#8

This is an oral history interview with Mr. Robert S. McNamara, held in Washington, D.C. on April 3, 1986, at 4:30 p.m. The interview is being recorded on tape, and a copy of the transcript will be sent to Mr. McNamara for his review. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Dr. Alfred Goldberg and Dr. Maurice Matloff. As we indicated in our letter of April 16, 1985, we shall focus in this interview particularly on your service as Secretary of Defense from Jan 21, 1961, to Feb 29, 1968.

Matloff: We might start with the background of the appointment to the office of Secretary of Defense. What were the circumstances?

McNamara: I had been with the Ford Motor Company approximately fifteen years, and was elected president of the company early in November or late in October of 1960. My secretary had been with me for some time, and I insisted that she ensure that I return every telephone call that came in every day. I came to my office one morning in early December 1960, went out and returned, and a number of calls had come in. I ran down the list, and one of the names, Robert Kennedy, didn't mean a great deal to me—I didn't know him. When my secretary got to that call, Mr. Kennedy came on the line and asked if I would meet with his brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, and said that the President-elect would be grateful if I would. I said that I would be happy to, the following week. He said they hoped I could do it much sooner, that afternoon. By this time it was eleven or twelve o'clock in Detroit, and I said that I thought that was unlikely. He responded that they would have Sarge in my office that afternoon at any time that I might designate. I said to come in at 4 o'clock. He came in (I had never met him either), and stated that the President-elect had authorized him to offer me the position of Secretary of the Treasury. I said that that was absurd, that I wasn't qualified. He replied that he was then authorized to offer me the position of Secretary of Defense. I

said, "I question my qualifications for that, although I had served in the Army for three years during World War II and had followed defense matters in a rather superficial way through the press." Then he said that the President-elect hoped that I would at least give him the courtesy of meeting with him personally. I replied, "I would. When?" Sarge suggested the next day. So he left. My office adjoined that of Henry Ford II, and I stopped in his office to tell him that I was going to Washington that night or the next morning, and to indicate to him that there was no likelihood that I would leave the Ford Motor Company. Henry Ford had just gone to New York. I called the company transportation office and asked them to set up a company plane to take me to New York that night. I did get in touch with him that night.

After arriving in Washington, before I met with the President-elect, I stopped at the Pentagon to speak to Tom Gates, then Secretary of Defense. I had not met him, but we had friends in common. He had been a director of Scott Paper prior to becoming Secretary, and at that time I was a director of Scott Paper. I told Tom of the President-elect's request and that I didn't feel qualified, but felt that I could strengthen the basis for my refusal if I had suggestions to make to the President-elect as to who was qualified, and that I thought that Tom was. It was my intention to say so, even though Tom was a Republican. It was clear to me that, if asked, Tom would have been willing to stay on.

I then went to see the President-elect, whom I had not met before. He stated that he wished me to serve as Secretary of Defense. When I said that I was not qualified, he made a very interesting remark—that he

was not aware of any schools for presidents, meaning that in a sense he didn't consider himself fully qualified either—and that inexperience was not sufficient justification for refusal to serve as Secretary of Defense. We talked at some length. I said that I was not putting my obligation to the Ford Motor Company on the same scale as the obligation of a citizen to serve his government; that my refusal was based solely on the grounds that I did not feel qualified to handle the responsibility, but that I was quite interested in examining the opportunity for public service at some time in my life, in a position which was more suited to my experience and background. He urged me to think further about it and to meet him again the next week. I should have mentioned that this meeting took place at his house on N Street, and that the street was absolutely jammed in front of the house with reporters. But there was an alley behind the house, so I was able to get in and out without this visit being reported in the press. When I left, we agreed that I would return on Monday.

Goldberg: How did your name get to Kennedy?

McNamara: I read or heard that Ken Galbraith was asked by Kennedy to think about names of individuals who might serve in the Cabinet and that Galbraith put forth my name. I had met Galbraith while he was working on one or more of his books during the 1950s. He was interested in corporate structures and cultures and I was a rising young corporate executive. I am told that he put the name forward; and also that Bob Lovett did. I had not really known Lovett, but I had worked during the war in a part of the Army in which he was very much interested, statistical control.

Goldberg: I was in stat control, too, in England.

McNamara: Were you? I didn't know that. I was in England, in January 1943. Anyway, I returned to Ann Arbor, where we lived, and talked to my wife about it and we agreed that if the President-elect believed that I could serve effectively, we would accept his judgment on that point. However, I would not accept the proposed appointment unless he agreed that I could staff the upper echelons of the Department with the ablest available people, without any regard to party or their participation in support of him or the Democratic Party, and that I would condition my acceptance on his agreement that, in effect, I was to be a working Secretary, as opposed to what I called a "socializing" Secretary. Then my wife and I talked to our children. At the time I was one of the highest paid industrial executives in the world, not wealthy, but in a position to become so. My annual compensation, including stock options, was on the order of $600,000 in 1960 dollars. We discussed the impact of all this on them—moving to Washington, a different life style, a substantial difference in financial compensation, which would now be $25,000 per year. The children were not at all interested in wealth, had an aversion to it in a sense, and therefore even though the impact would fall on them, rather than on us, they were not concerned. So I concluded that I would accept Kennedy's proposal with the two conditions. I was uncertain how to negotiate with a President. I believed it would be wise to put the conditions in writing, but how to do it? I finally concluded that I might call him and say that since it was snowing, I could not travel that day and therefore I was sending him a letter, in which I would outline what I had planned to say on Monday, had I been able to meet him then. I

