in Vietnam had produced the Indonesia outcome, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, period. "At least," the paper continued, "it is so reported in such respected journals as the London Economist"--and then it names one other source I can't remember. I was appalled that we would write within our own establishment to persuade each other of this falsehood by quoting the London Economist, of all things, when our own intelligence gave us nothing along those lines. I'm sorry to say that this after-the-fact invention by government--with no evidence of cause and effect--became nonetheless part of high doctrine, and it's very hard to shoot down.

M: What about other. . . .

T: Incidentally, I do think that it is "fed" to our officials. As you

know, people like to be told what they want to hear, and Asians are polite. So that, in the months after I left, it may have been true that Mr. Adam Malik, who is a very smooth Indonesian and a very gracious foreign minister, when, for the umpteenth time, is asked by some visiting American, "Was it not true that our strong stand in Vietnam did in fact stiffen your spines?" said amiably, "Yes."

M: That's always a possibility, right.

What about Malaysia, any other areas, Burma, Thailand? Get involved in any of those?

T: I was involved in all of those, but mainly in bits and pieces and stuff, and I'm not sure that I have any special views about the Johnson years that would be useful.

We had endless quarrels over the Philippines, but that is just the legacy of having an adolescent ward that never grows up. And it's an uncomfortable relationship and an uncomfortable country.

I thought we did very badly, as an administration, with Thailand, and I thought the Thais did very badly by us. It strikes me that they constantly twisted our arms to give them reassurances; the result, after a considerable number of years, was a Thailand with a far lessened sense of security because the Thais had done what we had forced them to do: what they had never done, historically, and that is, put all their eggs in one basket, knowing that that basket lived far away and would eventually go home.

M: That's not how they stayed out from under British rule in previous centuries.

T: That's right. And so I thought that was a sad story, the U.S.-Thai

relationship. And the Thais are showing, as we've always predicted, as people who were inside who knew about Thailand have always predicted, that they would be very quick footed, skilled in accommodation, would not scream from the rooftops when they had to live with the new reality. And they're already making quiet, secret overtures to Peking that I'm sure will result ultimately in Thailand's continued existence as a strong, independent state.

M: The administration, then and since, has frequently said that the critics of our Vietnam policy around Asia were only public critics, and privately, the Asian nations were always telling us, "We're really supporting what you're doing. We don't want you to pull out." Is that your impression? That we really had more support in Asia than [was made public]?

T: Asian nations are like most nations, but more so. They're more polite, Asian leaders. I'm not trying to make them seem that different from us, but there is a tendency to tell the free-spending and powerful foreigner things that the foreigner wants to believe. This has been done to us by all these states: when in private, they'll assure us of their support; but in public, they have to denounce us because of their opposition party. The truth lies somewhere in between. They will accommodate according to where they think we're at and what we're up to.

Lee Kuan Yew, in Singapore, was an arch critic of our Vietnam involvement; but once it was made clear that that's what we were going to do, he had other fish to fry, and he became one of the people the

administration kept pulling out of their pockets to support the war. I thought it was a disgraceful thing both ways because he was so fraudulently used, but he was using us, too.

Now, Lee Kuan Yew was able to adjust to the new reality. The Japanese similarly were appalled at what we were doing from the earliest days of escalation in Vietnam. The government, however, had to accommodate itself to us; and found it could deal with its own opposition. And once it achieved that kind of stability, having gone out on a limb in defense of our actions in Vietnam, [it] became, to some degree, more of a supporter than any right-thinking Japanese official actually is. A Japanese, early on, told me a wondrous thing that made my hair stand on end. When we were going into Vietnam, they said, "We tried that twenty years ago, and it was a terrible mistake to do."

M: I went to war with them when they tried that, as a matter of fact.

T: He said, "It won't work." And it was troubling to an innocent American in those days to realize the Japanese thought we were doing the same thing they had been doing. Because we knew we were right just as they weren't.

M: Right. This comes after your departure, but--

T: Let me just add one further thing about what "Asians" are telling us. You have to make a distinction between what Asians, like most people, really think and what they say in private and what they say in public. Very often, what they say in private among politicians is less to be taken as their real view than what they may say in public, for the

reason that I have just given. The further fact is that in Asia, we're dealing with small elites in most countries, and what the small elite may be saying to you, a small handful of leaders in a country, usually a tiny minority of national sentiment, if you will, may be very, very misleading; and furthermore, that handful may be here today and gone tomorrow. So I wouldn't bank on it, I wouldn't build enduring policies on it.

M: You left in the summer of 1966. What happened? Just get bureaucratically impossible with Rostow and Bill Bundy?

