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Interview of

WILLIAM P. BUNDY

**Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(International Security Affairs), 1961-63;
Assistant Secretary of Defense (International
Security Affairs), 1963-64**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

January 22, 1990

INTERVIEWERS: ALFRED GOLDBERG AND LAWRENCE KAPLAN

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Goldberg: This is part two of an oral history interview with Mr. William P. Bundy held in Washington, D.C., on January 22, 1990, at 3:00 p.m. in the Pentagon. The interview is being recorded on tape and a copy of the transcript will be sent to Mr. Bundy for his review. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Alfred Goldberg and Lawrence Kaplan.

Last time we had gotten through much of the period of your service as Deputy Assistant Secretary, but not all of it. There are a number of issues of the period which are worth discussing further. One of them is NATO. I know that it was not your primary interest at this time, but what was your attitude, in general, toward NATO? Did you see it as a long-term alliance, with the American military role in it as permanent?

Bundy: Certainly long term. I should say that I did have one organizational link to NATO in that the office of the Defense Department civilian representative to the ambassador to NATO was under my jurisdiction. That was, successively, Lawrence Levy and John Hooper. They worked very closely on all kinds of coproduction arrangements--the F-104G, and various things of that sort. My basic answer to your question is perfectly clear. I always saw NATO as a very long-term commitment. I don't think any of us at that time foresaw the developments that have happened within the last year. There is no question that we thought of it in a very long-term sense.

Goldberg: Were you very much involved with NATO policies, buildup, and strategy?

Bundy: No, I wasn't, really.

Goldberg: ISA was.

Bundy: Yes, and Paul Nitze intensely so. This was the period of the threat to Berlin and the supplemental military appropriations in the summer of 1961; then of the intense planning of the Berlin Planning Group with ambassadors of the affected nations. Paul was very much in charge of all of that. I picked up a lot of that in our constant contact,

but I wasn't directly involved at any stage. I had been, in CIA, involved in the Berlin crisis in 1958-59.

Goldberg: Did you think that the NATO policies and strategies of this period were realistic?

Bundy: I was very sympathetic, but not deeply involved, with the effort to get something that would be more graduated, and what evolved into flexible response. But I wasn't close to it.

Goldberg: I would like to turn now to some of the area problems and crises in which, I think, you perhaps did have some role--Cuba and the Bay of Pigs, for one. Had you been aware, during your service in CIA, of planning for it?

Bundy: Not at all, partly because I wasn't on the covert side, and partly because I was on leave of absence during the calendar year 1960 working on the Eisenhower goals commission. I learned about it at the same time others did, between the 10th and 20th of January.

Kaplan: Between that time and April, how much involvement did you have?

Bundy: Paul Nitze has statements in his memoirs about looking to me to check out the solidity of the plans. I didn't think it was quite that specific. I was kept informed of the plans. I guess I was operating on the premise that, in my own hindsight, was crucial to the role of OSD generally, that we didn't take ourselves as becoming involved in the plans, that we deferred to the military, in this case the military working with Tracy Barnes and others in CIA. I did keep reporting what the plan was: there was the brief interlude when it was to go into Santiago; then that was thought to be too frontal; and it was shifted to the Bay of Pigs. All of that I followed. Paul says that he relied on me very heavily; I thought he was also engaged in that, but I may be wrong. He says that he was constantly worried about the plans, but that I kept reassuring him. I kept reassuring him that the people, whom he knew, said that they were workable. I don't think either of us would have thought they were by any means sure to succeed, even in

the military sense. I did keep in touch with General Gray, who was the chief planner for the Joint Chiefs. Paul also says that Ed Lansdale was in the middle of that, which I do not recall definitely. I do not recall dealing with Lansdale and he does not appear in my date book more than marginally until the very end.

Goldberg: He was involved in irregular warfare business, also, at the time.

Bundy: Very much so. He was the liaison for that with the whole covert side of the agency, reporting to Gilpatric, as I recall. Lansdale was certainly following it. I don't recall his judgment of it until the very end. The meeting that I recall most vividly was at the White House, around the Cabinet table, in which Bissell of CIA underscored that any lodgement that was achieved militarily could not in itself do the trick. (He assumed, as all of us on the civilian side did, that we would not commit U.S. forces directly). Whether it then took off and succeeded depended on the strength of the local resistance--the people in the hills, as they were sometimes referred to--and the degree of popular dissidence ready to spring to arms. Bissell said that we had reports that that feeling did exist, but that they were not conclusive. This was something that you just couldn't tell. My hunch was that he was going back in his own mind to Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 when there had been a surge of feeling of some sort. Point one is that Bissell said that it depended on getting real support, on that snowballing. Point two is that I have had no chance to look back at the Joint Chiefs' evaluations of the military plans. But my impression, I remember vividly, as I looked back on it, in the wake of the debacle, was that they had been Delphic and imprecise, I thought, to the verge of irresponsibility. That is, perhaps, strong language but I think that was a feeling shared by others, that from here on out the Chiefs had to be pinned down. I thought they had failed more in giving a tough-minded evaluation than Bissell had done, based on what Bissell had said.

Kaplan: Were you aware at all of the JCS reservations about Zapata Operation (the Bay of Pigs)?