drafted a letter and called him to tell him this, but he was in Palm Beach, Florida. When I reached him there, he said, "Don't worry about it. It is snowing in Washington, and I can't get back either. We'll see you on Tuesday." Because it was essential to my strategy that the conditions be down on paper, I stated, "Mr. President, anticipating that I couldn't get there, I've already sent you the letter in order to facilitate the discussion. You will have it when I arrive."

So I went down on Tuesday, went in the back way through the alley, and found Bobby Kennedy with him, sitting on a love seat. I sat on a chair opposite, and showed the President a copy of the letter. He read it and passed it to Bobby, who read it and passed it back. The President said, "Bobby, what do you think?" Bobby said, "I think it's great." The President said, "It's a deal." I must say that never once, even under great provocation, did he deviate from that agreement, that I could appoint all of the individuals that were subject to political appointment in the Defense Department without any regard whatsoever to political considerations, or recommendations from the White House—and solely on the basis of merit. He said, "Fine, let's announce it right now." So he took a legal size pad and drafted a statement. We walked out on the front porch—the street was jammed with television and press reporters—and he announced it. My wife heard it on television that night before I got back home. I returned to Ann Arbor that Tuesday night, traveled to Washington on Wednesday or Thursday, and have only been back to Ann Arbor once since then.

I went into the Ford suite at the Shoreham Hotel and holed up there. I spent all of my time, from roughly December 10 until I went to Aspen for skiing at Christmas time, on recruiting individuals. I did it by taking a pack of 3x5 cards and calling people I knew—e.g. Lovett, Thornton, Galbraith—asking them for their suggestions for key positions in the Department—the Deputy Secretary, the Director of Research and Engineering, the Secretaries of the Services, personal assistants, etc. Then I cross-checked with various other people and finally began an interview process.

You will be amused to know that the day I arrived in Washington and went into the suite at the Shoreham, the left-hand column of the front page of the New York Times, as I recall, had a headline that Franklin Roosevelt would be Secretary of the Navy. I was so naive about the ways of Washington; I paid absolutely no attention to it. It made no sense to me. I didn't know Franklin Roosevelt, and what I knew of him led me to believe that he wasn't at all qualified to be Secretary of the Navy. Moreover, the President had promised me I could choose individuals solely on the basis of merit. A couple of weeks later, after I had recommended to the President several different individuals and he had approved them for appointment to various top positions in the department, he asked me one day, "What about the Secretary of the Navy, Bob? You haven't recommended anybody for that." I said, "That's right, Mr. President, it's hard to find the right man." He inquired, "Have you thought of Franklin Roosevelt?" I said that I had read the New York Times article, but that I didn't think that Roosevelt was qualified. He asked, "Have you met him?" I replied

that I hadn't, and he said, "Don't you think you ought to meet him before you come to a final conclusion?" I responded, "Sure, I will be happy to meet him." I vaguely recalled that Roosevelt was a Fiat dealer in Washington. I found his telephone number in the yellow pages, called him and said, "I'm Robert McNamara, may I come down to see you?" He damn near dropped the phone, you could tell. I went down to see him, and we talked. He was a very nice person, but inexperienced in managing large organizations. I called the President-elect when I came back and told him that I didn't think Roosevelt was qualified to be Secretary of the Navy. He asked, "Bob, did you follow the West Virginia campaign?" I said, "Mr. President, I was out in Detroit, and didn't know very much about the campaign, but I remember that there was a crucial test in protestant West Virginia of the importance of the religious issue and that you beat Hubert Humphrey, despite your catholicism. He responded, "Yes, that was absolutely one of the most important events leading up to the nomination, and Franklin Roosevelt played a very essential role." (I heard later that Franklin Roosevelt had spread rumors that Humphrey had tried to evade the draft in World War II). I said, "Mr. President, I still don't think he's qualified to be Secretary of the Navy." There was an absolute dead silence on the phone; you could hear a long sigh, and then, "I guess I'll have to take care of him some other way."

I think that it's crucial to understand that throughout my life I have believed that my success depended to an important degree on my ability to attract able people, focus them on important problems, and motivate them highly to address those issues in an effective way. I was certain

that my success in the Defense Department would depend on that, and that was why I laid down the condition. As I stated to you, the President never deviated from that. The result was, I believe, that our Department had the ablest group of senior officials that were ever assembled in any Cabinet office in the history of our republic. At a single time we had such people as Ros Gilpatric, Cy Vance, Joe Califano, Harold Brown, Charlie Hitch, Paul Nitze, John McNaughton, Bill Bundy, Alain Enthoven, Harry Rowen, Adam Yarmolinsky, Eugene Fubini, Paul Warnke, and a host of others, extremely able people. Whatever we accomplished there came about because of those people, plus the extraordinary group of senior military people whom we either inherited or insisted be put into the key posts. I was not very popular with the Air Force and Navy for a long time because we had three Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs in succession from the Army. The reason was that I thought they were the ablest people, and I didn't give a damn what color suit they wore, what service they came from, or whether the other services liked it or not. I was going to get the ablest person I could find as Chairman. It was a crucial appointment for me and the President. So, we manned the Department with the ablest military and civilian people we could find.

