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April 16, 1992

Mr. Alfred Goldberg
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Department of Defense
Washington, D.C. 20301

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Dear Mr. Goldberg:

Kai Bird has asked me to write you about his interest in reading my Defense Department oral history. Mr. Bird is a responsible scholar, and I am happy to give permission for him to read my oral history.

Sincerely,

McGeorge Bundy

McGeorge Bundy

McGB/ag
cc: Kai Bird

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Matloff: This is an oral history interview held with Mr. McGeorge Bundy in New York City on April 15, 1991. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff.

Mr. Bundy, as we indicated in our previous correspondence, we shall focus in this interview on events and issues affecting national security and the Department of Defense, particularly during your service as Special Assistant for National Security Affairs in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, 1961-66. First, by way of background, what were the circumstances of your appointment. Who recommended you, and how well and long had you known President Kennedy?

Bundy: I have no idea who recommended me, but I can tell you what I do know. I had known Senator Kennedy for a long time. We were schoolboys together at a private school for Boston boys, in the '20s and early '30s. I knew him again when he was at Harvard and I was at Yale. We saw each other occasionally. I had known him better when he became a congressman for the district in Cambridge, where we lived at the time, and still more when he became a member of the Board of Overseers at Harvard University at the time when I was the Dean of the Faculty. Although I had been a Republican, I told him in 1960 that I would be for him and I supported him during the campaign. Sargent Shriver came around to find out who might be interested in working for the new administration. We had a conversation and he asked whether I was interested. I said that would depend on whether the people wanted me and what the job was. I said I would if I liked the proposal. First off, Senator Kennedy offered me a job in the Department of State. We had, first, a general interview about staffing the department. He asked me either in that interview or later whether I would be interested in being an under secretary for politics in the Department of State. I said, "Yes," and we departed with the feeling that that is what it would be if it worked out. As it turned out, he didn't have an appointment of that kind, because of an amendment to the State Department act called the Dillon amendment, under which

the under secretary would decide to specialize at either politics or economics and then there would be another under secretary who would cover the subject that the number two man had left uncovered. It was called the Dillon amendment because when Dillon was under secretary, he emphasized economics, and therefore there was an Under Secretary for Political Affairs. But as the Kennedy State Department took shape, it was Rusk as Secretary and Bowles as Under Secretary. The President had to explain all this to me, because neither of us had known it when we had talked before. Bowles was going to be politics, and that meant that the next man would have to be the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, and he said that neither of us could get away with that. He asked me a little later whether I would be interested in the Deputy Under Secretaryship for Administrative Affairs, and after thinking about it I told him no, that I didn't want to do administration. He said he would keep looking. Some time later he called me and told me of a job in the White House. I knew something of it, because I had known Bobby Cutler, who had been Eisenhower's special assistant, and he had invited me to Washington to be in his NSC staff at a time when I could not go, since I had just taken a big administrative job at Harvard. I thought I would like to do that. What his reasons were, I am not able to say.

Matloff: How long and well did you know Secretary of Defense McNamara and Secretary of State Rusk?

Bundy: I had not known Bob McNamara before at all. I had known Dean Rusk, because the Dean of the Faculty at Harvard gets to know the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, or should, and we were friends.

Matloff: Were you briefed by Robert Cutler, and possibly by Gordon Gray?

Bundy: By Gray; Cutler was out of office by then. Gray was the Special Assistant; very much so.

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Matloff: This was a transition from the academic world to the world of presidential adviser and executive official in the federal bureaucracy. Was the transition difficult for you?

Bundy: Of course it was difficult. There was a lot to learn. It was a change of pace and assignment, but it was also very good fun, very interesting. I think, other things being equal, I would recommend that someone coming into that job have more governmental experience than I had. I had been in World War II as a junior officer, had been briefly a junior character in the Washington office of the Marshall Plan, and once worked for the Office of Facts and Figures before I went into the Army--not an ideally rounded preparation.

Matloff: What in your background proved useful, as you look back on it?

Bundy: Studying and teaching foreign policy; working with Col. Stimson, who had been both in the State Department and the War Department; and writing books and papers about it. I was, at least, a professor of the subject, if not a practitioner.

Matloff: How did you initially conceive the role?

Bundy: I didn't conceive it at all; I learned about it by doing. I think the most important thing about that job is that it's defined in terms of what the President himself wants and expects.

Goldberg: It did reach a greater dimension, did it not, during your period there than it had previously?

Bundy: Dimension?

Goldberg: In the sense of a greater and more active role by Assistant to the President.

Bundy: It's hard to make that kind of comparison. I would put it more like this: What JFK wanted from a Special Assistant was immediate and relevant service information, opinion, checking opinions of others, keeping him informed of both issues and internal governmental situations, mostly in the Executive Branch. There wasn't much legislative relationship, and rather less of an orderly management of

interdepartmental position papers, grinding their way up through a bureaucracy of several layers. If it was more important or more serious in any way, it would have been because the President used it that way.

Matloff: What problems did the President and you face in national security when you took over?

Bundy: The usual array of problems. The most urgent one, that we found cooking on secret burners, was the plan to invade Cuba. The wider question of U.S.-Soviet relations had very large and continuing importance. Berlin was in abeyance, but certainly not at an end.

Matloff: Did the President have a detailed agenda for national security?

Bundy: Not in the sense of a written out or listed agenda; he had a lot of things he wanted to learn more about, think about, and some on which he was eager for recommendations.

Goldberg: What about Laos?

Bundy: That was urgent at the time, yes.

Goldberg: Did you agree with the urgency on that?

Bundy: It wasn't escapable; it was a question of doing more, nothing, or less. The situation was one that he eventually decided to move on to a diplomatic track, but that wasn't the way it had been left.

Goldberg: Is it accurate that Eisenhower had emphasized the enormous importance of Laos?

Bundy: I wasn't in on those pre-inauguration conversations, so mine is second-hand evidence, but that's certainly my impression.

Matloff: Did President Kennedy set any priorities in handling your functions?

Bundy: How do you mean?

Matloff: Was he emphasizing certain problems over others, or certain areas over others?

Bundy: Some were placed on the agenda by sense of urgency communicated either by plans or by advice from the outgoing administration. Others, such as Latin America, JFK wanted on the agenda out of his own interests. Still others came from the general eagerness of most of the friends of the United States to get acquainted with, make a number with, or share views with the incoming president.

Matloff: You had a long run in the office, compared with predecessors and successors. Did your views of your role change in any way in the course of that tenure?

Bundy: The biggest change was the change of Presidents. As I said earlier, the job gets done on the terms that fit the President, not the other way around. People are constantly arranging the White House as if they could tell the President how to do his work. He will tell them, in the main, how he wants to do his work.

Matloff: Did you find a great change, from Kennedy to Johnson?

Bundy: They were two very different men, and they were different in their ways of going about this job.

Matloff: How about in the running and composition of the staff, did you bring in new people, or reorganize in any way?

Bundy: I was the Assistant and I had a Deputy, Walt Rostow. JFK had wanted him in the administration and initially thought he would be good in the Department of State. But there were difficulties about that that I only know about indirectly. Then he asked me how I would feel to have Walt as a Deputy. We were old friends, and I said it would be fine with me. Gradually we reduced the staff, changed some of the organizational processes, and did away with the Operations Coordination Board. The president's own use of the NSC was less systematic and less weighted with formal papers than Ike's had been. We cut the staff, pruned it, and brought in a few extra people as replacements, notably Robert Komer and Carl Kay^szen. We wound up with a somewhat smaller and per capita a higher-powered staff.

Goldberg: Who became the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs?

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Bundy: George Ball.

Goldberg: Rostow wasn't considered for that?

Bundy: I'm unable to say.

Matloff: To turn to the working relationships that you had in this position--in connection with the presidents, how often did you meet with them?

Bundy: A lot, and in different ways with the two men for different purposes. Those two felt they needed to be able to get that official whenever they wanted him.

Matloff: Why did President Kennedy resort to the task force approach in 1961?