Bundy: I knew they had reservations, but you wouldn't know it in their writing. They were plainly so eager to go, and this was building to a climax. The third meeting I remember is the celebrated one held in the conference room in the State Department just off the Secretary's office, where Fulbright was present and where the President went around the room and asked if we all agreed that we would recommend this. We all, one by one, said, "Yes." We didn't expect to be called on in that way, but there didn't seem any other answer to give. Then Fulbright said what a mistake he thought it was in terms of Latin America, etc. That one has been recounted by many people and by Nitze in his memoirs. I substituted for him on some occasions, and on some we both went. It was not as clearly divided as it should have been between us, but he didn't feel that he ought to go into the plans, and he didn't fully apprehend that I wasn't trying to or didn't feel competent to judge them. I was only saying what these people thought they could do. I didn't ever, that I can recall, have a picture of the whole full-scale operation; nor would I have been competent to judge it if I had. The fourth encounter was very shortly before the thing actually took off, April 18 or 19. It was a Saturday morning, and General Bonesteel, who was aide to Gen. Lemnitzer, and Gen. Lansdale asked to come and talk to us about it. It was just the four of us. We asked what their honest views were, and they didn't think there was more than a 35 or 40 percent chance that a lodgment could be made. I remember saying to myself that that wasn't the impression I was getting from the papers coming from the Joint Staff. They were trying to say we had to be prepared and were setting a much higher chance of failure than I had apprehended. I think that they were trying to soften us up for an immediate appeal for U.S. forces.

Goldberg: Did you report this up the line?

Bundy: I didn't, but I remember it was in Paul Nitze's office. This is not one that I can nail down with the clarity it should have, given the gravity of what I am implying, but I think there was a very clear understanding--and the President had said this at

meetings--that we were not to suppose for a moment that American forces were going to be used. There was some cautionary Marine deployment, and they were within striking distance. The Marines were supposed to be able to face down Latin American forces, and they were within reach. I have always wondered whether people in the military did think we should go in with forces and thought we had to get these civilian wimps really into the bind and then they would have to do the job properly.

Goldberg: Did you, Nitze, and McNamara all oppose the notion of American forces?

Bundy: Yes. I don't recall its ever being more than marginally discussed in my hearing, because it was just assumed that if you were going to do that, it might just as well be done that way from the beginning. The whole point of the "covert" operation was that--"covert" although known to half of Central America! There was another meeting, about ten days before the launching of the operation, where the President deliberately said, "We are going to discuss at this meeting the possible option of my saying we are not going to do this. I want to know just what is involved in my saying 'no go' on this."

Kaplan: April 5th.

Bundy: Yes. That was spelled out with some care.

Goldberg: How much inspiration did the Arbenz/Armas business have for this operation? Was it freely talked about, or used as an analogue?

Bundy: We never discussed this as much as we should have done, given particularly the fact that Bissell was an old friend of mine and my brother Mac and Paul Nitze, and so was Tracy Barnes. The whole thing was a good argument against having people be too much friends with each other. Nobody talked about it except in those big-meeting settings; it wasn't something you could discuss on a social occasion; you just didn't mention it at all, in any way, shape, or form. I don't know that any of us knew to what extent Bissell, and particularly Barnes, who had been the major action officer in the Arbenz affair, was involved. But surely they must have mentioned it and suggested

that it showed that if you push on this kind of thing, the door gives, that people rally, etc. I'm sure it played a part. But that is only surmise.

Kaplan: I was wondering about that phrase "a fair chance for success," which the JCS came up with, was this ever questioned?

Bundy: "Fair" was the operative word? I only know that the thrust of the paper was always "this is worth trying."

Goldberg: So it could be 51 percent.

Bundy: It was a difficulty we were very familiar with in the estimates business in the CIA--what did "probably" mean? Sherman Kent finally got to the point where he said, "When we say 'probably', we mean 65/75, or whatever; if we mean 50-50, we will say so," in an attempt to give precision. I thought that was a laudable endeavor. But that was not the case with JCS papers, and occasionally they used, "this is unacceptable." Finally we leaned on them very hard that that had to be a subjective word, and was not acceptable as a statement about a policy. If you think it's wrong, tell us why, and let us decide whether it is acceptable. The Joint Chiefs at the time were pretty lordly toward the civilians, which was not surprising, since they were veterans of high senior jobs going back to World War II and had been subjected to this barrage of questions in early 1961. It was a classic case of extremely bad communication and relationships. I have never been able to get out of my mind the view that they thought these inexperienced civilians and an inexperienced president would think they would not send in U.S. forces, but "wait until they see what it's like when the thing starts failing." This was never said, but I think there was a real, terrible failure of candor throughout the affair.

Kaplan: You would say that the OSD involvement was essentially a limited one?

Bundy: Yes. Afterwards we all agreed on that. The Secretary, and he never again did this, would be the first to admit that he took the view that he had to be sure that every last nut and bolt that might contribute to success was in its place; that there was no

logistic or administrative support that would be lacking, but not to really examine whether it could be done.

Goldberg: So it did constitute a hard-earned lesson.

Bundy: Oh, yes; and if the military resented it, you could say it traced back to this.

Goldberg: It also explains, I guess in good part, McNamara's attitude in the Cuban missile crisis the next year.

Bundy: Very much so. It explains the famous incident with Admiral Anderson, of which you now have a first-hand witness's account in Nitze. Have you read that?

Kaplan: Yes, I have.

Bundy: That was told about at the time. I wasn't there.

Kaplan: The interval between April 1961 and October 1962 has a good deal of interest for OSD.

Bundy: I didn't think it was dull.

Kaplan: It seems that there was a great deal of activity to compensate for failure, and among them was the role of volunteers, and a Cuban brigade.