Matloff: What problems did you face, aside from those of manning, in the Department when you took over?

McNamara: The most important single problem was to think through how to formulate security policy and related strategy and force structure and, from that, to derive the financial budgets. A second problem that came up rather quickly was how to apply military force. Those were the two most

difficult challenges we faced. I didn't believe then, and I don't believe now, that there was in existence at that time an adequate intellectual foundation for security policy, military strategy, military force structure, and Defense budgets. We tried to develop a concept of how to proceed to obtain such policies, structures, and budgets. In substance, it was to start with foreign policy as given, since it wasn't our function to establish foreign policy, and to derive from that military strategy, and from that, force structure, and from that, Defense budgets. Obviously, it isn't quite as simple as I stated (e.g. it was an iterative process), but that was the concept, and that was why in my statements to Congress each year, the so-called Posture Statements, I started with a very long discussion of foreign policy. Many in the State Department who didn't understand what I was trying to do (and that did not include Dean Rusk, because Dean strongly agreed with my approach to developing security policy and strategy and force structure) thought that I was trying to usurp the role of Secretary of State. When we took the Posture Statement to the Congress, the foreign policy section had been reviewed in detail by the State Department. It was essential to begin with a discussion of foreign policy because that had to be the foundation of security policy. The articulation and the integration of foreign policy, security policy, military strategy, force structure, and budgets obviously were imperfect—I understand that. But intellectually that's the way we thought of it. I think that it was extremely important. I don't believe that it had been done previously—certainly not in as formal a way as we were trying to do it, and with as much emphasis placed on the necessity of integrating

the several parts—and I don't believe that it has been done on any consistent basis since.

Goldberg: Would you say that what you included in your Posture Statements on foreign policy was really about the only thing that was available? And that you did it because the State Department did not give it to you?

McNamara: Essentially, yes, that is correct.

Goldberg: It has always been a problem with the military, getting that sort of thing; it goes back to the 40s. If you look at this first volume of ours, you will see that they were trying to get it from State in the 1940s.

McNamara: I think that since that time the statement of foreign policy has been formalized to a greater degree than it was then—at least during some of the Kissinger years that was the case.

Matloff: How about the state of the Department of Defense itself when you took over—the nature of the working relations, the structure? Were you satisfied with the state of the Department in those respects?

McNamara: I did not feel that the Secretary had been in a position to direct the activities of the Department in the formulation of policy. The organization of the Department didn't facilitate that. The Secretary was inadequately served by staff, other than the staff that was under the Joint Chiefs or the service chiefs. The civilian staffs in the services were particularly weak, and the civilian staff in the Secretary's office was, I also thought, weak and poorly organized to lay the intellectual foundation for determination of security policy, military strategy, force structure, and budgets. I set about to correct that, and to do so I

brought in the "Rand intellectuals." It wasn't that I was seeking to bring in Rand people, but it happened that I found Rand to be a major source of what I call security intellectuals. I brought in a number of other individuals with experience in security policy—for example, Paul Nitze, who had been director of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department, and William Bundy, who had had major experience in CIA, and elsewhere. The reason we were bringing them in was to bolster the ability of the Secretary of Defense to lead in the formulation of security policy and to avoid becoming a captive of the Joint Chiefs and the services. It was not that I didn't have respect for the Chiefs. I have a tremendous regard for them. But their ability to participate in the formulation of national security policy was severely limited by the very unwieldy and ineffective organizational structure of the Joint Chiefs and Joint Staff. Only now is that structure being changed by action of the Congress. It is interesting that the change is being stimulated by a former chief, David Jones, and it is being opposed by the present Secretary of Defense.

Goldberg: Don't you think that Gates was moving in that direction—greater policy formulation?

McNamara: Certainly Gates's action to introduce the SIOP was, in a sense, moving in that direction, but his moves were very limited and the staff was very weak.

Goldberg: But he, himself, was doing things.

McNamara: He was perhaps thinking that way, but the linkage between foreign policy and defense budget was totally lacking. There was no strategy that I was aware of which could serve as a foundation for nuclear

force levels, for example. There was no strategy that served as a basis for determining conventional force levels. I understand how difficult it is to develop intellectual foundations for conventional force levels, but we subsequently evolved the concept of a requirement for conventional forces sufficient to fight one and one-half wars simultaneously in support of our foreign policy commitments. That was a new concept.

Matloff: Your administration is associated with the introduction of PPBS and Systems Analysis as part of the machinery and processes in the Department of Defense. In doing some research, I came across William Kaufmann's assessment in his volume, The McNamara Strategy, with which I am sure you are familiar. According to Kaufmann, one of the benefits of the PPBS system was that it "reduced the need for the vast reorganizations that had shaken the Pentagon periodically since 1947. Responsibility for the management of the Department of Defense was clearly vested in the Secretary and he now had the means, through the planning-programming-budgeting process, to exercise his authority in a systematic and orderly way. In effect, he had found a substitute for unification of the Services and establishment of a single Chief of Staff." Would you go along with that?

