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MCGEORGE BUNDY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW I
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MCGEORGE BUNDY

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Mary L. Bundy — November 5th, 2005
Donor — Date

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INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 30, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: McGEORGE BUNDY

INTERVIEWER: Paige E. Mulhollan

PLACE: Mr. Bundy's office, New York City

Tape 1 of 1

M: Let's begin by way of identification. You are McGeorge Bundy, currently president of the Ford Foundation. Your government service, insofar as President Johnson's administration was concerned, lasted from the time he became president, when you were national security adviser, until you resigned in December of 1965 and left in what, February of 1966?

B: The end of February, 1966.

M: The end of February. One of the most frequent comments on Mr. Johnson as a foreign policy leader is that when he came to the presidency, he knew almost nothing about foreign affairs. Is this an accurate statement or assessment?

B: Well, it is and it isn't. This was of course often said, and the President was sensitive to the fact that it was said. We were in the habit of explaining to the press, and I think perfectly fairly, that the fact that the President had not had formal diplomatic experience to any great extent was no true measure of the degree of his exposure to major questions in foreign affairs. He had been involved in the Armed Services Committee and involved in the decisions of the majority leader over two very long periods of years, and he had also had a very close watching relation to the hottest years of the Kennedy

Administration. I'm not saying that he was the last man in the actual working sessions of decision-making with President Kennedy, because the relations between a president and a vice president are more episodic than that. There would be things in which he would be closely engaged, and then for a long period--I'm sure it seemed even longer than it was to have been vice president to the Kennedy Administration--he would not be involved. That happened again, of course, in Vice President [Hubert] Humphrey's relationship to President Johnson.

But in the terms and conditions of his career, which was of course preeminently a congressional career, he was nevertheless familiar with the necessity for choice in major foreign issues--foreign aid issues, defense issues, European alliance issues. He had had the very important practice of framing observations and reports on a number of situations of which, as it happened, the one at least that sticks in my mind now is the one that he was exposed to when he went out to Southeast Asia and reported back on it, whenever it was.

M: 1961.

B: 1961. So that that's on the one side.

Now on the other side, there was certainly a gap in his experience in the sense that he was not widely and easily acquainted with the people concerned with the conduct and management of international affairs both in the United States and outside the United States. His beat had never been the State Department nor the embassies, either U.S. embassies abroad or American embassies at home, and his acquaintanceship in serious terms--how many foreign leaders was he, in that sense, easy with? Sure, he had met

them, and he had been to coronations and ceremonial occasions, but neither he nor they had ever regarded that as his most important business. Probably somebody for this oral history ought to give himself the pleasure of collecting one of those marvelous accounts of what the Vice President was like on the road. You ought to have an interview with Bob Komer, who was his [aide on some trips].

M: Right. We're supposed to talk to him ultimately.

B: Well, get him to do it and seal it in lead, because the President would go up in smoke if he ever read it himself. But it's well worth having. What it shows you is that this was a man who had a traveling American senator's view--and a highly personalistic one--of how he was acting. So that the size of the bed and the shape of the photography and a whole lot of marginated little things got on the minds of all the diplomatic escorts. But unless I'm wrong, you will find also when you talk to Komer--because I remember his saying it to me--that the Vice President was a man who wanted to do it his way and had some really pretty lousy ideas. Then you told him four times that it was for this and this and this reason that it would not be smart, and he would hate it, but he would listen. This is, of course, one of his fundamental characteristics, that he both hates and craves good advice.

M: Does he master details himself?

B: Well, it depends what kind of a subject it is. If he cares enough, he'll master it down to the closest possible detail. And if it's an urgent issue, you'll find--I used to find--that the precise point was that he was worried about details. He had an administrator's--this is an aside, but I might as well state it here while I think of it.