Bundy: I wasn't involved in that. That passed entirely into the hands of the Mongoose projects--what Lansdale was up to, more or less, as direct action officer, working with a lot of people. I wasn't one of them, and have nothing useful to say about that.

Goldberg: How did you first learn about the impending crisis in Cuba?

Bundy: I really was marginal; I was not on Excom. Paul did tell me, I guess, about Tuesday or Wednesday, about what was cooking. And occasionally I would get a quick briefing as the last thing at night, when just the two of us were in the office. But I was not privy, and kept my mouth shut. I had one piece of relevant information bearing on something Colby says in his book. Colby says that McCone's instinct was that this could be what the Soviets were going to do, as opposed to the NIE, which said they had never done such a risky thing before and it was highly unlikely. Colby says that McCone, because of his doubt, kept the reconnaissance flights going and therefore deserves

tremendous credit. He turned out to be right on the judgment, but I strongly query that he alone was responsible for continuing the reconnaissance flights. I can contribute on a personal basis to that to show the level of concern, because another person who was beating madly on this question at the time was Senator Keating. He had his own sources, of some nationality, but there were a lot of wisps of smoke coming out of the Cuban door at that point and Keating was saying he thought something was cooking. I had to testify the preceding week at some committee in the Senate, and I remember being prepared with some care as to what we did and didn't know. I forget the committee--part of Armed Services, I think--and I remember that the Senators were alert and it was one where I had to get up the evidence and know that it was a real concern. It was an official hearing and I was testifying. Why I was chosen to testify, I don't recall. There was also the resolution that was brewing on the Hill, the Cuban resolution, which was in large ways the model for the subsequent Tonkin Gulf resolution, and both based in some sense on the Eisenhower Middle East resolution in 1957. In other words, everybody was on the qui vive about this. I have no knowledge directly of the authorization for reconnaissance flights, but my impression from many other accounts is that everybody knew that just as soon as we could get in the air over there we were going to go. I'm merely trying to knock on the head Colby's suggestion that only McCone's great prescience caused this additional flight to be taken. Everybody would have been for that flight; that flight was imperative. I think that was the general feeling--we could not miss anything that might be going on. That's one of the points on which I have a slight difference with the Colby book.

Goldberg: What was your position on our course of action when we recognized that the Soviets did have the missiles in Cuba?

Bundy: I never took a position on it at all, and I was not told about positions during the time by anybody, including, most specifically, my brother Mac, or Mr. Acheson.

Goldberg: How about Mr. Nitze?

Bundy: I did have only one exchange that I recall, and it was either toward the end of the first week, or later. There had been reports that seemed to indicate that the missiles might be becoming operational very rapidly. I wrote a note on yellow paper from my own typewriter and took it to him and said, "This looks mighty serious to me; I wonder if it doesn't tilt the balance in favor of the strike option." That was of no significance in the policy-making process. So the basic answer to your question is no. I was involved mechanically when the decision had been taken, in being sure on Saturday that the right plane picked up our ambassador to Germany from Georgia. That got fouled up. I was involved by that time in that I knew also that Mr. Acheson was going to Paris via London. Those are footnotes, if that, to history. I was simply the man in charge of being absolutely sure that they got where they were supposed to get.

Goldberg: Did you know much about Nitze's role at the time?

Bundy: I can't recall that I did. I think he was probably consulting primarily with Captain Zumwalt; but, in any case, I wasn't that close to it.

Goldberg: The system worked better in this instance, of course, than the Bay of Pigs.

Bundy: There was no place to go, except up. I thought it worked extraordinarily well. I have always thought it was very foolish to call the Excom an exercise in bureaucratic politics. It was the least bureaucratic decision-making body ever convened.

Kaplan: That was Acheson's criticism, wasn't it?

Bundy: In some ways. I never heard of his criticism of it. Everybody was speaking up. I have always thought Graham Allison's book on it as bureaucratic politics was, to put it mildly, misnamed.

Goldberg: It did a good job for Allison.

Bundy: No comment.

Goldberg: What did you think was the decisive factor in Khrushchev's retreat?

Bundy: I'm not sure my judgment is worth a damn. I suppose that he was persuaded that he couldn't force the matter as he had thought; and he couldn't get any

concession from us. I've always supposed he might have thought he could get something on Berlin from it. The fact that the water drained out of the Berlin crisis so quickly thereafter suggests that, having been defeated in the missile crisis, he had no more leverage on Berlin.

Kaplan: What about the Turkey exchange?

Bundy: I didn't ever get into that in any way, shape, or form. I was not in a position to judge the accuracy, which, I guess is, at best, mixed, of the famous Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett article. I was never in a position to judge whether that had or had not happened. I had no first-hand knowledge.

Kaplan: What was the expectation during your service with the coordinating committee on Cuban affairs in 1963, the year following the crisis?

Bundy: I don't recall having a significant role in that. Maybe this is a lacuna in my memory. By then it would have been in Vance's pew, because he had succeeded Gilpatric, and would have therefore had the Lansdale brief, so to speak.

Kaplan: Did Cuba then just drop from the purview of everybody?

Bundy: No, it moved to the Deputy Secretary. I wasn't involved. I was involved in the Sino-Indian War, from two days before the denouement of the Cuban missile crisis. I already had my Indian dashiki, or whatever, on.

Goldberg: Let's move to your area of the world now, and look at Laos and Vietnam. What was your general attitude toward our involvement in Vietnam, in the period when you were Deputy Assistant Secretary, 1961-63?

Bundy: I thought it was an awful headache, but we had to stand firm and do whatever was necessary, keeping it to the minimum so that the Vietnamese would get strong enough to stand on their own feet.