Bundy: To take an example, he had a large set of potential problems around Berlin and he wanted a very strong group working on it and the advice, in particular, of a former Secretary of State. It was simpler to do that if he had a task force, of which Acheson was the chairman, which would report to him. It would report also to the Secretary of State and the information would be shared with the Secretary of Defense. The notion of a small group of people with particular qualifications who could feel, and act on the feeling, that they were advising the President directly was appealing to him.

Matloff: Arthur Schlesinger states in his volume, A Thousand Days: "It was symptomatic of the President's doubts about State that the first two task forces in the spring of 1961 had chairmen from Defense--Gilpatric on Laos and Nitze on Cuba. . . . In time, the task force approach led to the formation of the so-called Executive Committee of the National Security Council." Do you agree with this?

Bundy: I wouldn't put it quite that way, but I wouldn't quarrel with it, either.

Matloff: Did President Johnson make any further changes in connection with the NSC, other than those you had outlined in the case of his predecessor? He had the Tuesday Cabinet.

Bundy: He went to the Tuesday meetings, which were smaller than the National Security Council. The Security Council had the disadvantage for both Presidents that it

had certain statutory members and one of them in particular was the man in charge of civil defense. There wasn't anything that either President thought that official had to contribute and there were a number of other difficulties with that meeting. It had become a meeting in which the entire national security bureaucracy listened to the President, as it appeared to us. This was not the way that either Johnson or Kennedy wanted to conduct business.

Matloff: Did you detect in your relationships and your role vis-a-vis the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State that the presidents were looking at that role differently?

Bundy: How do you mean?

Matloff: In your dealings with one secretary vis-a-vis the other. Was one president relying on you more in case of differences among them, for example?

Bundy: I don't think either president thought I was there to resolve Cabinet difficulties.

Matloff: I think you have already implied that Kennedy, at least, did not make use of the full Cabinet, in terms of national security.

Bundy: I'm not saying that, because I didn't always go to Cabinet meetings; but I don't think any, or very few, presidents, have used the whole Cabinet that way.

Goldberg: No, not from Truman on.

Matloff: How about your working relationships with Secretary McNamara?

Bundy: We got to be very close. We didn't know each other at the beginning, but we came to know each other. I think he never supposed that I was the same as the President, nor should he. I did a lot of business with his deputy, Gilpatric. We had for a while a meeting that included under secretaries and met in my office. We didn't continue that, but had it for some months at the beginning of the administration. I got to know Gilpatric. I had known Paul Nitze for a long time. I, of course, knew my brother, and I came to know McNaughton. So I knew the working players over there.

Bob McNamara and I got closer and closer as the years went by, and by the time I left the government, I think there was no one I was closer to in the government.

Matloff: How about your dealings with Cyrus Vance, Gilpatric's successor?

Bundy: I knew him, too. I knew him well after he became the deputy.

Matloff: How about relations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and its chairmen, Lemnitzer, Taylor, and Wheeler?

Bundy: I knew them all, obviously. They, very correctly and understandably, thought that the person they wanted to talk to the most in the White House was the President, so I didn't do a great deal of business directly with them. Business either came when they met directly with the president, or it came, as most of it did, through the Secretary.

Matloff: Did you have direct access to the Joint Chiefs if you wanted it, or did you go through the Sec/Def?

Bundy: My business was mainly with the civilians, but I could reach any chief if I wanted to. And they could reach me.

Matloff: As far as you know, were they encouraged to seek direct access to you?

Bundy: I don't think they were encouraged, but I don't think anybody stopped them. The Chiefs as a body didn't report to the Special Assistant at all.

Matloff: Why did President Kennedy enjoin the Joint Chiefs of Staff after the Bay of Pigs to advise on issues transcending purely military considerations?

Bundy: He may have thought that they would sometime spot something that they might say was not a military matter but he would nonetheless be interested in very straightforward questions.

Goldberg: Eisenhower told them the same thing.

Matloff: Did you ever have difficulty getting information from the JCS or from the military services, for that matter?

Bundy: I don't recall it that way.

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Matloff: How about in dealings with State if there were conflicts over national security issues?

Bundy: There were bound to be disagreements; there always are.

Goldberg: Were you ever aware of the JCS withholding information?

Bundy: That's an iffy question. That the Joint Chiefs don't tell you everything they know that you would be interested in knowing is a fact of bureaucratic life; but if you don't know enough to ask for it, you are not going to know that you are not getting it. I didn't find them particularly withholding.

Matloff: If there were conflicts over national security issues, say between the Secretaries of State and Defense, were you more apt to follow the Secretary of Defense's advice than that of the Secretary of State?

Bundy: I don't recall any voting record one way or the other.

Matloff: Were the problems of national security easily divisible between State and Defense throughout the '60s?

Bundy: No.

Matloff: The lines were becoming blurred?

Bundy: No, it's just that they never are that separable. You can take that issue back to the eighteenth century.

Matloff: How about with CIA directors, what contacts did you have with them?

Bundy: There was a direct reporting relationship in the sense that all the papers that came through to the President, that I knew about, came through me. Dulles, in particular, had occasional meetings with the President, and McCone had some. That agency has a very strong sense that it works for the President, and while it's a part of the national security apparatus and in a sense depends on the NSC under the statutes and does business regularly with the Special Assistant, it also feels it has a right to talk to the President. Presidents often aren't as eager to see the director as the director is to

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see the president, and sometimes the special assistant gets caught in between that way.

Matloff: Did you have confidence in the CIA intelligence estimates?

Bundy: That's too broad a question. Some things they're very good at, and some things, we think, they are not as good at; that is always true of every agency. We didn't think they were diddling us, and I still don't.

Matloff: Did you have any impressions on comparing its estimates with those of military intelligence?

Bundy: I think on certain kinds of issues, those which directly engaged a service interest, the agency had a useful detachment.

Matloff: I'll skip over relations with the Congress.

Bundy: Not very many of those; I saw them, but it was exceptional.

Matloff: Were you involved very much with the press?

Bundy: Yes, both presidents wanted me to do a certain amount of that, and I did.

Matloff: Did you prepare the presidents for meetings with the press on national security issues?

Bundy: Occasionally. Sometimes the President would be all ready and know what he wanted to do, but sometimes he wanted to know what a particular man was like and what he was likely to have on his mind.

Matloff: Would you want to comment on the styles of the two presidents in decision-making, particularly in the national security field?

Bundy: Not very much. I don't compare them any more than I can help.

Matloff: Because they were different?

Bundy: They were different; and the comparison could hardly avoid being invidious to one or the other.

Matloff: In the case of Kennedy, how much reliance did he place on the formal machinery versus, let's say, special commissions, elder statesmen, or outside consultants, rather than using the formal machine?

Bundy: He used both, I think, quite consciously. They were good for different kinds of things, and having both gave him a confidence that he was not missing something.

Matloff: How would you characterize your own style?

Bundy: I think I'd leave that to somebody else.

Matloff: You want the historians to do this. Let's turn to some other substantive topics. On the question of the threat facing American national security when you assumed office, what was your perception of the threat and on what did you base it?

Bundy: There wasn't "the threat," at least for me. Indeed, threat analysis, which starts on the notion that you first have to look at "the threat" and then decide what to do about it never was terribly congenial to me, because it's too easy to identify a threat and then have a policy for it. Take as an example a big one in our years, the complex problem of relationship with the Peoples Republic of China. For reasons that were as much American political reasons as they were international reasons, we had no real prospect of relations with China. But was China a great big threat? That is quite a different question. Whereas there was a certain kind of national security analysis that assumed it was a threat, because it was a country we didn't recognize and that we'd had had a war with, and was a large looming force in Asian affairs. What I am reacting against is the tendency to think that if you have a tough time in relations with a country, that country becomes "a threat." Cuba as "a threat" was a favorite topic. I never thought about Cuba that way. The problem with thinking that Cuba was a great big threat was the problem of difference in size and shape. That there could be threats to specific countries--Central American countries, or some other Caribbean nation, yes, but that the United States was going to be overcome by Cuba, no. I'm not saying many people thought that way, but they sounded that way sometimes.

Matloff: Did you encounter differences in the perception of the threat among the different departments?

Bundy: Yes; within a department there are differences. These are not monolithic subjects; the government is not monolithic, and the departments are not monolithic.

Matloff: Did this raise any problems for you in your position?