T: No, that's not the reason I left. I left for three reasons, and it's hard to say which was paramount. One reason was that I had decided when I went into government, after getting my Ph.D., that unless I wanted to be bureaucratized forever, I would have to, before I became too advanced in age, get back on an academic ladder in order to have an alternative career, not having a law degree and a law firm to hop back to from time to time.

M: Some of us suffer those disqualifications. (Laughter)

T: So it was high time to get back on some academic ladder, and Harvard, on March 1, 1966, asked me to come back, which happened to coincide with the day of Mac Bundy's actual departure--and which relates to my second reason.

My second reason was that my most interesting and demanding employer of the whole list, running from Chester Bowles, Roger Hilsman, Bill Bundy, Mac Bundy, to Walt Rostow--I had not yet experienced Rostow--had decided to leave, and I felt I had had the best of government

experience available. Had Mac stayed on, I would have felt more interested in staying on, but with his departure, it seemed an appropriate time to go. A third reason was quite simply the deepening of despair over one's inability to have any substantial effect on changing American-East Asian relations for the better. The moments of euphoria--when one broke through the travel ban after four and a half years of trying; when one got the President finally to say some gracious words toward Peking; when one heard the President give a conciliatory speech about the future of the Mekong and North Vietnam--such moments of euphoria were very few and far between, and they could not balance out the deepening sense of horror over escalation and killing with no end in sight, movement down a track which seemed a suicide track, though I could not, myself, at the time grasp, I would not have predicted how destructive the consequences of that track would actually be in this country.

M: Wasn't quite obvious in this country in 1966 yet. Had the number of dissenters inside grown appreciably by then?

T: It's hard for me to judge because we didn't level with each other very much, particularly as the heat began to increase from outside. There was a certain degree of suspicion among those inside, and you had to hold your doubts to yourself a bit more. Cooper and I labored, as I think I've written, kept moving on the hope against hope that within six or eight weeks or ten weeks or at least by the autumn, we could somehow, as I felt at the time, entrap our own country and the other side into negotiations. It was my strong view that you could only do it through entrapment because there weren't enough people in high

places in our government who really believed in negotiations. So it would be by perhaps trapping both sides into having to go to Rangoon; then, once you get to Rangoon, having to stay talking; and then having outside powers like the British, and the Japanese, and the Russians put pressure on us to get together. So we felt if we could trap our nation and its adversary into negotiations, the war could be wound down fairly rapidly.

By the end of 1965, that seemed to be a pure illusion, and I lost my faith in it. Cooper stayed on and kept trying. Indefatigable people like Harriman stayed on. There were doubters, from the very early days, who were shoved aside because they were doubters. Men like Paul Kattenburg as early as 1962 or 1963, and he knew Vietnam probably better than any foreign service officer, assured me that if Ho Chi Minh were brought into the streets of Saigon, he would be greeted as the national hero regardless of his politics; that we were butting our heads against a wall, and that there was no way out except gracefully getting out.

The Vice President of the United States, in January, 1965, reassured me two days before he was sworn into office, when I told Mr. Humphrey about my grave doubts about the bombing planning that I'd read about after I left his staff to come back to the Bundy staff in November. In December, I was working to some degree with that Bill Bundy-John McNaughton group as Mac's representative or at least observer. When I told Vice President-elect Humphrey of my doubts--and I've written about this without using his name--he assured me that he totally shared my doubts, thought it was an appalling, absurd plan,

but assured me that under no circumstances would we move onto that track because before we could ever do so, there would be a coup in Saigon, and a neutralist government would come into power and would politely invite us out, which, in his view, was the best solution. So one had a sense that with a friend like that, or at least a friend with views like that at the very top--I think he was completely unaware, as he has now informed us. . . .

M: Right.

T: One had a sense of the presence of fairly neutral and fair minds like Mac Bundy--and I don't think Mac Bundy became personally an advocate until he went out in February of 1965 and came back and proposed the go ahead. Until that time, he seemed to me a judicious, detached, and fair adjudicator, observer.

M: But after that--

T: But after that an advocate, particularly after he rightly or wrongly went onto the Teach-In circuit, the famous nationally-televised TV Teach-IN with Hans Morgenthau that May, and some other university appearances that pushed him into the advocacy role and made his mind a less detached one.

M: Did he change by March of 1966?

T: Whether his private doubts had gone, I don't know. I didn't see much of it in change, but he had already decided in December of 1965 to leave the government to take the Ford Foundation thing. It was Mac who, as I told you at first, clued me in on the bombing plans after I came back from my assignment to the Humphrey vice presidential

campaign in 1964. He brought me into his office; he showed me all the papers, a final set, an inter-agency approved set of November 1 or December 1, and he said, "I want you to read them here."