One of the difficulties of working with Lyndon Johnson was that until you knew him well you couldn't always tell what detail was missing in something that you were proposing or you were trying to get him to decide. And it would stay there undecided, and it was very seldom for purely arbitrary reasons. But he didn't like to say, "Look, if you'll settle point A, that's all I need to know, and when that's done, I'll do it," because he hated to decide anything until he was ready to decide it. So he might often not tell you at all what it was that was making him hold the thing up. Because if he did tell you and you then did that, he might actually want to think up another reason. And if he really didn't want to do it and didn't want to explain to you why, he wouldn't even say that, which would of course have simplified things. Of course the President is perfectly entitled to say, "I'm just not going to have a visit from the Prime Minister of Italy." "Why not, Mr. President?" "None of your goddamned business. I'm just not going to have it. Don't pester me anymore." But he wouldn't do that. He would hold it, and then you'd have quite a long, slow, difficult process, more often on small matters than on big ones. This was one of the hazards in life in his staff. Put that off to one side because that was as true of his dealings with Bill Moyers and Joe Califano or Jack Valenti as it was in his dealings with the foreign affairs area.

But he hadn't found those subtleties of international affairs the main business before he came to the White House. Nor had he had large scale sort of concern with these issues in the way in which a diplomatic historian like yourself or a political scientist like me or a diplomat or a reporter--Max Frankel or Walter Lippmann--would be concerned with it. He met them the way a senator from Texas or a frustrated vice

president meets them, and it's quite a different thing.

M: How were the personal relationships between you and Mr. Johnson? How did they start? Did you work with him closely when he was vice president?

B: Well, it's hard for me to be clear-headed about that. I can tell you how they looked to me. I had, as far as I know, never met him before he became vice president and I became special assistant for national security affairs. Then I did meet him, I'm sure, very early during the administration. I don't recollect where that first meeting was. I worked with him on the particular question of his trip to Berlin. That was the first time I had really close exposure, although I was probably involved in a background sort of a way with his Southeast Asia trip. I expect Walt Rostow was closer to that, because Walt had the Far Eastern account.

M: That was before he went back to the State Department?

B: Before he went back to the State Department in 1961.

The Vice President didn't want to go to Berlin. I couldn't figure out why. My guess now is that he felt that this might be a political trap, and that he was going to have to carry the can for a Kennedy Administration mistake. But if he thought that, he never breathed a word of it to me. He just sort of acted as I saw him act later in other circumstances--he was not about to wander into an unknown pasture, and he needed reconnaissance weekly. So we explained what we thought the advantages and disadvantages were, and President Kennedy I think just plain kept the personal heat on him and he agreed to do it, grunting and groaning. Then of course it turned into a triumph. And our office--Walt actually--drafted the speech in which the phrase that he

loved and that hooked everybody was "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor." Some of the people who were a little more dovey about Berlin blamed the Vice President for being more belligerent than the administration. But we didn't, we were delighted, and he was delighted. He came back fat and happy in spiritual terms and wanted therefore from then on--every now and then it was, "Nah, nah. I never had a speech like that Berlin speech. You write me another speech." And I would say, "Mr. Vice President, I don't write good speeches. Rostow is right here, and he's your man as much as anybody else is."

And we felt that way. I mean, our view was that--it wasn't everybody's view in the White House in the Kennedy Administration--the Vice President had a perfectly fair claim of that kind, and that it was vastly better for him to be informed than uninformed. Well, this was spasmodic with him, because he wasn't in the main line of the conduct of international affairs. And what he wanted was--as he always has and all politicians do, but he has it in unusual degree--the vision of sugarplums for him is a great big happy headline on a thing that happened to him. He believes in achievement enormously, but especially, as we all know from later events, in terms of legislative achievement, and in between he wanted dandy publicity. We provided some. Well, in a sense we were ancillary elements positive in his Berlin experience, and so we were in touch that way. And I don't think he ever felt--I hope he didn't and certainly he would not have been justified in feeling--that any of the people on our staff had anything but a feeling that the Vice President, while an unusual human being and idiosyncratic, was after all the number-two man in the government and a man who as occasion served and as opportunity came up we should be trying to help. So we did.

I guess there was a shade more to it than that, too, because he asked us two or three times to parties for new congressmen. And we went, and we enjoyed ourselves and took a great shine to Mrs. Johnson, who was, as she has been always, the most generous and gracious of hostesses. If you had asked me the middle of November [1963], "What do you think about Lyndon Johnson?" I would have said about three things: "One, I think the President is going to continue him; two, I think he's a man of formidable intelligence; three, he's a loner; four, when he asks for help, we try and give it to him, but the kind of help he seems to want is more surface than substance." That's all right. I can understand that perfectly. "And five, he gives dandy parties, and I've met some of the most interesting men in the country because where the hell else would a guy with my background meet a freshman western congressman and a lot of other very able men?"