Bundy: No, it's normal. On a hard problem, any five people will have different views. That, at least, I was prepared for. That's the way faculties are.

Goldberg: Faculties are worse.

Bundy: We don't have to be invidious in the comparison.

Goldberg: It's difficult not to be.

Matloff: What and who were the dominant influences in strategic policy and planning in the Kennedy administration?

Bundy: What do you mean, nuclear policy and planning? strategy toward other areas and countries?

Matloff: Yes, all of that.

Bundy: Planning is also a tricky word with JFK, because he didn't really make and approve plans. He mostly thought in terms of what we were going to do next.

Matloff: Maybe we should use the words "policy" and "concepts."

Bundy: I think that the president thought it was his responsibility to make those decisions. Clearly in some cases he had to take very careful account of both the opinions and the weight of the opinions, or the political influence of the opinions of other forces, one of which, of course, would be the Defense establishment, and another would be the American political view of a particular course. Take the largest single new decision in nuclear strategy, which was the decision not to build the B-70-- he made that decision himself, and I'm sure it was recommended by McNamara and not recommended by the Joint Chiefs. In the end, he had to work out the compromise,

which was essentially really a victory for him with Chairman Vinson. Nobody but the President could do that.

Matloff: What role did you and your staff play in connection with strategic policy and concepts.

Bundy: Different roles in different cases, and in different years.

Matloff: Can you give examples?

Bundy: We were not central in that; it was fundamentally between the Pentagon and the President, and especially the Secretary and the President. We were, on the other hand, important, I think, in thinking about European policy and Berlin policy, although we were not the only ones, by any means. We were important in sorting out places where there were differences among other branches of the government, and there was some of that with respect to European defense policy. We were important in the more general way that the President used us to find out more about the things that interested him. We were certainly not underemployed; we were busy.

Matloff: Were you and Secretary McNamara agreed on basic strategic concepts?

Bundy: Basic strategic concepts is, again, not a phrase that means too much.

Matloff: To make it more concrete, the Kennedy administration marks the change from massive retaliation to flexible response.

Bundy: That's too sweeping. In my view, the Kennedy administration marks a series of specific decisions, which are each one sensible in its own terms. The full evolution of McNamara's own strategic writings, to include concepts like assured destruction and flexible response, is really longer than the Kennedy administration. JFK's basic proposition would have been the forces he found on hand and on order when he got there were more than enough; that the war plans he was briefed to and the hypothetical war scenarios were enough to persuade him that that was a war that neither side would want.

Matloff: How about on such things as counter-force doctrine?

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Bundy: Counter-force is not so much a doctrine as the acceptance of a phenomenon that a certain kind of accuracy allows you a certain kind of attack plan. I don't think JFK got into that; I know I did not.

Matloff: You weren't aware of McNamara's speeches?

Bundy: Aware, but not interested very much.

Matloff: He didn't clear his speeches then?

Bundy: Of course he did. The major ones.

Goldberg: Especially the one at Athens.

Bundy: We argued about that one, but the argument was over whether he was going to offend the French. It was the Ann Arbor version, the public version, of the same speech that was cleared and amended by the President's own hand.

Matloff: While we are speaking about McNamara, this was the era of systems analysis in defense, one of his innovations. Did you have any view about the use of systems analysis?

Bundy: I think it is a useful tool; it doesn't solve everything. If you don't count in the things you can't quantify, it's dangerous, but I don't think it was used that way.

Matloff: How closely were you following the writings of the strategic theorists, for example, in and out of Rand, during this period?

Bundy: I probably lived on my hump, on what I had learned. I had been following that stuff pretty carefully from Cambridge, which was a good center of strategic analysis in the 1950s. So I don't think I was surprised, particularly, during the early '60s. Most of the best people from Rand were in the Pentagon by then. Harry Rowen was a friend of mine.

Matloff: Brodie was productive in this period. There were also Kaufmann and Wohlstetter.

Bundy: Kaufmann was up at MIT.

Matloff: Writing was still coming out on limited war.

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Bundy: One of the writers on limited war was Bob Osgood, a PhD student of mine.

Matloff: How about the Presidents? How closely did Presidents Kennedy and Johnson follow the developments, say, of military strategy, if I can use that term?

Bundy: I think in the broad sense of following and approving the McNamara decisions on strategic procurement and on strategic non-procurement, they both followed. I think that you could certainly get to a level of complexity of strategic analysis that wouldn't have interested either of them. My own experience, without focusing precisely on these two gentlemen, is that people with political responsibility are not enormously impressed by the differences of analysis among analytic experts as to just what weapons system is likely to have which kind of consequence, because their general picture of nuclear war is that any nuclear war is a political and human disaster. So they are really talking about not getting behind or being seen to be behind, not getting vulnerability, not losing the opportunities to have an improved or a different or a better system, but they are not talking about how that will be useful in counter-force as distinct from counter-city targeting. And they are sensible, because most of the counter-force targeting with the SAC is, in fact, against targets in cities.

Goldberg: Yes, they wanted a bonus effect.

Matloff: Did interservice competition become a problem at all for you?

Bundy: It's a problem for the president, not so much a problem for me, because when it gets to be a tough one, it's going to be his, and the services will want to be sure that he's getting their point of view. That's when you find the air attache or naval aide of the air age [?] will be bringing little pieces of paper to the President to read showing just what is thought by their chief. That's natural; there is nothing wicked about it.

Matloff: Did either of these presidents try to mitigate the rivalry or competition among the services?

Bundy: They were both impatient about it, but I don't think either one made the business of resolving internal Pentagon struggles his primary business.

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Goldberg: It wouldn't have done them much good.

Bundy: I think it is an interesting question. Presidents have weighed there. And there has been gain--Goldwater-Nichols would have been a good idea 20 years earlier.

Goldberg: Even Eisenhower couldn't stomach it, and he knew the bodies.

Bundy: He said so in his notes to himself.

Matloff: How about the defense budget? Were you drawn in on this in any way?

Bundy: We were involved. I was in on a meeting on the defense budget when I learned that JFK had been shot. We had regular annual meetings in budget time of our staff with Bob McNamara and his senior staff.

Matloff: Who actually set the budgetary ceilings for defense in these two administrations?

Bundy: I don't know how it was done. I did not do that. It was between the President, the Secretaries, and the budget director.

Matloff: Some assistants for the President's national security affairs have written that they tried to avoid being drawn in on the budgetary problems. Did you find yourself of the same mind?

Bundy: It varies. You don't get into the budget as such, but we were involved. We were arguing the kind of question as how many new submarines, that sort of thing. Our staff was always a little below McNamara and McNamara didn't usually fight us on the merits. He would say, "This is the smallest I can defend in the Congress."

Matloff: Were you generally satisfied with Defense's share of the federal budget?

Bundy: As I suggested, our general suggestion was that it could have been a little lower in that nuclear field. But we would have been willing to see the money spent somewhere else in defense. It wasn't a big issue.

Matloff: How did the Presidents normally resolve differences with the Secretary of Defense over the defense budget?

Bundy: There was no normal for that; it depends on the case.

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Matloff: How about the influence of domestic constraints on the defense budget, in the Johnson era particularly? Were you more sensitive to that development?

Bundy: I don't know what you mean by constraints. Sometimes domestic opinion wants you to go up more than you want to go and sometimes it wants you to go down more than you want to go. I don't have a strong feeling.

Matloff: The great society era had no bearing on it?

Bundy: I don't say that; I just don't remember it as a big issue, or being very much involved with it.

Matloff: When the administration came in, there was much talk about the missile gap. Did you believe in it?

Bundy: I didn't have any direct personal knowledge, but it soon became apparent that mostly the missile gap was a prediction of a gap, not an assertion of it, in the '50s, as I found out when I came to work on it after I left the government. I think that JFK had been on record that the projected missile gap was a big problem, the Gaither committee's missile gap, and came in with that as part of his political record and discovered that it didn't seem that there was going to be that much of a gap. He sat on that news for a while, in early '61, and then let it come out in a speech by Gilpatric later in that year, a speech that at least some of us thought was largely designed to bolster our Berlin position. It was a speech on the record, and by then all the intelligence agencies had swung around and were saying there wasn't a missile gap. It was, in management terms, a difficult issue, because it was sensitive. That was a complex issue of arranging and getting straight both the estimates and what the President said about the estimates.