McNamara: Yes. When I became Secretary, the Symington Report was on the table. Ros Gilpatric had been a member of a committee working with Symington, and the report, as I recall, proposed a very substantial reorganization of the Department and the services. It considered that a prerequisite for effective management of the Department by the Secretary. I had spent a good part of my life in managing organizations, and I agreed, in principle,

with many of the major points of the Symington Report. But I felt that it was extremely unlikely that that report, or any significant part of it, could be implemented politically. Parts of it would require action by Congress; all of it would require difficult decisions that I thought would lead to extended controversy and turmoil within the Defense Department. Therefore, while I reached the conclusion that the Department would have to be managed in ways quite different from before—that the Secretary must direct the formulation of policy, development of force structure, and the preparation of budgets—I also concluded it would have to be done essentially within the existing law and the existing structure. I was determined to do that. I have long felt that an optimal organizational structure is a desirable but not a necessary condition to major improvement of operations in most kinds of organizations. I was determined to get control of that Department without the organizational changes that had been proposed by the Symington Committee. I thought that could be done by recruiting the proper kinds of people, by laying out the approach to formulation of security policy—i.e., integrating foreign policy, security policy, military strategy, force structure, and budgets—and by developing the tools to apply that set of intellectual concepts. One of the tools was the program, planning, and budgeting system.

Matloff: Had this been a new concept for you, or had you been working on this right along?

McNamara: My concepts of planning and control were formulated over a period of years beginning when I was a graduate student at Harvard. In a

budgetary planning course, we studied control systems that had been adopted by major corporations. Particularly, I remember the experience of the Du Pont executives who went into General Motors after Du Pont bought a major part of General Motors, about 1919. Between 1919 and 1923, Donaldson Brown, Alfred Sloan, and a number of other Du Pont executives laid out the planning and control system that was a major factor in GM's success over the next fifty years. I had studied the concept in the late thirties, and I had applied portions of it in the U.S. Army Air Forces, while I was in Stat Control. After the war, I went to Ford Motor Co., where I became assistant director and then director of the Planning Office, Comptroller, Ford Division manager, and subsequently president. In each of those positions, I applied the general concepts of planning as a major tool of management. I then came down to the Defense Department and tried to do the same thing there.

Matloff: You had not met up with Hitch before that?

McNamara: Never. I knew what I was looking for in the Assistant Secretary, Comptroller, but I couldn't find the right man. While skiing at Aspen during Christmas week, I continued to try to recruit individuals for the key posts in the Department. Using my three-by-five cards and references, I came across the name of Hitch and tracked him down. He was then employed by the RAND corporation, but he was a professional economist and was attending the annual meeting of the American Economic Association. I tracked him down and asked to see him. He said that it would be very difficult and, in any event, he wasn't interested in the job. He said that he had married late; he and his wife had just had a child, he was

happy in Los Angeles and he did not wish to move. I suggested that on his way back to Los Angeles we meet in Denver. So we did. I aroused his interest, and eventually he agreed to come to Defense. He was a superb "comptroller." The word connotes accounting, but his function was planning, strategic planning, and the derivation of force structure and the defense budget from such plans.

Goldberg: It wasn't accounting under his predecessors, either.

McNamara: But they didn't do what he did.

Goldberg: McNeil did a great deal.

McNamara: Not that. There were certainly no papers around that showed that.

Goldberg: McNeil didn't put much down on paper.

McNamara: You can't do policy formulation, strategic planning, and budgeting without putting it down on paper. You can't run that Department by the seat of your pants.

Goldberg: His people put the things down on paper.

McNamara: I will defy you to show me a written statement of the foundation for strategic offensive nuclear forces by McNeil or anybody else prior to 1961.

Goldberg: That's another matter.

McNamara: But that's very important, not just for force structure; it's important, as well, for formulation of strategy and the preparation of war plans. I didn't know anything about those matters, but I said to myself, "Now, a) we have some nuclear weapons, b) we have to think how might we use them, and c) we must determine what number we should have."

The questions led to the planning and analysis. You might say obviously we had weapons and we also had war plans, so somebody must have thought through how we would apply these things and how we decided how many to have. But I could find no evidence that had been done.

Goldberg: Bernard Brodie did it for the Air Force in the early 1950s.