Goldberg: What did you think was at stake for American security or national interests?

Bundy: You have to differentiate there, because in 1961 certainly the connection to the overall credibility of the United States vis-a-vis the Soviet Union was more to the

fore than it became after August 1963. We were thinking in terms of what it would do to our relationship to the Soviet Union. I think we all felt that we just couldn't yield another position. We had compromised on Laos for reasons that were particular to that. The consequences would be serious in the sense of the Soviet threat.

Goldberg: Did Vienna have something to do with it?

Bundy: A great deal, in the sense that Khrushchev was probing all of that. And what Kennedy is said to have told Scotty Reston in November 1961 as to why he then ordered a step-up: "I was worried about the effect on Berlin and the Soviets if we didn't." That was certainly a weight on the scales in favor of doing whatever seemed necessary. I was involved in handling but not really in finally judging a lot of the spring of 1961 programs, and I was involved in marginal actions to support the Harriman team, once it started to negotiate in Geneva on Laos. In my memory there was a gap in my involvement until the Taylor-Rostow mission in the fall of 1961. Then I was acutely involved in handling that business when they came back with their recommendations. That was described in length in my manuscript.

Goldberg: What did you think about the domino theory?

Bundy: I basically accepted that the consequences would be, at different times, of varying degrees of severity and immediacy. I never particularly liked it and didn't use it in speeches, but that there were cumulative consequences could hardly be in doubt to anybody who had lived through the latter thirties.

Goldberg: What role did you and ISA/OSD play in the 1961 civil war in Laos?

Bundy: We inherited that situation. I felt I had a considerable familiarity with that situation in its broad aspects, because I had been the CIA briefing officer in the 1959 conference on Berlin in Geneva. Day after day I would be briefing about Laos, because there was some dust-up at the time. To the point where Secretary of State Herter said, "Don't tell me any more about Laos; I am bored with Laos." It was important and was being dealt with. I knew a good many of the personalities, the geography, and so on,

though I wasn't an expert on Laos or Asia. But when we came in in January 1961, the immediate question was, in effect, "Do we go to war in Laos?" The testimony is now very full that at the last briefing Eisenhower gave Kennedy, with Rusk in the room, he said, "I think you've got to stand and fight here, if necessary, alone." Rusk has written about that. We addressed the question practically immediately. My most vivid memory of that early stage was when Ambassador Winthrop Brown came in from Laos to consult. It was a Saturday, towards the end of January, 1961. Nitze was away, or he would certainly have accompanied Brown, an old friend, to see General Lemnitzer. Tick Bonesteel was also in the room, the Chairman's private office. I will never forget it. Brown, who spoke in a low voice, in answer to General Lemnitzer's question said, "General, the Lao won't fight." He meant the lowland Lao. Gen. Lem was upset that an ambassador told him this. Brown had studied their belief structure, and knew something of the ethos. He simply said that his judgment was that the people wouldn't fight. I had no doubt at all that, when Brown conveyed that to Nitze directly--I, of course, wrote it up for Paul--and when Paul, in turn, conveyed it to McNamara, it was not an insignificant rivulet in the advice to Kennedy that this was not a good place to take a stand. So the sense that we were really going to move in Laos was doubtful from then on. I wasn't directly involved in Harriman's meeting Souvanna and thinking him much more hopeful than the very jaundiced view that people had had of him in the Eisenhower administration. I was only marginally involved in President Kennedy's March speech, the coming together of the strands, and the decision to go the negotiating route.

Goldberg: So that would have been one of the major strands, probably, in the decision to negotiate rather than to fight.

Bundy: Yes. Once you had somebody say that, it did fit with the way they performed. Every time you sneezed, the Lao were running in the other direction. Actually, you could have concluded that without the judgment of the man on the ground.

Goldberg: When did you first become involved in Vietnam policy-making?

Bundy: Very early in the day. I remember a session with Lansdale early on about the need for a new ambassador and other things, some of which is recounted in Colby's and in many other memoirs. I haven't read Nolting's. I wasn't involved in the selection of Nolting, but I welcomed it. I had known him from years past. After the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam really became a question of approving the action plan, and what quid pro quo we got; it seemed State Department business. The mechanics of the plan seemed to make sense to us. In May Gilpatric took hold of the issue in the Gilpatric task force.

Goldberg: How about over a period of two or two and one-half years?

Bundy: I got more and more involved; then in the fall, with the Taylor-Rostow mission, I was very much involved. Nitze's memoirs add, in connection with the October-November decision-making period, that he participated personally in a small meeting with the president and argued strenuously against a commitment of troops. By then I thought we were tending that way, anyway. Paul has provided something I didn't know. It may have been quite decisive, but I don't recall discussing it with him at the time.

Goldberg: Were you in favor of the commitment of troops?