[That was] the more valuable to me, I would say in passing, because it is very important, as I found out slowly, for a man with my kind of job to have informal communication with people on the Hill and almost impossible to have any formal communications, because you cannot testify. It was as difficult for me to be seen on the Hill as it was uncomfortable for them to come calling on White House staff offices, except in Larry O'Brien's office. It's an awkward relationship, and yet it's a very important one. So that's about where it was when Dallas came.

M: Then you, of course, were thrown into much more intimate personal contact from that time on.

B: Immediately, as of that very night. This was difficult for both of us, but obviously necessary. I met him at his request. I telephoned first that afternoon to say to him what

I'm sure he had already decided. I think I said it to him, it's conceivable that I said it to someone with him. I think [Horace] Busby was handling some of the communications at that point. It may have been that I talked to Buzz and through Buzz or I may have talked to him direct. The burden of my message was simply that he must come back as fast as possible, and of course that was everybody's view from here, and he'd already decided that. I did not get involved in this sort of take the oath here or there kind of question. I think that phone call came after that.

So I got word, I think through Ted Clifton in the course of the afternoon as they were on their way back, would I please be at the airport and ride back with him with the two Secretaries? Well, [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, of course, was winging back from Japan, so George Ball and [Secretary of Defense] Bob McNamara and I went out. And we did ride back with him in the helicopter to the White House lawn. And the burden of that conversation was simply to satisfy him as to what did and did not need to be done that night. Nothing needed to be done that night. He said then what he was to say over and over again to so many of us in the next weeks, that he needed us more than President Kennedy had, which in a short-term sense was certainly true. Any one of us was more immediately useful because he had particular things to catch up with that President Kennedy had not had.

I made a mistake that night. I told him that I thought he ought to come into the West Wing just as soon as possible. That was wrong. And he did come in the next morning. I had already found out it was wrong, but I hadn't alerted him promptly enough not to do it, and it took a little straightening out. We did straighten it out. It's never been,

that particular thing, a source of fuss between--it wasn't, I think, a source of fuss between Bob Kennedy and the President as many other things that happened in those weeks did become. But that was stupid on my part. I was focusing hard on the question of symbolism and continuity. I would say that McNamara and Ball had the same view, but I had a more intimate sense of the West Wing and should have been a shade better. We fixed that up by nine o'clock the next morning, and the President went back over and stayed in the EOB until things were good and clear in the Oval Room.

And I worked with him. Oddly enough, not only on national security affairs the first week or ten days, but I sort of discovered that there was a gap in the staff work on odds and ends of things. I wrote the Thanksgiving Proclamation and helped him there to get it sorted out and put out. A lot of people did that kind of thing, people who were more personally stricken. We were all stricken, but nobody quite the way [Ted] Sorensen was, and he pitched in in that kind of a way, too, as I'm sure the President would say. Well, I did do odds and ends and while--as I discovered gradually--everything I was saying to him was being double-checked, either with Abe Fortas or with somebody, nevertheless, he was doing some double-checking back with me, and there was a certain kind of not only immediate need, but a sense that I was trying to do a job the way he wanted it done. He, of course, went <u>way</u> out of his way to be very, very nice, and was, by his lights and with his standards.

One of the troubles with the President and his being nice is that his notion of being nice is to have you with him twenty-four hours a day. That became a really very serious strain later for people like [Jack] Valenti. [Bill] Moyers was better at protecting

his private life. It became very tough on McNamara. There was a period in 1964 when the President just didn't feel comfortable without the guy with the Stacomb hair. On the weekends, before church, for a swim, came down to Sunday supper, go for a ride on the boat, it was very tough. It happened to me in a different way, I remember. I stuck the President up for a vacation in January, an accidental thing.

M: Just when Panama was about to happen. A good time.

B: Very. And one of the very last papers that President Kennedy ever initialed in the White House was approval of a vacation. I'm not sure he really approved of it, but he wrote me and said, "It's a good idea, I need some rest myself. JFK." So I kept that paper--restrict these people who own the Kennedy papers--and I showed it to LBJ and I said, "I have the President's approval for this vacation. Do I have the President's approval?" And he said, "Go on. Go on. Fine."