McNamara: But you can't use early 1950 in 1960; it's a totally different world. I defy you to find any papers. That was my problem. When I came into the Department I couldn't find any papers. I couldn't find any intellectual foundation for either the application of force or the determination of force requirements that related to our foreign policy. The policy for application of force was "massive retaliation." We had on the order of 6,000 strategic warheads, so you say to the commanders, "Are you going to use all of those?" They reply, "Yes." Every one of the plans applied all of the weapons, with minor qualifications. You ask: "Why 6,000 instead of 3,000?" and there was no reply except, "We want to knock the hell out of them." And then you ask, "How will they respond?" And the commanders reply, "With whatever they have left." And you ask, "How much will they have left?" The answer of course is the Soviets will have more left than we want to be hit with. Not much of that was laid down in writing. You try to find a written statement that said: "We will launch six thousand weapons and knock the hell out of them, but they'll survive with tens of warheads which they will launch against us. We'll lose millions of people—not as many as they lost, but millions." There wasn't any such statement. The closest approximation of it—and it wasn't a statement of policy at all—was a war game done by the Net Evaluation

Subcommittee, a committee of four four-star officers that prepared one copy of a report for the President. It was the only piece of paper that related in any way to what I'm talking about—the application of force. It evaluated the exchange and it scared the hell out of you. No wonder they only had one copy of it, because it showed the bankruptcy of our strategy.

Goldberg: That was the first of the Hickey committees.

McNamara: That's right.

Matloff: Would you give some brief capsule descriptions of your working relations with various segments in and out of the Department; for example, how did you arrange the division of labor between you and your deputies—you had three in sequence?

McNamara: To a degree I looked upon them as alter egos—in a sense we shared my responsibility. I was spending much more time with the President than they were. They were spending much more time on details and administration than I was. On the major decisions of how to approach the problem of developing security policy and strategy and force structure, I had my deputies be part of my thinking every step of the way. In force application that was also true. On all of the major decisions I tried to treat them as my alter ego. We would discuss the matter, I would come to a conclusion, and I would expect them to follow it, whether it was what they recommended or not. It worked very well; it was superb.

Matloff: How about with the JCS? How close were you with the Chairman? Did you prefer dealing with the Chairman, rather than with the Joint Chiefs as a corporate body?

McNamara: Yes, I dealt with the Chairman rather than with the Chiefs as a corporate body. I wasn't overly concerned about what I thought was a miserable organization. I held the same view of it then that Davy Jones holds today and the same view that is reflected in the congressional legislation: the structure was very undesirable—the so-called collegial body, the confusion of power, the placing of the Chiefs in positions where their thought processes were circumscribed by the biases of their service positions and responsibilities. I thought that it was a very undesirable structure. I thought that I could deal with it without changing it, by treating the Chairman as the directing officer—the CEO, if you will—of the Joint Chiefs. That was clearly not his function in law. But one can behave with other human beings in ways that aren't prescribed by law. I treated the Chairman as my senior military adviser. I recognized that he, in turn, had to be responsive to the formal structure of the Chiefs, he had to reflect the views of the other Chiefs. It never bothered me that I overruled the majority of the Chiefs, or even occasionally the unanimous recommendation of the Chiefs.

Matloff: How did you handle the problem of splits within the JCS?

McNamara: It didn't bother me in the slightest. It made no difference to me. What I was looking for was the right answer, and if four people proposed the wrong answer and one person the right answer, I supported the one. If I thought all five were wrong, I selected another answer. Initially, that caused a certain amount of resentment and concern. But I believe if you were to ask Max Taylor if he approved of that system, he would say yes.

Goldberg: Did you pick Taylor for the job?

McNamara: I sure did. The President brought him back into the government after he retired as Army Chief, to assist in appraising the Bay of Pigs debacle—how we got into such a mess. Some people have said that I recommended to the President that Max be made Chairman to get him out of the White House so I wouldn't have to deal with the White House where he might look over my performance. That is absurd. I recommended he be appointed Chairman because I thought that he was the brighest, ablest, and most policy-sensitive military officer I could find. He was terrific. We didn't agree on everything, but that wasn't my objective. My objective was to get the ablest Chairman available. In Max, I had it.

Matloff: How about with the service secretaries, how did you see their role and how did you make use of them? Did you ever, for example, use them outside of the traditional interests of their departments?

McNamara: No. Nor did I use them perhaps in ways that they had been used in the past. Basically I didn't use them in matters relating to security policy, force application, or strategy. I used them in connection with logistics, procurement, and training responsibilities, which I thought were the proper responsibilities of their departments.

Matloff: On what kinds of issues would you normally be dealing with Secretary of State Dean Rusk?

McNamara: One of the first was the issue of nuclear weapons. In the early days after I was sworn in as Secretary, I received a very highly classified letter from Dean. I have forgotten the point that he was making, but it related to nuclear weapons. It said TOP SECRET EYES ONLY,

and I was so naive that I assumed I was the only one that had a copy. By God, I read about it in The Evening Star a day or so later. I just couldn't believe it. We ultimately found a general officer, an Air Force general, who, I am absolutely certain, leaked it. He leaked it in order to bolster a position that ran counter to the views of other senior members of the DoD. He leaked it to generate opposition to their position. I mention this simply to say that Dean and I had a very close relationship. He wanted my views on major foreign policy issues, and I wanted his views on security issues that had foreign policy implications.

Goldberg: It is generally considered that you did play a very substantial role in foreign policy matters during the period you were Secretary; more, probably, than any other Secretary of Defense.

McNamara: I don't know, because I don't know what role other Secretaries have played.

Matloff: Particularly in the Johnson period.