Goldberg: What was the reaction to the McNamara press conference for February at the White House?

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Bundy: The President's reaction was, "Oh, dear." He would have thought that that kind of an apparent disagreement of what he'd said as a candidate would come to him before it got into the papers.

Goldberg: Did McNamara hear from him?

Bundy: I forget, if I ever knew. I'm sure McNamara stopped talking about it, and I am sure that was not accidental.

Matloff: You weren't drawn in on the demise of the so-called missile gap?

Bundy: I was. It was in a speech that was officially authorized and reviewed by everybody before it was delivered and Gilpatric's was understood to be an administration statement.

Matloff: Various administrations have called for nuclear superiority, parity, or sufficiency vis-a-vis the Russians. Did you or the Kennedy administration have any feeling on the question?

Bundy: I would say that Kennedy's feeling was that enough was enough, and that he never really felt that he was in that situation.

Matloff: Did you believe in a balanced strategic nuclear triad?

Bundy: It was there when we got there, and there were obvious reasons for its being there and it continued to be there. Turning it into an iron deity didn't happen in our time. Maybe you know what year the word "triad" came into our language.

Goldberg: Sometime in the '60s. You had to have the full emergence of the missiles and the submarines.

Bundy: The first of the submarines wasn't in business until '60.

Matloff: The term gets used later on about the NATO triad.

Bundy: That's a different thing, even less useful as a concept.

Matloff: Let me ask you about another quote--this one from McNamara's volume, The Essence of Security. He said: "...the uniqueness [of thermo-nuclear power] lies in the fact that it is at the same time an all-powerful weapon and a very inadequate

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weapon . . . [that it] does not effectively translate into political control or diplomatic leverage." Would you have gone along with that?

Bundy: I probably wouldn't phrase it exactly that way, but I wouldn't quarrel with it.

Matloff: You mentioned some of the controversial matters in weaponry, for example, the B-70 bomber. There were others in the McNamara administration--controversies over the ABM system, the TFX fighter-bomber, SKYBOLT, nuclear carriers. Were you drawn in on those issues?

Bundy: Some of them. I got into SKYBOLT because it was so immediately international and I was at the Nassau meeting where it came to its final ending and we produced instead the Nassau solution.

Matloff: How about the controversy over an ABM system?

Bundy: I don't remember being much involved in that.

Goldberg: Mostly after your time, I think.

Matloff: McNamara was involved in this one.

Bundy: He stayed a lot longer than I did. You're talking about 1967, I think.

Matloff: Did you generally follow the recommendations of the Defense Department in connection with weapons acquisition and deployment?

Bundy: More often than not, but it is the "not" that is the interesting case.

Matloff: Can you give a "not"?

Bundy: I think the NSC staff was more restrained than the Secretary's recommendations on the kind of marginal addition to strategic forces that came into the budgets of 1962-64--not dramatically, but we thought we had more than enough already. The difference was really not on the merits, but on the political acceptability of going any further than he wanted to go.

Matloff: During the McNamara administration there was also controversy over plans for reorganizing the reserves, merging the reserves with the National Guard--were you drawn in on that?

Bundy: I had a very marginal part in that.

Matloff: On the question of the call-up of reserves for Vietnam?

Bundy: We were not an active force in that, either.

Matloff: The question always comes up about the Johnson role.

Bundy: Johnson was involved in all of these things.

Matloff: I was talking also about Johnson's position on it.

Bundy: His position on this would have been stated directly to the Secretary of State, not to the Secretary of Defense. It would not have been much of a staff issue.

Matloff: From all indications there was a reluctance in calling up the reserves. Did he ever discuss that with you?

Bundy: I remember his reluctance in calling up the reserves, but it would have been more his telling me, than asking me.

Matloff: To shift to international crises that came up during this period--I know you have written on a number of these. In connection with the Bay of Pigs affair, April '61, one of our historians is working on this period. What in your view went wrong with handling the operation and what role, if any, did you play in that operation?

Bundy: We didn't any of us think hard or carefully enough about the ways and means of testing the plausibility of the basic assumptions of the plan. Thinking back on it later, it is clear that we let ourselves be sold by people who were deeply committed to this undertaking and who themselves have since said in print that when they agreed to the President's condition that he wasn't going to use American forces, they were really thinking that if they became engaged, he would back them up. We were so naive that we didn't know that that was where they were coming from. It was a clear-cut consequence of beginners in government judging CIA operational recommendations.

Matloff: Did this operation have any direct impact on the White House review procedures that you were involved with after it was over?

Bundy: In the largest sense the most important conclusion was no more big CIA operations, that the notion of a secret operation that isn't going to involve a "genuinely [?]" non-American landing of thousands of people on a contested shoreline was nonsense to start with. The whole operation was a contradiction in terms. So we didn't have any more of those. But covert operations that tried to be covert did continue, and we still had a lot to learn about how much to believe about them, and they were not very useful. They were really a substitute for action in the case of Cuba after 1961.

Goldberg: Was Maxwell Taylor brought in partly as a result of the Bay of Pigs experience?

Bundy: Yes.

Matloff: Was this part of the tightening of the White House procedures under yourself and Taylor?

Bundy: I think it was the particular need for advice that had military solidity and weight, which the President certainly was not getting from us and didn't feel that he'd had from the Joint Chiefs in that operation. It was not altogether their fault, but they displayed the usual bureaucratic courtesy in not being very severe in judgment on somebody else's plan.

Matloff: No change in your own position as coordinator of national security affairs?

Bundy: I continued to be the Special Assistant, but the President had a new Military Assistant. We had very intense arrangements for cooperation. Max always had a man at my staff meetings, and I usually knew what he was talking to the President about. He and I got on, in human terms, very well. It was no big deal.

Matloff: On the Cuban missile crisis, October 1962, this one was apparently handled differently.

Bundy: It came out better; more people were prepared to say they had a part in it.

Matloff: How did you first learn that there was a crisis?

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Bundy: The notion that there was a potential crisis emerged during the summer and early fall. We took up our firm position that if there ever were Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba it would be a very serious matter, and we gradually got more serious about looking. Eventually we ran the well-known operation after a fight between the Air Force and CIA as to whose plane would do it. I presided over resolving that, although I didn't resolve it. I simply told Gilpatric in Defense and somebody in CIA that either they would settle it or I would tell the President that they could not. As often happens, that produced a settlement. The Air Force made the flight, and then I got the word. The next morning I told the President. That's all in my book.

Matloff: How about your relationship to the EXCOMM that was set up?

Bundy: I ran it administratively. The President ran it in terms of what was discussed, and in terms of decisions.

Matloff: Did you encounter a difference between military views--those represented by General Taylor, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs--vis-a-vis the civilians on the committee?

Bundy: I don't think the committee broke apart that way. Taylor was the only uniformed military man in the meetings regularly. There wasn't that much to put between him and other "moderate hawks." It wasn't a military-civilian split.

Matloff: Were you aware of the differences that developed between McNamara and the Navy?

Bundy: I don't remember when I learned about them, but I've known about them for about 25 years now. No doubt that they both have strong views.

Goldberg: Invidious ones, of each other.

Matloff: What lessons did you draw about dealing with the Soviets from this crisis?

Bundy: I think it's very unwise for either side to try and steal a secret march on the other; that's the most important thing. Secondly, it's important to do better than we did in predicting what they would do, because clearly we didn't expect this. It's also

very dangerous for them not to predict our reaction, which, whoever made that decision, clearly hadn't thought through.

Matloff: Why did the system work better in this case than in the Bay of Pigs affair, from your perspective?

Bundy: They are very different episodes. This one is presented to us as a démarche by the other side and we have already thought about whether it was acceptable and decided and announced that it would not be acceptable. It's how we respond. The Bay of Pigs is somebody else's plan--another administration and another branch. It's CIA-planned and prepared at the instance of another president. It is sitting there and if you decide not to do it, you are the men who wouldn't execute the brave plan put together by the five-star general. I've always thought afterwards--Kennedy never said this to me--that the problem of not going ahead, as a beginner, with this package left on his table by a very distinguished senior figure, was hard. This [the Cuban missile crisis] wasn't like that, but it was important to sort it out. We had time to sort it out by the good fortune of having discovered it while it was still a secret. Crises of that kind are best taken on their own terms, each one, and not comparatively.