Bundy: I started that way and backed off, as we went along, pretty much the way everybody else did. The more we looked at it the more we wondered what really was their function. Then, when we finally decided, the flood that was supposed to be the peg for the troops was receding. Then came the decision to go the advisory route. I was with McNamara in the important Honolulu conference of December 1961. I can add a few coloratura notes on that one. Again we had the feeling that the military had been all revved up and ready to do their thing. They had dusted off SEATO plans four, five, and six, and less relevant plans I don't even recall ever seeing. They seemed to me relics of the massive retaliation era, altogether unrealistic. I remember the first time I looked at them I said, "That can't be the way it's going to go." Those were contingency

plans in case the Chinese intervened. There was one that didn't go for that, but they all led up to a crescendo, the use of nuclear weapons, and this and that. The meeting I remember vividly was after the decision had been made that we would send a lot of advisors, helicopters, communications equipment, and infrastructure things. Adm. Felt presided, but McNamara was clearly the guiding figure. Fritz Nolting and I were sitting next to him. Lt. Gen. McGarr, commander of the third division in WWII, a legendary military officer, briefed us on what his action plans were in the next three to six months. They were right out of a World War II book. I remember sitting there and passing a note to McNamara saying that it was the most unrealistic thing I had ever heard. He crumpled or tore up the note and told me to put it away. He obviously agreed. They were treating it as a conventional war; even then, it seemed to me, totally at variance with all we had heard, read, and thought. Here was the top military man on the ground taking the totally conventional approach.

Goldberg: It lasted for a long time, too.

Bundy: Harkins, who was chosen in 1962, had been at the same briefing. He was the commander of the Army--under Felt--in the Pacific. McNamara sat there for over a day and the supporting staff sections of CINCPAC, backed up by people from Washington, came in and said, "We should have much better communications; we can do this and this and this." "Yes. Check, yes, do it." He must have made twenty immediate decisions on the spot to go in and do things. What he was trying to do was on the merits, but he was also well aware of an undercurrent that these people had rattled on another one. There was the feeling that the decision not to accept the introduction of troops meant that we were going to let it go. He was saying, "Anything that falls within the guidelines of the policy that we are not for the time being committing U.S. combat forces, we will approve; and we want to strengthen them, the South Vietnamese, in every way we can." Some very expensive continuing actions were approved at that meeting. It set the tone for policy for the next year and a half, and

nailed down McNamara's position as the action officer, much more than any military man, in terms of Vietnam. I haven't seen that covered in the history books.

Goldberg: Let's go back to October 1961, after Diem asked for a defense treaty and increased military aid. In a memorandum to McNamara, you argued that, "It is now or never if we are to arrest the gains being made by the Viet Cong." You suggested also that "an early hardhitting operation" would limit Communist expansion and give Diem a chance to reform and strengthen his government. How far did you think at that time that we should have gone militarily?

Bundy: That was one of my yellow sheet typed memoranda, and it went no further than Nitze, but turned up in the Pentagon Papers, eventually. It was my playing great grand strategist. It makes clear that there was a time that I thought we ought to do it, but do it harder and on a different rationale than Taylor and Rostow were suggesting. And that this would have a cauterizing affect. That is hardly a new idea in military policy. Certainly, operations in the Dominican Republic, Panama, and others have been based on that kind of rationale: hit hard and quickly. As far as I know, it did not get further than Nitze. He doesn't refer to it in his memoirs. I once said in a speech at West Point, when the question of gradualism came up, that I wrote a little squib that you will find in the Pentagon Papers, but I'm not going to take any credit for it, because I didn't push it.

Goldberg: What position did you and ISA take on the question of increasing the number of American military advisors in the area?

Bundy: Again, whatever we could make a good solid case for. We did approve incremental changes. We approved a lot of technician teams, and things of that sort, that were a part of the advisory setup. Whenever you approved the infrastructure, you were usually approving an increment to the force structure. He [McNamara] obviously had a certain degree of latitude from the President and he would approve those on the spot in the successive conferences.

Goldberg: Did you agree with the overthrow of Diem?

Bundy: That is covered at great length in my manuscript. And I did a long interview down at Charlottesville in Kenneth Thompson's shop, which was published as part of a volume on The Kennedy Presidency. (The title is that or Kennedy and was published in 1986 or 1987.)

Goldberg: Does that include your assessment of the consequences of Diem's death on American involvement and policy?

Bundy: That and my manuscript both do--that we gave too little consideration to the fact that it would commit us more deeply to get this deep into the politics. By the time that trip took place and I became engaged in the issue, we already had this 'test the waters' business of late August. There were a lot of things done wrong in those early stages. I was doing the Charlottesville presentation in the presence of Fritz Nolting, a rather peculiar setup, in a sense. We had been friends before the war, back in 1940. We'd never been in an adversary situation to each other. But he felt vehemently about this and had had his famous head-to-head with Harriman, which Bill Colby again recounts in his memoirs. The whole atmosphere was rancid in late August and early September 1963.

Goldberg: What was the basis for the feeling of American officials in 1963 that the Americans would be able to end their military role by 1965?

Bundy: I recall vividly that the general sentiment was very upbeat in the spring of 1963, particularly from Sir Robert Thompson, whom everybody took, in hindsight, more seriously than he deserved. We thought we were moving ahead on schedule--this, despite Ap Bac, the engagement that Vann makes so much of. Brigadier (then Col.?) Serong (the Australian officer) had come into the picture and given a rather pessimistic view before the counterinsurgency group, at some time in early 1963. JFK, in the conversation reported by Kenneth O'Donnell and in the conversation reported by Mike Mansfield--both in the May 1963 time frame--I wouldn't for a moment challenge the authenticity of those conversations. I know that we had a meeting in