McNamara: I never, in even my private thoughts, conceived of my relationship with Dean other than one in which the Secretary of Defense was a servant of the foreign policy of the country, and therefore I conceived of Dean Rusk as superior to me. I don't mean in the line, but as having a function that put his view with respect to foreign policy above mine. I was mentioning today at lunch that Dean was one of the great patriots of our nation. One day he called me and said, "I want to come over to see you." I replied, "I'll come see you." He said, "It's a personal

thing." I responded, "I don't care whether it's official or personal, I'm coming to see you." So I went over to see him. The point simply is that I felt that the Secretary of State was senior. But I also believed that to the extent foreign policy carried security implications, it was the role of the Secretary of Defense to state what those implications were and to comment upon them. I never hesitated to do so. Much foreign policy does have security implications, and that is why I was frequently expressing views, publicly and otherwise, on those issues.

Goldberg: The other reason, I think, for this belief, was that presumably you had a closer and more significant relationship with the President than did Dean Rusk.

McNamara: I don't want to say it was closer than Dean's, but it was certainly close with both Kennedy and Johnson—that is true.

Matloff: Did your fostering ISA, or "the little State Department," as it is sometimes called within the DoD, complicate or facilitate your dealings with the State Department?

McNamara: It facilitated them. This is why I put so much care in selecting my ISA heads. I had Nitze, Bundy, Warnke, and McNaughton—absolutely superb people. It was one of the two or three most significant posts in the whole department.

Matloff: Did your relationships with Kennedy and Johnson differ in any way?

McNamara: They had different styles, but the relationships were very close.

Matloff: Did you get the feeling you were being used more in matters dealing with foreign policy under Johnson?

McNamara: Both Kennedy and Johnson used me in matters outside the Defense Department. Kennedy pulled me in on the steel price increase, for example; and both used me on many of the actions relating to civil rights, some of which had military implications because of the riots and civil disorders.

Goldberg: We put out a volume on that. Have you seen the Army volume on it?

McNamara: No, but it's a fascinating subject.

Goldberg: It has the whole story of that period.

McNamara: Johnson got me into a lot of different non-Defense matters, other than foreign policy, one of which was aluminum pricing, the rollback.

Matloff: How about your relations with Congress, particularly as time went on?

McNamara: I think in the public press it was thought then that my relationships with Congress were very bad. I don't think that was the case. I don't think that you can point to a single bill that I wanted that I lost, not a single one, whether it was a money bill or non-money bill. I don't think you can point to a single action that I wanted to take that the Congress prevented. We canceled the B-70 program after the Congress had authorized the funds for the program; I believe there were 40-odd thousand people working on it. Against the opposition of Congress, we dissolved 30 or 40 National Guard divisions; we closed hundreds of bases in the face of Congressional opposition. We got every single appropriation bill through. We canceled the nuclear airplane and the Skybolt missile.

We made the KENNEDY a diesel-powered carrier instead of a nuclear carrier. Rickover had a fit and the Joint Atomic Energy Committee, which was a very powerful committee, was absolutely determined that the KENNEDY would be nuclear powered. There was blood on the floor over these issues. That is why the press felt, and many in Congress felt, that my relationships were very bad. But I felt that my job was not to serve the Defense Department per se. I looked upon the role of a Cabinet officer differently from the way most Cabinet officers look upon their roles. And certainly most departments look upon the roles of Cabinet officers differently from the way I do. The Secretary of Education looks upon himself as the servant of a constituency; his constituency is the teachers. The Secretary of Health and Welfare looks upon himself as a servant of the health profession; Commerce the same way; Labor the same way; and so on. Many thought that the Secretary of Defense should think narrowly about security issues and about the role of the Defense Department. They believed he should function as a sectorial lobby, if you will, within the broader society. I felt that I was a servant of the President, that the President was the servant of the people; and that my function was to look upon Defense from the point of view of all the people, not just from the point of view of the Defense Department. That brought me into close and continuing conflict with some elements of the Congress, particularly the Armed Services Committees, which tended to be committees that represented the Defense constituency, both the military forces and the industrial contractors. The military-industrial complex never bothered me a damn bit. I thought that it was greatly overrated as a political force affecting decisions. I never let

it affect my decision, whether it liked them or didn't like them. The Congress always had the power to turn down a recommendation that I made in the name of the President, if its members could consolidate their power and use it. They never were able to. Although they tried awfully hard, I don't believe they were ever able to overturn one of my budget or force decisions. The B-70 controversy was a perfect illustration of this point. It led to that famous Rose Garden meeting, which was very serious. This was a potential conflict of a constitutional character. It was not at that stage a dispute over a weapon; it was a dispute over the relative powers of the Executive and Legislative branches of our government. There was no way to settle that other than through the Judiciary. This was a very dangerous situation which would have caused tremendous trouble to our nation, both then and later, had it not been for one amazing individual, Vinson. Vinson was thought to be either a pawn of, or the dictator of, the Defense Department. But when it came down to the wire, he was a great patriot. He understood the constitutional issues that lay beneath the surface of this controversy. He said to the President (the President, he, and I were the only people present in the Rose Garden) in effect, "You're a young President, I'm a senior member of Congress; but I have tremendous respect for you as President and for the office of the President. I understand the constitutional conflict that lies beneath the surface here. I don't want to surface that. You don't want to surface it. I led my troops up that hill, I was the leader of the B-70, I'll put them in reverse, and I'll lead them down the hill (i.e. he would not continue to fight over decision to cancel the airplane)."