Goldberg: You also had another year and a half of experience in office.

Bundy: And we knew each other; that makes a big difference.

Matloff: To go to the Berlin crisis, 1961-62, including the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, were you drawn in on this one, and what was your role?

Bundy: We were involved in the consideration of contingency possibilities and reviewing the work of task forces of one kind or another and in responding to changes like the change of the wall, itself, so we were involved in it all the way through.

Matloff: Did you get involved in the problem of whether the reserves should be called up or not?

Bundy: Yes, but the decision about calling the reserves is very presidential and very departmental. It's not very interdepartmental.

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Matloff: How about the question of a civil defense program, which arose? Dr. Edward Teller was taking a very strong position.

Bundy: Yes, but he wasn't the main reason. If any outsider was, it was Nelson Rockefeller. We were involved in it, and so were people in the Pentagon. I think it was a mistake to get the civil defense issue and the Berlin issue intertwined, because it suggested to people that the Berlin crisis might evolve into a nuclear crisis with a kind of a rapidity and urgency that accounted for putting that particular policy departure into a speech that was mainly about Berlin.

Matloff: Did you draw any conclusions from this episode about dealing with the Russians?

Bundy: There were a lot of different elements in it. The most important one was that, as a crisis between the U.S. and the USSR, after the wall it did not get worse; it simmered down.

Matloff: How about the problem of NATO, did you become involved with the policies, buildup and strategy?

Bundy: We were involved all the time. We were not directly, operationally, involved, but we were watching it. The one that engaged us particularly was because of my own feeling that the State Department was pressing the case for the multilateral force beyond what the President wanted. That's all spread on the record; there's nothing new about that.

Matloff: Did the President see NATO as a permanent U.S. commitment?

Bundy: NATO was a response to a cold war threat. The cold war threat looked like a threat of indefinite duration. Nobody was sitting around in the early '60s saying that the cold war would end in 1989.

Matloff: There is even some question as to whether Eisenhower viewed it in his original endorsement of the whole idea as a permanent one.

Goldberg: He never did.

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Bundy: He kept saying we shouldn't have six divisions there, but they were there when he came and they were there when he left.

Matloff: How about on the question of the possible reduction of U.S. troops, which perennially came up in Congress--was this ever drawn to your attention?

Bundy: We had it as a regular issue, but I think the political realities were that the political signal conveyed by a reduction of troops was not worth the very marginal savings that would come from that.

Matloff: You mentioned China earlier. Were the initiatives to China that were later taken by Nixon and Kissinger anticipated in any way during these years?

Bundy: People looked at the general possibilities of an opening to China, but I would say that in the Kennedy administration, when the President looked at that, his basic conclusion was that that was second term business. A newly elected Democratic President ought not to try, in the then-existing political environment, both in terms of the behavior and talk of the Chinese and in terms of the balance of opinion of the friends of China and of Nationalist China in the United States. What he would have done in his second term we will never know. In Johnson's case, it got overtaken by Vietnam.

Matloff: This brings us to Vietnam. What did you think was at stake for American security or national interests in that involvement? What was your attitude toward our involvement?

Bundy: Let's leave the Kennedy years apart because the decision was not presented with the same sharpness and force as in 1965. The most important consideration for Lyndon Johnson, one that I agreed with at the time, was that this was not the time to lose. Not that there is ever a good time to lose, but the American people would not understand or support a president who accepted defeat in Vietnam in 1965.

Goldberg: In retrospect, what is your view?

Bundy: In retrospect, that it wasn't going to work, and the sooner we found that out and acted on it the better off we would have been.

Goldberg: Regardless of the American people's feelings?

Bundy: No, that's a hard matter. You'd have to accept that risk and that loss and you'd have to have a president who was willing to accept it. LBJ certainly wasn't in 1965. I think it was a loser, and it would have been a less expensive loser if accepted sooner.

Matloff: To go back to the Kennedy years, had you believed in the domino theory?

Bundy: There's an influence, that what happens in one country affects what happens in another, yes, but that you could push one domino and knock the rest over, in its extreme form--Foster Dulles said that if we lost the offshore islands we would lose Japan--I never believed that. But I did believe that the next door country would be affected.

Matloff: How about the question of increasing the number of American advisers, an early decision made by Kennedy, were you drawn in on that one?

Bundy: Sure, but I wasn't ever my own chief Asian expert. I don't really remember whether Walt or I had the more to do in staff work. The basic recommendations and decision-making were not, I think, central White House staff matters, but neither did we violently oppose it.

Matloff: I remember one night after being called from my office in the Army historical office, working with a task force in the Pentagon trying to find out how many advisers we had. When Kennedy got the number, he said to double it.

What were your impressions of Diem? Were you surprised when the coup actually took place?

Bundy: Not at that time, because by then we knew that our policy was not to discourage, indeed, to clearly not discourage, a coup. They may have been more active out there, but I don't have any precise sense of the right way to describe what they thought their mandate was.

Matloff: Do you have any estimate, in retrospect, of the consequences of the death of Diem for American interests?

Bundy: I never thought that it was wrong to be for a change there, leaving aside the question of life and death. I think that anyone who wants to argue that it would have been better with Diem has an uphill road.

Matloff: How about the impact on the American involvement as a result of his death?

Bundy: It certainly didn't help in terms of any plan to disengage. It would have been better to leave him there and wash our hands of it and blame him, if that was the decision; but it wasn't the decision to get out.

Matloff: Do you recall why there was a feeling among American officials in 1963 that Americans would be able to end their military role by the end of 1965?

Bundy: I don't know how many people thought that, and the process by which the small reduction that was made toward the end of Kennedy's life was worked out is a matter about which you should ask Bob [McNamara].

Matloff: Were you encouraged, discouraged, or had you come to any conclusions about the American involvement at the time of Kennedy's death?

Bundy: We had been discouraged for months; either with or without Diem, things had been going badly most of 1963.

Matloff: To turn now to the Johnson role, was your role in connection with Vietnam any different under Johnson?

Bundy: They are always different, because no two presidents are alike, but I am not sure I know how to spell that out.

Matloff: Did he consult you, for example, in connection with the Tonkin Gulf resolution?

Bundy: He told me about that one; he had made up his mind by the time I saw him that day.

Matloff: How about the two crucial decisions in 1965--to bomb north of the 17th parallel and to commit ground combat troops?

Bundy: I was involved in those, closely involved in the staff work and the planning, but the President's decisions, as he would have been the first to say, were very much his own. I'm not saying I was against them, but that he was making up his own mind.

Goldberg: And telling you about it afterwards.

Bundy: Very often, or letting me find out by what he put in the papers.

Matloff: Did you consult with the Secretaries of State and Defense on policy and strategy toward Vietnam?

Bundy: In a straightforward sense, all the time.

Matloff: Were your views different in any way from theirs?

Bundy: In any way, of course they were different.

Matloff: Do you want to indicate in what way?

Bundy: It's much too general a question.

Matloff: How about the policy of gradualism toward Vietnam?

Bundy: That's again too general. There were times when I was in favor of more, times when I wasn't in favor of more, times when the recommendation came out of left field and was approved before I heard about it; it doesn't lend itself to the sort of general answer that your general question asks.

Goldberg: You sound entirely too normal about all this.

Bundy: Absolutely.

Matloff: On the question of bombing Vietnam--in this case McNamara's views apparently underwent somewhat of a change. There came a time when he called for a bombing halt. This may have been after your time.

Bundy: No, there was one before I left, in 1965.

Matloff: Do you recall how you felt about that?

Bundy: I think I was marginally in favor of it, perhaps more than marginally. I thought we ought to try it. I became less enthusiastic about bombing halts after they didn't work, three or four times, but that was mostly after I left the government.

Matloff: Did you find that your own views and those of the president, particularly Johnson, were diverging more and more about this war?

Bundy: Again, too general. Yes is the answer; for example, by 1968 I was definitely for cutting back.

Goldberg: You were gone already by then.