Honolulu in May 1963 that was distinctly upbeat, and on the way back from that meeting I was charged by the Secretary with developing a plan to start withdrawing the advisors on such and such a number. The number by the end of 1963 was the figure that finally appeared in the communiqué of October 1, 1963. In other words, Kennedy was expressing that, and we were planning it, on the basis of an assumption that the favorable trend-line would continue, as we then thought it was. We thought we would be in a position where we could just pull back and turn it over to the Vietnamese. I didn't, myself, give explicit weight to the 1964 election, but I was not unconscious of when it took place. Then you set against that the very clear and strong noises that Kennedy made in those inaugural newscasts in early September 1963. "Do you believe in the domino theory?" "Yes, I do, as long as China is there so strongly" Nobody pursued, in the debate about Diem, what Paul Kattenburg of State seems to have suggested, "Why do we go on with this?" Bobby Kennedy may have suggested it; but I have no indication that that was followed up. I have written in my manuscript at the end of my treatment of the Kennedy administration that I just do not know what Kennedy would have done. I did, and do, think that the Arthur Schlesinger and O'Donnell accounts were particularly emphasized at a time when it was strongly in the political interest of whatever survived of the Kennedy family or tradition to indicate that he would never have done it the way LBJ did. I am loyal to both men, and decline to play any part in that kind of talk.

Goldberg: To turn back to the Berlin crisis, of 1961-62, did you play any role in that?

Bundy: No. This was very much Nitze's purview. I did see the documents occasionally, and I was watching the officers who were working on it with him. I certainly knew when he was going to the meetings and he would occasionally talk a little bit about them when he got back. I knew what a colossally difficult problem it was, because I had wrestled with Berlin, too, in my CIA days. I had been at the Geneva Conference, and the head of a watch committee group in the winter of 1958-59.

Goldberg: Was he using Harry Rowen, mostly, for the European problems?

Bundy: I don't recall. You'd have to ask Harry. But this was something on which Nitze played a very important and quite possibly unique and decisive role. I was quite struck in his memoir when he said, "This may have been a more dangerous crisis than the Cuban missile crisis." I'm inclined to buy that as a historical judgment. In terms of my testifying about my personal role, it doesn't play a part. I got quite an earful during that summer from Mr. Acheson on the subject.

Goldberg: Do you know whether Nitze favored the call up of reserves at that time?

Bundy: I do not know; my instinct would have been that he was in favor of whatever it took.

Kaplan: You mentioned earlier that the Cuban missile crisis, in a sense, settled the Berlin problem. And yet there were flare-ups, particularly in February 1963, and again in April, the month before the treaty between the Soviet Union and East Germany that created a great stir, at least with Gen. Lemnitzer. His concern was that the Soviets were still up to something.

Bundy: I don't recall, my mind was elsewhere by then. My mind was in India.

Goldberg: What was the ISA view on the impact of Red China on the conflicts in Southeast Asia?

Bundy: That is an important question, because people often treat it as a Chinese threat all along. It was not treated so in 1961. The Chinese were in pretty poor shape in 1961-62. There were projects quietly to suggest to them through Hong Kong intermediaries that we would give them food aid if they needed it. They were in the throes of the aftermath of the "great leap forward," which had turned out to be a great leap backward. They were not in a threatening mode until later in '62. My recollection is that we recognized the Sino-Soviet split and its gravity from the fall of 1960 on; certainly in the fall of 1961. We stopped using language like "Sino-Soviet bloc," etc. Maybe the Chiefs didn't, I don't recall. We did not think of China as a major threat at

that time. When the Indian affair erupted, which was in the last few days before the denouement of the height of the Cuban missile crisis, October 20 or thereabouts, we took our readings from the State Department--that the Chinese really didn't have any warrant for doing this kind of thing. Later, retrospective scholarship, notably Neville Maxwell's India's China War brings out India's record of provocation and delay, but we took it all as a rather nasty case of aggression, pure and simple. Needless to say, our long-legged ambassador in India didn't diminish that, because I never met a man who, when confronted with a live situation, responded with more militant views than Mr. Galbraith. Then we were in a real situation, no doubt about it.

Goldberg: How successful were your efforts to send arms to India and get other U.S. allies to supply them?

Bundy: We didn't have a formal request, if I recall correctly, at first. It was while Cuba was still a dicey situation, whether they would withdraw, or the IL-28s would go out--all of that was still very much in the air in the latter days of October. At some point about that time McNamara produced a directive that told the Pentagon, "The man in charge of this is Deputy Assistant Secretary Bundy in ISA. Whatever he tells you to do, he has my authority to do." Something along those lines. It was a strong directive. Since everybody was working on Cuba anyway, nobody objected to giving this to me, so I would have these repeated meetings and was in close touch with State. I would talk with the Assistant Secretary for the area, Phillips Talbot, and so on. The policy was clear--whatever you can find to send them that is purely defensive, get it out there fast. The military were wonderful. There was a civilian--Phil Hilbert--in the Department of the Air Force who was the source of the undying phrase, "The Pentagon runs on 'islands of competence'." Phil was absolutely right, and he was one of the biggest islands. If you had him in your corner, lo and behold, planes materialized, whether they had to be flown over or sitting at Mainz, it didn't matter. We ran a pocket airlifted military aid operation for the better part of three weeks before there was any

formal request. We were flying planes into Dum Dum airport in Calcutta, and some into New Delhi.

Goldberg: Did they make any difference?