Matloff: I take it that neither Kennedy nor Johnson laid down a list of priorities or a detailed agenda in the national security field that he wanted you to carry out. You had to feel your own way, basically.

McNamara: I think that Kennedy believed that I should examine the Department from the point of view of the adequacy of our forces in relation to our foreign policy commitments. He campaigned on the theme that the missile gap existed. I mention that because it indicates his mindset. He was concerned that our strategic forces were inadequate. It didn't take Ros Gilpatric and me more than three weeks to determine that there was a strategic offensive nuclear gap, but it was exactly the reverse of the kind that had been implied by the term missile gap.

Goldberg: Were you surprised at the extent to which political considerations played such a role in most of the major issues and decisions, when you first came in?

McNamara: I'm not certain I would agree that political considerations played such a role, but I do want to say something. In a book I have just written, I have a chapter on what I call misperceptions that endanger our security in the nuclear age. One of the misperceptions is that a military weapon which is irrelevant in a military context can be used for political purposes. This relates to what you're saying. I'll give you an illustration of that, the most extreme illustration I can think of. We canceled the Skybolt. It was a pile of junk; there is absolutely no question about that. The British, who would have had a right, had we produced Skybolt, to procure it, had led their public to believe they were going to maintain a nuclear deterrent force through procurement of Skybolt. When we canceled

the weapon because it was a pile of junk, they said, "You're going to overthrow the Macmillan government by this decision." We didn't want to do that. But they said that was what was going to happen: "Our retention of political power depends on maintenance and modernization of our independent deterrent." We said that Skybolt was a pile of junk. They said, in effect, "Let's not discuss the performance of the weapon, just go ahead and produce it." That is an illustration of a point you're making. I was surprised that in our own society—I won't say in the Kennedy and Johnson administration—events similar to that happened every day. For example, the governors knew very well the state National Guard divisions were not combat ready and in effect played no significant role in our defense structure. But would the governors support the elimination of those divisions? Not one of them would. When I pressed Johnson to approve disbanding the divisions, he said, "Bob, you're going to have trouble with the governors. Why don't you go to their annual meeting?" They met that year in Hershey, Pennsylvania, as I remember. I went there and spoke to the 50 governors, including such really outstanding people as Nelson Rockefeller. Not a single governor would support the elimination of the National Guard divisions, even though every one of them knew the divisions were hollow.

Goldberg: Were you surprised?

McNamara: I was surprised. but we went ahead and eliminated them anyway. I was very surprised how often attempts were made to make defense decisions reflect political—i.e. non-military—requirements. But I never had the President say to me, "Bob, do this. I know you don't think there's any

military justification for it, but we've got to do it politically." Not once. I insisted that we make the decisions relating to: closing bases, adding forces, canceling forces, eliminating weapons, whatever, without regard to the political decisions. That is one of the things that got me into such hot water with the Congress. For example, Eddie Hebert wanted the military's medical services expanded. He wanted military personnel who were treated in civilian hospitals to be treated in military hospitals. He would then justify the expansion of the military hospitals, the addition of a medical university, and so on. It made no sense to me. Why should the wife of a military officer go to a uniformed gynecologist instead of going to a civilian hospital adjacent to the base? It made absolutely no sense to me, so I refused to support Hebert's program. I never would agree to building a medical university. The plan to do so wasn't passed by Congress while I was Secretary. I never would have allowed it to be passed. If it had been passed and it was within my constitutional right, I would have refused to spend the money for the project. Because of such views, I was in constant conflict with certain elements of the Congress. There is absolutely no question about that. The nuclear carrier was one illustration, the medical university was another, the bases, the Guard, you name it. But we got along. Eddie Hebert once said, "Bob, you've seen my office. I have all those pictures of the Secretaries. How about your picture? I want an autographed picture." I said in effect, "You son of a bitch, you've been trying to destroy me and now you want an autographed picture? I don't believe it." He said, "You're damn right I want your picture." So I gave him a picture and autographed it: "To the

greatest riverboat gambler of them all. With best wishes, Robert S. McNamara." He got a great kick out of it; it was placed on his wall. In sum, I would not allow political pressure to influence action contrary to what the President and I believed to be the interests of society.

Matloff: Let me ask you about perceptions of the threat. Do you recall what your initial perception of the threat facing the United States was, and did that perception change as the years went on?

McNamara: I don't know that initially I had a very clear perception of the threat. I knew what our treaty responsibilities were. It was alleged that the Soviets had both an objective of hegemony—of aggressive intent against Western Europe and other parts of the world—and conventional offensive force capabilities that greatly exceeded our defensive capabilities. It was perhaps not expressed exactly that way by Kennedy, but it was that general conception of the threat that led Kennedy to say, "Bob, take a careful look at our forces and see whether you think they're adequate."

Matloff: Did you see Communism as a monolithic bloc?