Bundy: But I was in touch on Vietnam, intermittently. And he called me back a couple of times to those "wise men's meetings." I was one of the principal people telling him that it wasn't working, that the country couldn't go on on this course after Tet.

Broadly speaking, I had been less optimistic a little bit in the 1967 meeting, and I became definitely of the view that the thing to do was to cut our losses there. I didn't think there was going to be any good result from it, but I thought continuing the war was worse. That was where we really came to a parting of the ways.

Goldberg: You were getting on a more parallel course with McNamara, or vice versa.

Bundy: I don't really know how Bob evolved in 1966-67, because I wasn't there. He certainly didn't ever tell me, or anybody else that I know of, that he was in disagreement with ^{LBJ?} JFK, so I don't know where we were vis-a-vis one another in 1967-68, but we found ourselves in considerable agreement.

Matloff: In connection with systems analysis and the Vietnam War, it might be a little bit out of your bailiwick, but you may have some thoughts about this. In Alain Enthoven's book, the one he wrote with K. Wayne Smith, How Much Is Enough?, he wrote, "The Systems Analysis office did not have a prominent, much less a crucial, role in the Vietnam War. . . . In Vietnam, no one insisted on systematic efforts to understand, analyze, or interpret the war. . . this most complex of wars never got serious and systematic analysis." Elsewhere in this book he even suggests that the problem in the conduct of the war from Washington was not "overmanagement," but "undermanagement." The puzzle here is that, given the McNamara administration's

strong interests in management and quantification, how do you account for this development, if you accept it as correct?

Bundy: I can recognize it; I know the man whose mind it's coming from; it's not the way I would think about understanding the Vietnam War. I think it was an enormously complicated war, in an enormously complicated judgment situation, in which nobody, I think, with any sensitivity, would claim that he or she at any given point had fully understood it. That would be true on both sides, but broadly speaking, the North understood what it was doing better than we understood how we were resisting. You can think of individuals who understood parts of it very well; and individuals who didn't understand any part of it at all. I have never studied Vietnam as a scholar, or participated in it except at the considerable distance of senior White House staff. But what I understand about it is that I didn't understand a lot of it, but I would not look to systems analysis to sort it out, although very likely the first thing Enthoven would say was that he doesn't mean punching a computer, and that it is really a more complicated matter than that seems to suggest, etc. It's too much of an area for me to give you a brisk answer to.

Matloff: It's rather important from the point of view of defense on the perspectives on the McNamara era.

Bundy: I think the current retrospective defense perspectives on Vietnam are mostly wrong, but that's a separate subject.

Matloff: This is just one facet of it, of course, something historians of the future are going to have to wrestle with. I was wondering if you could suggest in what respects, from your contemplation of it, Vietnam was different from previous wars in which the U.S. had engaged.

Bundy: The war it's most nearly like is Korea, and it's enormously different because of the enormous differences between the internal situations in the two countries.

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Matloff: Do you have any thoughts about whether the United States failed in Vietnam, and if so, was it a failure of military policy, national policy?

Bundy: It obviously did fail, that's very clear. The basic correlation of forces among people on the spot was deeply against us and nothing that we were able to do, or, in my view, could have done, short of waging nuclear war on North Vietnam, would have turned that around. The war was lost on the ground because the people against us were so much stronger through time than the people who were with us.

Goldberg: Did you feel, as others did, that China loomed in the background if we actually engaged in large scale ground war in North Vietnam itself, if we invaded North Vietnam itself?

Bundy: I don't myself recall being sharply engaged in a big discussion of a large scale invasion of the North; I don't remember anybody who recommended that. Anybody who recommends it now is trying to get it late.

Goldberg: What was the feeling about the role of China in relation to North Vietnam and the war?

Bundy: Certainly we didn't want the Chinese to come in; the recollections of the Korean blunder were very strong. Probably the Koreans and Chinese had their own recollections of Korea in which their enthusiasm for getting into the war was lower than we thought we ought to think, but I myself don't think that the varied calculations about the Chinese danger and varied inhibitions on our behavior up near the Chinese border are anything but marginal to the larger issue I was just discussing.

Matloff: In the post-Vietnam literature, for example, even the writing by people like Robert Osgood, looking back on what he and other theorists had recommended about limited war, he has done a mea culpa on the question of American public opinion, that they didn't take into account what the impact would be in a protracted limited war, that was a mistake that he and other theorists had made. I don't know whether you would go along with that or not.

Bundy: I don't recall his opinion on that. If the American people had been three years more patient, we simply would have lost more expensively.

Matloff: Let me ask you about one other operation, aside from Vietnam--the Dominican operation of 1965-66. Were you drawn in on this one?

Bundy: I was, indeed; he sent me down there.

Matloff: Did he?

Bundy: Partly to get me out of town.

Matloff: Why?

Bundy: Because I was about to have a debate on Vietnam and he didn't want me debating Hans Morgenthau, They called it off, and had it when I got back. I went to it, and the President got mad all over again.

Matloff: What was your role in connection with the Dominican Republic?

Bundy: He sent a mission of us--me to talk to the political side and Vance to talk to the military sides; no, Vance to talk to the organized military, me to talk to Camanos [?] and his people, and we were supposed to copper together some sort of arrangement that could then lead on to elections. We thought we got a pretty good one, but he wouldn't accept it. Eventually he sent Bunker down, and Bunker got an arrangement that was much like the one we got, but a little bit safer. Three months later the President was ready to go with it. So I was close to that one.

Matloff: Did you draw any lessons from that?

Bundy: That was not a bad operation, if you say that there is a kind of obligation on the United States not to have too much bloody civil war in the Caribbean. If you say that it was a big Communist threat, you are saying something I don't believe and didn't believe at the time. By the time I got strongly in it, the troops were already there, and the problem was how to get out. I think Johnson's entry there was a bit hasty and a bit overdone, but the negotiations to get out (whether they were too long or not is

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another question) were managed pretty well, and the Dominican Republic has done pretty well since, by their own historic standards.

I was involved in the Dominican Republic as a staff officer watching the process when the President decided to put the troops in. My most intense involvement came when he sent me down there to see if the team he sent could work out a peaceful conclusion to the enterprise, after the landing and first suppression of the fighting. We were there for some little time, a week or two, working on a compromise solution, which we thought we had. Vance had been negotiating with the organized military and I was negotiating with the rebels, and then we were meeting together and putting together plans to which we got, we thought, conditional agreement. We recommended that to Johnson and he wouldn't approve it, and eventually called us back. An agreement not too different from the one we had worked out was eventually produced some months later by Ellsworth Bunker, who had spent a long summer working on it. Johnson, I think, was very sensible--cautious, with respect to our own proposal, but sensible about the general notion of working toward a compromise agreement. One man who had a great influence on that was his friend, Abe Fortas, who knew Juan Bosch and, in fact, recommended that Johnson somehow explore what Bosch might have to say and do. When I was sent to the Dominican Republic, I was sent by way of Puerto Rico to talk to Bosch, who was in self-imposed exile at the time, and who didn't, in fact, go back. It was clear that Bosch, himself, was not the answer to the problem of finding somebody that could be the head of a government of some kind of peace and reconciliation. He assisted us in getting friendly responses from others among the rebels when we got there, so, in a sense, the visit was useful. The whole enterprise was very Johnsonian--in the scale of the initial military intervention (he didn't want to be in a position of not having enough strength) and in the tempered character of the eventual resolution.

Matloff: On general questions about the Cold War, did you believe that containment was a realistic policy, that its assumptions were valid, or did you envisage detente as a more realistic policy?

Bundy: I think that on that, as on some of your other questions, my answer would be yes and no. When you had a case of clear-cut pressure for a unilateral advantage by the Soviet Union, then yes, containment was usually indicated, although not every case was the same. I've already said that in my view, as I look back on it, Vietnam was not a good place to try and hold the line—not the middle of Vietnam. But yes, of course, there was really a series of issues between the Soviet Union and the West, broadly speaking, and in that context, I think containment made a great deal of sense. I would be more sympathetic to George Kennan's view of what's necessary for containment than I would be to Paul Nitze's view, but that's a difference within a broad support for containment. When you ask if that means I reject detente, not at all. Detente begins, certainly, with Eisenhower, and continues with Kennedy and Johnson on particular kinds of issues.

