

Matloff: This is an oral history interview with Mr. Robert F. Ellsworth held in Washington, D.C., on September 2, 1988, at 9:30 a.m. The interview will be recorded on tape and a copy of the transcript will be sent to Mr. Ellsworth for his review. Representing the OSD Historical Office is Dr. Maurice Matloff.

Mr. Ellsworth, as we indicated in our letter of March 17, 1987, we shall focus in this interview particularly on your roles as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, 1974-75, and as Deputy Secretary of Defense, 1975-77. By way of background, would you discuss your contacts with OSD and with Secretaries of Defense before your appointment as ASD(ISA) in June of 1974. For example, concentrating first on your service from 1961 to 1967 in the House of Representatives as a member from Kansas, what contacts, if any, did you have with the Department of Defense in that capacity?

Ellsworth: Very few. I wasn't on any of the Defense-related committees. The only contact I really had was as a freshman congressman. I came in before the Eisenhower administration had left town and started lobbying immediately with it. I continued lobbying with the Pentagon in the Kennedy administration, in particular with Secretary of the Navy Connally, with regard to a decision that had been made under the Eisenhower administration to close down a naval air station in my district. I tried fiercely to get that decision reversed, but did not succeed with either the Eisenhower or the Kennedy Pentagon. I would say that that was essentially my main contact with the DoD when I was a congressman.

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Ellsworth: At the time he just said that he didn't get along well with Schlesinger. A lot of people didn't get along with Schlesinger.

Matloff: Did you take away any lessons from the handling of that incident on the part of United States?

Ellsworth: No, I think not.

Matloff: In another crisis, the dispute over the Cyprus issue between Greece and Turkey in July of 1974, did you agree with Secretary of Defense Schlesinger's publicly stated view that Turkey had gone too far in its military intervention in Cyprus, and the implication that military and economic aid should be reassessed toward Turkey?

Ellsworth: Yes.

Matloff: Was this an issue on which he consulted with you and your office?

Ellsworth: I suppose so.

Matloff: What was your recommendation on this? Did you recommend curtailing arms sales to Turkey?

Ellsworth: I don't remember. I suppose so.

Matloff: Ford was opposed to curtailing it; he didn't want to curtail sales to a NATO ally. Kissinger favored continuing military aid. Congress prohibited arms sales in the act of 1974 and Ford eventually signed the act.

Ellsworth: I was sent over to Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece, along with Joe Sisco of the State Department. We flew to London and met with the Prime Minister of Turkey, who was a poet, and a student of Kissinger--Ecevit--and with British foreign officers. Britain was a party to an agreement which

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governed relations between Greece and Turkey with regard to Cyprus issues. So we tried to reinvigorate and rejuvenate that.

Matloff: When was this?

Ellsworth: In the summer of 1974, during the period of the crisis. Then we flew to Athens for the purpose of meeting with the dictator of Greece, Ioannides, and trying to persuade him to cool things down and to enter into diplomatic and political dialogue with Turkey rather than declaring war. Then we flew to Ankara and met with Ecevit and the war council to try to get them to hold back and not declare war. Then we shuttled back to Athens and Ankara again. We kicked up a lot of dust in an effort to get the parties to settle the issues instead of declaring war. It was prevented, just barely. Both in Athens and Turkey they were getting ready for war. So I was out of town during that period of time. We would call Kissinger from over there and get him out of whichever gala he was attending at the time. Kissinger couldn't understand why his former student Ecevit wouldn't do exactly what he was told. He would want to talk to him, and we wouldn't know what either of them said. It was an interesting episode.

Matloff: A recalcitrant student.

Ellsworth: That's the way Kissinger saw the whole thing.

Matloff: You took office less than a year after the end of the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Did you play any role in the administration's efforts in the wake of that conflict to defuse potential conflict in the Middle East--for example, in connection with setting up that buffer zone in the Sinai?

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