Bundy: I think they made a morale difference. My own surmise, in retrospect, is that the Chinese only wanted to go so far, particularly in the northeast frontier area. We then revved up a squadron of C-130s that went out to New Delhi and that flew up into Ladakh and landed on a hard surface, which wore their wheels out very quickly. They did a terrific job and carried a lot of stuff up there. That was in the early stage, I think. It was an exhilarating experience. I sat in my irregularly-shaped office across from Nitze, and six to ten people would come in around the conference table. I would say, "Can the Army produce these mines and have them in Rhein-Main by Tuesday?" And someone would say he would find out and let me know. Bingo--we would fill up a plane and shoot it out. We had thrown away the book and probably didn't keep accurate cost records in that early stage. It had a morale effect. Then, of course, the Chinese did just call the whole thing off. The Indians at that point appealed seriously for aid, and then we had to figure out if we wanted to get into it on a continuing basis. The decision was quickly made--I don't recall any big meeting at the White House on it--that yes, we do want to have a significant aid program. The Indians need it for reassurance; the British couldn't do it entirely. So we got ourselves into planning what became the Nassau package--\$60 million from us and \$60 million from the British. I went over to London on that in early December and nailed it down in negotiating with a British opposite number, who turned out to be my wartime boss at Bletchley (Sir Stuart Milner-Barry). So we confounded the staffs of both sides by agreeing so rapidly and went out for a drink, while they cobbled up the details. The British were unexpectedly accommodating, and then MacMillan approved it at Nassau, because I think it was a time when Skybolt and Polaris were much more on his mind than a mere \$60 million to accommodate the Americans. They didn't care too much about our

moving into their shoes, because they didn't want to get back into India in a big way. We set up a military mission with Gen. John Kelly. He was a good Army officer and understood that he had to lie low and be as invisible as he could. Most of my winter was spent working on aid to India. It was kind of intoxicating to have this much responsibility. The policy wasn't earthshaking, but we also had to worry about the Pakistani, of course.

Nitze does say in his book that he tried very hard at one point to insist that we should take the position with the Indians that they had to resolve the Kashmir issue, if we were going to go through with this. I was not of that view, because I didn't think they would agree, and I thought it was more important to establish this aid. We took an enormous amount of care of what kinds of equipment we sent and to what units it went. We devised what we thought was a pretty foolproof system that it was only going to divisions for use in the northeast frontier area or in certain mountain areas, and not to be deployed against Pakistan. We gave them a lot of defensive stuff. Paul says in his memoirs that we armed them for the '65 war. I don't believe that, and I don't think the record of what we sent would show it. Whether we contributed psychologically to whatever caused the Pakistani problem is a more debatable issue. It was a very carefully crafted military aid program designed not to accentuate the chances. I can remember telling the Indians they would be crazy to get into a war with the Pakistanis, because the Pakistani armor would wipe them up in the West; and saying to the Pakistanis that they would be crazy to get into a war because they would lose East Bengal. The second prophecy was dead right; the first one turned out not to be because of that incredible business in September 1965 where the Pakistani behaved so stupidly.

Goldberg: Did you play a role in connection with the MAP decision for the five-year commitment to the Shah of Iran, in 1962?

Bundy: Yes, and that was kind of exhilarating also. It arose from the review of the policy toward the Shah in early 1961. There was a task force at that time with strongly pressed points of view. There was the view expressed by Kenneth Hansen of the BoB, who had been on a Ford Foundation project in Iran and become very anti-Shah. He was assisted by Robert Komer, well-known in this building, then either at CIA or the NSC staff. They were pushing for distancing ourselves from the Shah and letting the National Front move in. If they took over, so be it, because the Shah was not a hopeful fellow. The other view, of Phil Talbot and particularly of Julius Holmes, the ambassador designate, was that we could probably get the Shah to focus seriously on reforms and if we went along with him, we could get much better results the gradual way. I sided with the Holmes/Talbot view at that time. The upshot of it was that that view did prevail; that was the instruction to Holmes; and he seemed to be accomplishing a lot in his first year--the beginning of the White Revolution and various liberalizing measures were taken. One of the things we hadn't done was to deal with the Shah's overweening desire, even then, for fancy military hardware, the desire which, in the end, played a big part in the events of the 1970s. I don't know where the idea came from, maybe from McNamara, but the Shah was coming on a state visit. We had been working on this for some time, from late 1961 onward. The idea formed of giving him a five-year commitment expressed in terms of end items, not in terms of financial amounts. We would say this was final, and a firm commitment, subject to Congress giving us enough overall money. At that point this was not a serious worry, Congress was in the mood to appropriate these things and we had a good relationship, particularly on the military aid side, and had been able to get our submissions pretty much without serious cuts. The result was that this five-year commitment, which McNamara went through with a fine-toothed comb, was put together and it fell to the Secretary to impart it to the Shah. I was there with him, and the Shah was there with the ambassador--the four of us in the Secretary's conference room. McNamara went

through it, not in a harsh or didactic way. But the substance of the message was, "Shah, these are the only toys you are going to get." At that point we had a complete whip hand, because he didn't have enough oil money yet and couldn't afford to pay for it in any other way. We thought it was a brilliant stroke, from a policy standpoint. And Congress approved it. We must have consulted before we offered it, but in those days you could make that kind of arrangement with the Committees. I think we must have had some serious discussions with the Foreign Affairs Committee, which was the authorizing committee on the House side. It was certainly a major policy action. As I look back on it, I think it may have been deeply hurting to the Shah. We thought of it in the upbeat way. State, and all the people who worked on Iran, knew exactly what we were doing. Julius Holmes knew. And we didn't do it untactfully, but we were saying we knew better than the Shah what he needed; and it didn't contain the glamor items that he was particularly prone to want.

Goldberg: That came later.

Bundy: I think, in any biography of the Shah, it was probably a factor in how he came to feel that if he ever came into enough money, he would make his own decisions.

Goldberg: To go on to arms control and disarmament, what were your views on them and did they differ in any way from Nitze's or McNamara's?