McNamara: No. Again, one of my problems with Congress was that exact issue—I got into a hell of a mess over my belief that Communism wasn't a monolithic bloc. In the latter half of the fifties, what were known as strategic seminars for civilians had been organized and addressed by uniformed officers. These were designed for the purpose of educating the public on the communist threat and the military forces required to meet that threat. In reviewing the statements that were made by the military officers, it seemed to me that they were exaggerating the threat, treating

it as monolithic, presenting it in a very ideological way. So, not believing that the threat was monolithic, not believing that it should be simplified to the extent of an ideology, and not wishing to exaggerate it, I insisted that all speeches of senior officers (one-star officers and above) be sent to a section we set up to review them. In that section I had both civilian and military reviewers, and I insisted that they lay down a set of guidelines against which they would review these speeches. One of them was to remove all language that conveyed an ideological or monolithic view of the threat. I remember that I insisted that they change words like "aggressive Reds" to "Soviet Union"—to try to take out the color words. That got me in one hell of a mess. Conservatives in Congress called for a special set of congressional hearings which eventually led to the only claim of executive privilege that had been put forward for years, The hearings came about because some of the officers, who thought they were being censored, persuaded their supporters in the Congress—one of whom was Thurmond—that I had infiltrated Communists into the Department, and particularly into this review group. They felt in particular that one of the Communists was Adam Yarmolinsky, my assistant, who was associated with the work of the review group. They insisted that I give the names of the reviewers. They knew very well who the reviewers were, but they wanted to put me on the spot. The reviewers included a major, other military officers, and civilians. I refused to give the names, because that would blacken the individuals. I had set up the group; it was following my policy; the whole thing was carried out in accordance with my wishes and my instructions. I said, therefore, that I

would assume full responsibility for it and I wouldn't allow Congress to have the names. We went through hearing after hearing in the Senate Caucus Room, a huge room jammed with members of the press and public, particularly women. The critical moment came in an exchange with Sen. Thurmond. He said, "Mr. Chairman, I would like the Sergeant-at-Arms to take to the Secretary this newspaper." It was a tabloid, and on the front was a full-page picture of a nude woman. He asked, "Mr. Secretary, do you see that?" "Yes." "Do you know where it came from?" "No." "Well that is what is sold to the sons of these mothers stationed at the US military base in Rhein-Main, Germany. Would you tell the mothers what you see on the front page." I replied, "Yes sir, the picture of a woman." He said, "You're just engaging in the evasion that you so customarily follow when testifying before the Congress. Tell me how she is clothed." I responded, "She has little clothing." He said, "Mr. Secretary, I've dealt with you before; that's what's wrong with you; you say she has little clothing. She has no clothing. Why don't you tell that to these mothers!" Then we went on from there to the procedures for "muzzling" the generals and his claim that I was screwing up the Department by infiltrating it with communists. Finally he said, "Mr. Chairman (Stennis was chairman), I ask that you direct the Secretary to supply the names of [the censors]." The Chairman said, "Mr. Secretary, you heard the Senator. I think that is a perfectly reasonable request." I said, "Senator, and Mr. Chairman, I've told you several times why I cannot give those names. I cannot run that department if people carrying out my orders are held responsible for my actions. I am responsible. If you want to remove me,

you can try to do so by engaging in whatever process is legal for that purpose. But I am not going to remain in that Department and give you those names." The chairman said, "I have to tell you, Mr. Secretary, we will hold you in contempt if you don't give those names." I said, "Mr. Chairman, I plead executive privilege." He said, "Mr. Secretary, you must understand that you cannot plead executive privilege without the written approval of the President." I said, "I do understand." He said, "Do you mean to say that you have that approval?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do." I pulled out of my pocket a letter from President Kennedy. It authorized me to plead executive privilege. After I read the letter there was a dead silence. The chairman said, "I've anticipated this moment for months (I think the hearings had been going on for about six months) and I've examined the history of our Republic on this subject. I find the following . . . (he had written on yellow legal-sized pages a report on the use of executive privilege, starting with George Washington). Based on that, I hold your use of executive privilege in accordance with the traditions of our Republic." He was terrific. It is, however, another illustration of why I was frequently in trouble with some members of the Congress. I never gave an inch on something I believed in. To return to your point about the nature of the threat—I wasn't an expert on the Soviet Union but I did recognize that a degree of paranoia existed in certain parts of our Republic with respect to Cuba, as an illustration. I think the problem that arose over the Bay of Pigs was in part a function of two factors: one, the failure to recognize the paranoia that led to an respect to the exaggerated view of the security risk of

a Communist government in Cuba; and the other, a totally erroneous judgment of the capability of the so-called freedom forces to free Cuba from Castro's rule. The latter came about because of the error of combining operations and intelligence. Some of our problems in Vietnam came about from the same cause. That was the reason for my request to President Johnson to allow me to go to CIA and to ask that the Director set up a special unit to evaluate operations in Vietnam. I didn't feel that the intelligence services of the Defense Department were capable of doing that. There was too close a relationship between the intelligence function and the operational responsibility. [How many times do we have to learn these must be separated.] So the answer to your question is that I did feel that the threat was misstated by parts of our society—parts of the military, parts of the Congress, and parts of the public—and I did seek to obtain a reevaluation of that threat by all of the parties.