Goldberg: It's also implicit in containment.

Bundy: In a way. Containment is, itself, less than open warfare.

Goldberg: Certainly Kennan kept saying that for years afterward.

Matloff: How effective did you view military aid, on the basis of your experience, study, and reflection, as a tool for political leverage in the Cold War? Can you give some examples?

Bundy: I think that military assistance is a necessary and constructive operation in cases where there really is a threat to the military, and associated with it the political security and self-confidence of a country, and where the country can make reasonable use of the assistance. Where the problem comes is, when you get an unlimited appetite and interlocking "if you don't help them now, they won't trust you," and the process can begin to generate its own momentum rather than the momentum of a real

requirement. That has happened in a number of different places at a number of different times. There tends to be, also, a mutually reinforcing enthusiasm for military assistance on the part of both the giving and the receiving military, so that people want to support their friends. I think you have to be wary about the bureaucratic and military-political tendency to turn this into a sort of enterprise with its own justification, which, since it's expensive and since it can stimulate regional competition, it's very dangerous to let that go at its own speed.

Matloff: Would this have been an area where your office and yourself would have been drawn in?

Bundy: Area by area, we would have been, yes. We were constantly involved in things like whether there should be military assistance to Israel--that's how far back we were, it hadn't even begun--and how far we should go in supporting the Pakistanis; what should be the position toward Turkey, etc. Those are continuing and recurrent issues.

Matloff: Did you find the views of OSD on this in any way different from yours?

Bundy: OSD isn't one body on this. Different parts of it have different opinions.

Matloff: On the question of relations with the Russians, did you come away with any lessons from the two presidents you served and their experiences with the summit meetings, for example--lessons about their effectiveness, necessary preparations, etc?

Bundy: I don't think summit meetings are a category apart; they are a part of a process, and it's foolish either to be too worried about them or too hopeful about them. We had, in an immediate sense, a not very productive meeting in Vienna, but neither was it a very damaging meeting. I think people tend to exaggerate both praise and criticism about summits, generically. That's the only one that Kennedy had with Khrushchev, and Johnson had a meeting with Kosygin which was useful, but not cosmic, and, of course, did not persuade him that defensive missiles were bad for you.

Goldberg: Was that meeting chiefly at McNamara's instigation?

Bundy: McNamara was the prime witness, but he didn't set up the meeting.

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Goldberg: Did he push Johnson to hold it?

Bundy: No, I don't remember it that way. I should add that I was not in the government then. I went to the meeting because I had been called back in to be the staff officer for the Six-Day War.

Matloff: How about on arms control and disarmament--did your views in any way differ from those of the presidents you served?

Bundy: I don't think sharply with JFK. I don't think that arms control got to be a very lively enterprise in the time I was in the Johnson administration, but with Kennedy the big effort was to get a test ban. We were very much on the same wavelength on that. I had an incidental role in it in that one of the things that I was the staff man for was nuclear testing. You remember that the Soviets broke the temporary lull in testing in the fall of 1961 with a series of tests. In a sense, we tested back in the fall and spring of 1961-62. They tested again, in late 1962 or early 1963. In early 1963, not long after the missile crisis, the recommendation came to Kennedy to resume atmospheric testing. He said he wasn't going to do that, that he didn't see any need for it. I said, "If you really think that, why don't you put it in the peace speech." And that's what eventually happened. He did say that we would have no more atmospheric tests unless other people did, and that led to the atmospheric test ban treaty. The particular exchange just happens to be the consequence of being close to each other and knowing where each other was coming from.

Matloff: How about on the comprehensive test ban treaty?

Bundy: The comprehensive test ban treaty was, in the end, prevented by a relatively narrow but fairly deep difference over the numbers of inspections that would be politically and scientifically necessary and acceptable. That never happened, and is a very complicated argument. Some people think we were so close that if it had been done a little better, we would have gotten a comprehensive treaty; I'm very doubtful about that.

Matloff: Did you have any role to play in the establishment of ACDA?

Bundy: I was involved in the staff work around it. Everybody wanted one, and the president got Jack McCloy and put him to work on being the congressional salesman for it, which he did brilliantly. The price that they exacted was one that we were delighted to make McCloy pay, which was that he should be the first chairman of the general advisory committee.

Matloff: How about the non-proliferation treaty that came later, signed in July 1968?

Bundy: People were working on it, but it got to be serious business when Lyndon Johnson told Dean Rusk he wanted that treaty. That was one on one, and was after I was out of the government.

Matloff: The SALT talks were postponed until the next administration, and nothing came of the groundwork being laid at this point.

Bundy: The NPT happened, in 1968.

Matloff: But not SALT, which was postponed until the next administration. On whose advice were Kennedy and Johnson relying more heavily in the efforts in the field of arms control and disarmament? Were they leaning on the Sec/Def, Sec/State, ACDA, the National Security Adviser?

Bundy: I think all of the above. I think the balance in the test ban process would have been with Wiesner, McNamara, Seaborg, and me, something like that order. It would always be a calculation of what you could get away with politically, because in terms of the rational argument the notion that it would be better not to test was one he liked.

Matloff: On the basis of your experience and reflection, what was your judgment of the overall structure and working relationships in the U.S. national security system? How effective was the system working in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations?

Bundy: I don't ask myself if the system works. There are parts of the system that work very well and there are parts of it that are a nuisance. There are complexities which will be different, depending on a particular issue and the particular players. I think it's rare

that a particular legislative change makes a distinctive improvement. That appears to have happened since my time, in Goldwater-Nichols, but I am still inclined to think that that's largely because of Scowcroft and Powell and the state of mind in the place where the Chiefs operate. The Joint Staff and the other Chiefs find it works better this way, and they are telling the Congress that it works better this way. This is a piece of legislation that landed in a favoring environment with favoring personal attitudes toward it, and has, I think, done a lot of good.

Goldberg: But the Navy and the Marines certainly were not in favor of it.

Bundy: But they are not against it now. Not all of them, or not as much. You know better than I. The Navy doesn't want to join anybody.

Goldberg: And the Marines even less so.

Bundy: That's right.

Matloff: How satisfied were the presidents, to your knowledge, with the working and effectiveness of DoD?

Bundy: Both of the presidents I worked for during that time had great confidence in the Secretary of Defense and, broadly speaking, agreed with him that it was his job to run the Department of Defense and bring to them only the problems that it made sense for them to decide. I think, myself, that a price was paid for that, in that the kind of relationship that the Chiefs got used to in World War II, in which their real boss, in operational decisional terms, was the President. They missed that in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Goldberg: They were different people, though.

Bundy: I understand that, and I'm not saying that they were right; I'm only saying that the state of mind is a persistent one.

Goldberg: They knew what they would have preferred, certainly.

Matloff: Was military advice in policy formulation at the level of these presidents that you served adequate, in your view?

Bundy: That's too broad.

Matloff: Can you think of any cases where it was not?

Bundy: They obviously didn't do the job he thought he was asking them to do when he asked them to review the Bay of Pigs. A professional military officer would have said, "If you ask me whether I would approve this plan, the answer is no." And they didn't say that.

Goldberg: There are bound to be differences between the administration--between the President in the White House and the military. They have different agendas.

Bundy: The military don't think they are prescient. They would rather have the President disagree with them than deceive them. There are cases where understanding where the other side was coming from broke down, that, in my own view, needn't have broken down. This was, in part, the very clear-cut "buck stops here, and I will talk to the President" attitude of the Secretary of Defense, which I respected, but it isn't the way I would behave if I were Secretary of Defense. I would want to be sure that the Chiefs knew that the President had listened to them.

Goldberg: Did Taylor help a lot in the relationship between the White House and the Secretary?

Bundy: He did his very best, and I think he did help. And I think that the Chiefs felt that he was helpful. It's not their idea of an ideal substitute, that a former Chief should be over in the White House partly between them and the President.

Goldberg: They preferred him as Chairman rather than military assistant in the White House.

Bundy: I would have thought so, I don't really know.

Goldberg: What occasioned his moving from the White House to that position?

Bundy: Vacancy in the chairmanship.

Goldberg: Yes, but why Taylor, already retired?