M: Approved by the Bundy review group, not by the President?

T: Right. That's to me slightly ambiguous. The Bundy review group appeared to think they had the presidential approval in principle. This may be wrong. But I wasn't even told that at the time.

M: Right.

T: This is after the fact, I was told. He asked me to read these papers in his office right there and tell him what I thought. I read them. I told him that, to begin with, I knew nothing about weapons, that the last airplane I could identify was a P-38, and as for fire power, on that I was no expert. I went on to say that I had accumulated one fundamental worry which, incidentally, had been my worry all along that was now even more so: that the Vietnamese lived there and we didn't; that they had been fighting for this cause for twenty or twenty-five years, and if necessary, I thought, would be willing to give up their cities, their industries, whatever they'd built over the past ten years and go back into the bush on the conviction, an enduring conviction, that someday we would tire and leave, and that in that conviction, I thought they were right. And if I thought they were right, they probably thought they were right, and for that reason, it struck me that it was a bad place to move into. And Mac, who always heard out such comments with extraordinary fairness, said, "That's a good point. You may be right. Thank you." And that's that.

M: And that was the end of that conversation. After you left, you were one of the really few who left during the administration and then made your views, doubts, clear. Was there any subsequent contact from within? Did your old colleagues ostracize you for your heresy, or did they encourage you?

T: In my bad days at the White House when it seemed we were getting nowhere, and when the demonstrators were outside, and when the mothers, and the clergymen, and the kids were up in arms, every now and then I had flicker across my mind a Walter Mitty action, calling anyone I knew in the press to come to the sidewalk in front of the White House for a certain hour on the next afternoon, and I would then come out and dramatically burn my White House pass and hold a press conference, and thereby leave the government. Then I realized there was the intolerable problem of all my collected files, and how could I get my papers out in the course of this Walter Mitty gesture? So it was never a terribly serious thought, but it just gives you an insight into some of the flickerings in the mind of people who were very troubled in those days. And I'm sure I was not the only one who was troubled.

To comment on what you just asked, of which that reminded me, I found that it took about nine months to turn around, once you got out of government. Although I admittedly was in a university and, therefore, was asked tough questions by students and colleagues, and therefore, expressed my views privately, I did nothing publicly until June of 1967 when I wrote a letter to the New York Times, which was

my first sort of open statement, expressing doubts, expressing a strong sense that on many occasions in the past we could have got out of this situation and should have.

But it took me that long to write that letter, which is an interesting side angle on why men don't scream from the rooftops. One has a sense of constraints--respect for one's colleagues who are left in, a sort of loyalty to the good guys inside, as well as to the presidency, and I'm sure also some sense of fear. You want to be invited back. You don't want to break the code. You therefore want to be careful. That was action number one, and that was followed up by some other much more outspoken things. Although I forgot to add that my first move expressing dissent, when I was in government, was to write internal parody.

M: Right.

T: Small, funny pieces.

M: Is this what the Atlantic finally published?

T: Right. Smally, funny pieces for private circulation among one's friends and colleagues. And during the 1963 Diem crisis, I--parody and satire is an outlet for frustration--when I felt that Kennedy was going to go the wrong way, I did a parody of some minutes of a White House meeting on Vietnam, which ended up in Arthur Schlesinger's book on Kennedy. I gave him permission to use it, but without using my name. But it was that sort of thing. I used to do that when I worked for Chester Bowles, et cetera. So, in the Rostow days, in that summer of 1966, I was increasingly appalled at some of the

activities and modes of thought of the White House staff. And off of Cape Cod, I wrote a similar parody of a Rostow staff meeting, and brought it back in late August, September, and showed it to many of my trusted colleagues on the Rostow staff, who whooped and hollered, and loved it. It became a sort of privately circulated underground paper and got into the hands of Mr. Manning of the Atlantic, who eventually persuaded me to publish it with names slightly altered, and that was in May, I guess, of 1966.

M: 1967.

T: Right. If you count that, if you count the use of satire or parody, that was my first break, and that did in fact cause some commotion, as was reported. Mr. Rostow allegedly told Mr. Bator, who then called Mr. Neustadt who then called me saying that if this thing were published, I would be unwelcome in government ever again and that they would see to it that things were--well, I don't know. There were certain implied threats. By that time, it was already in print, in the presses and I didn't worry about it particularly.

M: Anything else?

T: No, no. We could talk forever.

M: Oh, yes. I can keep keying subjects, but I don't want to burden you any longer, unless there are [things you'd like to add]. Okay, thank you.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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