Bundy: No, not in any significant way. I wasn't involved in any of the rather elaborate thoughts that went into proposals, or in the limited test ban initiative. The only thing I did in this field when I was in ISA was in the brief interlude while I was Assistant Secretary. We did cobble up, with Arthur Barber in a leading role, a proposal for a freeze on launchers, which was so patently in our interests, since we were so far ahead, that it never got off the ground.

Goldberg: Did ISA play any role in the establishment of ACDA?

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Bundy: I didn't. I'm pretty sure that Paul Nitze thought it was a good idea. It was so clear that the White House wanted it. I think we all thought it was a good idea, and we thought very highly of both William Foster and Butch [Adrian] Fisher.

Goldberg: During your tenure in ISA as Deputy Assistant Secretary, what do you regard as your major achievements?

Bundy: I am reluctant to claim anything as my own. I think we got the military assistance program onto a more coherent, rational basis, better meshed--the meshing was not primarily my doing--with economic and other programs with the grant recipient countries. So we were thinking in a more overall way of strengthening them. That was an enormous contribution of my time. I got more satisfaction on the Indian aid matter, which went on into 1964. I pulled out of it when we were just deciding we couldn't do a lot of things they wanted and were eventually going to pull back.

What went on in 1962-63 may have been important in the long story of US-Indian relations. After an initial and dramatic phase of emergency aid (mines and other defensive stuff) we provided a very generous initial program of \$120 million, with the British contributing half as a result of negotiations with them prior to the Nassau Meeting of December 1962 between JFK and Macmillan. That was an amusing London negotiation in a personal sense: my opposite number turned out to be none other than my wartime chief at Bletchley (in the ENIGMA operation. Stuart Milner-Barry (later Sir Stuart) of the Treasury, and we wrapped up the deal in principle in about 15 minutes, to the astonishment of our staffs, and then left them to work out the details. Then at Nassau, aid to India was on the agenda but got very short shrift indeed, with the intense discussion reserved for the SKYBOLT business and the coming out with our POLARIS offer. By the time the two top men got to India, both were tired and visibly bored by the whole subject. So they just signed off on the deal without any real discussion.

Then during 1963 the Indians sent a couple of high-level delegations, and I recall dealing directly with their Army chief of staff and also with the prominent industrialist J. R. D. Tata (then head of Air India as well as his great steel company), who was a Parsi from Bombay, direct, charming and extremely able, brought in by his government as a special troubleshooter and emissary.

We worked especially on aid to their air force, where at some point the Indians wanted to get help to set up their own aircraft production program. At the same time, they were still scared enough of the Chinese to want assurances of our help in case of another attack, and we drew up some contingency plans, and gave some assurances, that went pretty far--in an effort, essentially, to head off their building up their own air force to the maximum and using scarce resources in what we thought would be a wasteful way.

In all this, Ambassador Galbraith was far more gung-ho and ready to make commitments than Washington was--either in the Pentagon or in State, where Phillips Talbot, the Assistant Secretary, was very wary of the implications in the area of our taking on a commitment to India of any sweeping sort. At the same time, the Soviets were in the play, already giving some help to the Indian military, including the Air Force, and it was argued that they might get a much stronger position if we did not join in heartily.

I forget the details, but the outcome was that we did not give them the large-scale help they wanted, or give them the categorical assurances they wanted of US action in case of a crunch, and they did not accept our advice against a production program of their own. And in due course the Soviets did move in and establish themselves as the prime suppliers of military aid, including production advice, designs, etc. for fighter aircraft production.

All quite possibly of importance in declining a gambit and refusing to change the basic shape of US-India relations. Whether it left scars I never followed up to find out

as I dropped out of the picture by early 1964. We judged that despite Soviet aid the Indians would go on being ornery and independent, ergo basically neutral and not a true Soviet client, and I would think that judgment borne out by time.

Although it was exciting to work with McNamara on Vietnam and we had that upbeat feeling in the spring of 1963, all that was washed away by the events of the fall.

Goldberg: What about disappointments, or things not completed?

Bundy: Vietnam, obviously, left a very unsatisfying feeling when I left the Pentagon. Obviously I was not going to be able to forget the program in my new assignment. I don't recall anything else I would have regarded as a major disappointment. The things I had been involved in, indeed ISA as a whole, and McNamara as a whole, had a very constructive influence in this building in getting people to look at what they were really trying to do and how that fitted with what other people were doing--getting people to think more broadly and at the same time in terms of the objective, rather than some abstract JCS laid-down force goal. We got away from that, certainly in the military assistance program, to a large extent. We felt things had been rigid and bound to the past when we arrived. That was certainly true in the military aid program.

Goldberg: Did this impact mostly on the military, would you say?

Bundy: I would say so. There were a lot of civilians who turned out to be very receptive to this kind of thing. The military was doing it by the numbers, in the old vernacular, it seemed to us, when we arrived, and the numbers had gotten a little stale in relation to the problems. That wasn't universally true, of course. But we brought fresh air into the Pentagon; there was more hard thinking of the overall sweep of what one was trying to do. I would say that the place was in better shape when I left than it was when we arrived. By and large, we had gotten away from the frictions of the early period. We had a pretty smoothly operating shop in ISA. Certainly, it was good working with Nitze. We had some first-rate talent and it was regarded as a good, and possibly upwardly mobile, place to be assigned, if you were an officer. We didn't know where

Bud Zumwalt would end up. We had devoted friends, in the sense of teamwork. I have very fond memories of it from a personal standpoint.

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