Bundy: He's the man you most trust, and he's a perfectly good, clear-cut, respected four-star officer. You don't want two.

Goldberg: Did McNamara have anything to do with it?

Bundy: I don't really know. I don't recall being directly involved in it.

Goldberg: It's been suggested that he preferred to have Taylor in the Pentagon rather than in the White House.

Bundy: Taylor may have wanted to do the job. That was between the two of them.

Matloff: How would you characterize the styles, personalities, and effectiveness of the Secretary of Defense and other top officials in OSD who served in the two administrations? Did you have any impressions of the way they operated and how effective they were?

Bundy: The ones I have mentioned were all able people, and they were all doing their very best in very hard jobs. People tend to have defects of their qualities. McNamara was very much of a "carry the duty," responsible decision-maker, and also extraordinarily disciplined and responsive to the judgments and guidance of the President, but not anybody else. He was respectful of Rusk's territory. They were respectful of each other. They had an offensive and defensive alliance and would never be found criticizing each other, and they never were. These are fine people, and I'm not prepared to sit in judgment on them.

Goldberg: What about the military attitude toward McNamara, which was often invidious?

Bundy: That's a very complicated subject. I don't think that there is such a thing as "the military attitude," especially when you ask what his own chiefs thought of him. You might get a sort of black and white view from LeMay, and maybe from the Navy man who was supposed to have had the row with him; you may have all this in black and white. These aren't my views. None of them ever blew his stack to me in a separate corner, so I'm not a good witness.

Goldberg: The interesting phenomenon is that this feeling persists to this day among people who were only junior officers back in those days.

Bundy: It's certainly true that the younger officers have inherited the view that McNamara's is the wrong way to run the Pentagon. I'm familiar with that; it gets out into the public prints all the time. I'm questioning whether the senior military on the scene at the time were that unanimous.

Matloff: How about your impressions of Dean Rusk? Certainly McNamara was deferential to him.

Bundy: It worked both ways. Rusk was not trying to do the Pentagon's business. He had a very deep-seated view that one thing he did not want was ever to have any daylight between his position and the president's position. Therefore, until the president had a position, he didn't have one, very often. That meant that a lot of people were flying blind, including the President. "What does Rusk think?" "We don't know what he thinks, Mr. President, because he hasn't said yet." It's a complicator, and it's for a very good reason. He was never hesitant, I am sure, one on one, in telling the President exactly what he thought.

Matloff: The only irritation I found in Rusk about the McNamara period was the business of setting up the Pentagon Papers. I think Rusk felt that he should have been consulted.

Bundy: There's no question that McNamara was doing what he thought was a totally private matter, and it stayed totally private until it got into the hands of the egregious Ellsberg.

Matloff: We were having a very fine interview until Rusk said, "Did you have anything to do with the Pentagon Papers?" I indicated that I did not, and everything worked out all right.

Goldberg: I was recruited, but I didn't accept.

Matloff: Were there any others in the field of national security that particularly impressed you, either in DoD or outside, of whom we have not spoken?

Bundy: There were a lot of good people in that administration, and I wouldn't want to suggest that leaving somebody out means that he wasn't any good, because I don't feel that way about it. I used the term "he," which shows how long ago it was. I have a wife who keeps track of my use of these pronouns.

Matloff: Any further thoughts about either of the presidents as commanders in chief and directors of national security policy?

Bundy: I think the thing to remember about JFK is that he was only president for less than three years, and that he was learning all the time. I think he knew, by the end of 1963, that he understood that constituency and that they understood him. I think he felt at home with the American military. Yes, there were individuals, in his case probably only Gen. LeMay, who bothered him. Even Gen. LeMay didn't bother JFK as much as he bothered Bob McNamara. But on the general proposition--he was well on the track of the ways and means of being a first class commander in chief. He would have understood the book by Larrabee about FDR as a commander in chief. It's a remarkable book and it describes the problem of a politician, which is what the commander in chief is, and has to be, as commander in chief. Johnson had other qualities, but he had, I think, a difficult built-in characteristic, which was that his notion of action had been framed in the Congress, which meant legislation, compromise, getting the majority. He negotiated with his military, in the sense that you have to take account of where they are coming from and think about their imperatives in a political way, as FDR did about MacArthur's command and the Pacific command--Admiral King's basic view that war was really only interesting where the Navy could find it. Very understandable--Marshall's view, Ike's view, and all the rest--but he thought about them and about what his orders should be. Johnson, I think, deeply thought, "What I want is to have the country sit still while we do what we have to do in

Vietnam. I don't want to lose there, and I don't want my generals complaining. Somebody's got to go and get me a bargain. So McNamara, you go and negotiate and tell me what they will live with out there." It was a different temper, a legislator's temper, and that's what Johnson really was.

Goldberg: But not Kennedy.

Bundy: Kennedy was still a junior commander.

Goldberg: But he had the legislative spirit.

Matloff: One final question: What do you regard as your major achievements in the area of national security during the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies? And, conversely, what disappointed you the most?

Bundy: The disappointment is easy, because it is clear that if you had it to do over again, you would try to do better in whatever advice and help you gave on Vietnam. You don't naturally think very much about particular personal achievements when you are thinking about what is, in the end, a job of trying to help somebody else. You are working for the President. You are trying help him do his job, which, God knows, is enormous. I think that, broadly speaking, the way I look back on that is that you did the best you could. You certainly didn't get it all right, but you didn't get it all wrong, and on the whole you were useful to a couple of people that you tried to help, who had that crazy job.

Goldberg: It's my impression that you had a limited view of the role of the Assistant for National Security; that you felt that you should not intrude on the Secretary of State's or Secretary of Defense's position in relation to the President, that they were the primary advisers. And yet, at the same time, the position achieved a great deal more public recognition, or publicity, partly presumably because of what was happening during these years. Is that accurate?

Bundy: I don't think I would be the best judge about the public recognition question. I think it is true that I was more visible than others who had held it. The job, in this

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particular form of Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, begins with Ike and Cutler. Cutler had it twice, two or three others had it, and then it was Gordon Gray. All of them played Mr. Inside. They didn't talk to the press; they didn't go on TV shows; they didn't do much seeing of ambassadors or other foreign visitors. All of those I did do, really because the two presidents wanted me to. I dare say that being relatively young, one of the visitors from Cambridge, and all that, gave the press something to hang its hat on. So I think you are right; there was somewhat higher visibility. I didn't try to do, and I think the two Secretaries knew I didn't try to do, their jobs. In a measure, a part of the reporting and advisory job with respect to international politics, and more there than with respect to international military or defense issues, although there was some of that, became a part of my portfolio, and when there was a disagreement, sometimes the department's second and third level people thought, "Bundy is trying to take over our job." I don't think the Secretary thought that. He may occasionally have thought there was trouble from the White House, but he was inclined to blame it on other people.

Goldberg: Do you think the scope of the job became larger, whether you wanted it to or not, during this period?

Bundy: In the terms of public visibility and in terms of my holding of the job along the spectrum, there is an upgrading or a change in the apparent magnitude of the job. People coming into a new administration will want it more, afterward, than they did before. But how to quantify that or explain it or sort it out? The real qualitative jump in the job comes, I think, when you get a president who really actively doesn't trust the bureaucracy and actively believes in the positive advantage in secrecy from your own bureaucracy.

Goldberg: And we know his name. Were you consciously and deliberately restrained in offering advice and recommendations to the Presidents because of your concept of the role that you should play?

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Bundy: No, I had no sense that I shouldn't say to the President what I thought; in fact, quite the reverse. I would have thought that he was entitled to know.

Goldberg: No initiatives?

Bundy: I don't know. I have suggested that the particular case of be the one to announce that you are not having any more atmospheric tests--that's a relatively tactical suggestion, but not a trivial one. You are constantly saying, "Don't you think we ought to do this?", or "Maybe we ought to ease up on old so-and-so," but your first job is that he should have the dope he needs. The ones I remember with regret are the ones where we didn't do that, whether it's look harder at the Bay of Pigs, or let's ask ourselves whether the thing in Vietnam would ever work.

Matloff: We want to thank you for your cooperation and for sharing your recollections and insights with us.

Bundy: You are very cordial and friendly interrogators.