While I was on vacation, somebody put in a story--one of these things to the effect that I was very tired and thinking of quitting. It wasn't true. It really was not true. And the very next thing that happened to us was that we had to go down to the Ranch for two days, this kind of marvelously generous, in a sense slightly clumsy and insensitive way. The straightforward way would have been, "Look, I saw this thing in the papers. I hope there isn't any truth in it. If there is, let's talk it out." "There's not any truth in it, Mr. President. Relax." But he doesn't do business that way.

But we got that straightened out and went back to work. I would say that everybody who worked for Lyndon Johnson had a kind of a curve which was subject to ups and downs, and mine was pretty well up through most of 1964 for lots of reasons, but

partly that he needed the office very much, partly that he knew how we all felt about [Republican presidential candidate, Barry] Goldwater--there wasn't any problem there--partly that I got accidentally quite involved in the one really tough moment he did have in the campaign, which was the Walter Jenkins affair. This was just a nonproblem.

In 1965 I would say the curve had ups and downs. He thought I just really was crazy to get entangled with these debaters, and I did, and I really didn't consult with him about it, because I knew what he would say. I felt then and continue to feel that the failure to have serious communication with the angry groups was one of the things that just went wrong with our administration. It probably was wrong of me, or in a sense it was unstafflike, to go out and try to handle all that on my own.

M: A passion for anonymity.

B: This passion for anonymity with LBJ, and actually with his predecessor, was a selective passion. Because half the time he would be telling you that you should get on every available TV program, and the other half the time he would be denying to anybody that you existed.

M: You never knew which one you were going--

B: Never knew which. But in this case, he knew which and I knew which and I just went the other way, because my own integrity was involved or so I presumed to think. So things weren't so good there.

On the other hand, there was another entanglement which I'm not sure quite what it is, I think probably a gradual draining of the bank on the kind of issue that he really didn't want to be bothered with that I just thought one had to bother him with. I'll give

you an example: he put in a rule sometime in 1965 to the effect that everybody would be asked who he was when he called the White House. So that instead of getting the switchboard and saying, "Give me Mr. Bundy's office," they'd say, "Who's calling please?" and they'd write it down. And this was clearly intended to provide a list of all press calls, so that the President--the poor innocent probably still thinks if he'd only had better staff officers, he could have traced all leaks--so that he would know--

M: Did this come from the President or from Marvin Watson?

B: It came from Marvin Watson, but don't kid yourself, what came from Marvin Watson didn't come from Marvin. Marvin was not that kind of an imaginative figure. Now, we all held to it. In my own memos to the President I said, "You know, I think this is too bad, this rule of Marvin's, and I wonder if you have reviewed it." But that was a diplomatic fiction, because the President was doing this and he was doing it because, you know, a) he's the most intensely curious man about the processes of news that ever happened, and b) I'm sure he was telling himself correctly that by all rights he had a right to know. He was supposed to make the news at the White house. But it's not workable, because all that happened, and everybody knew it was all that would happen, was that within weeks there were knowledgeable columnists sort of saying, "The President is now trying to keep tabs on us, and this is a violation of"--I don't know what--"the first through the twenty-seventh amendments."

M: At least.

B: And the heat was too big and all you could say was, "Mr. President, this is what Marvin should have known in the first place." Well, he used to run off at the mouth--I'm using

his language as I think about it--about how he couldn't even--this was just an orderly matter; nobody was trying to take down any names. Lyndon Johnson is in some ways like a naughty boy; if you catch him with his hand in the jam pot, he hates it. You're not supposed to be looking while his hand is in the jam pot. And so our relations were clouded by that for a while.

And in a wider and a deeper sense toward the end of 1965, it became clear to me that I was really running out of steam. This was not just this complicated question of relations with the President. It was a much more deep-seated thing. I had been doing this job for going on five years, and it was clear to me the President wasn't--you know, we were friends and I was--God knows--working with him intently on substantive matters that we will come back to, but it was just not workable from my point of view that I should still be doing that, let's say, for another two years. So I had begun to talk with my old friends at Harvard about whether they'd have me back as a professor, and it looked as if probably they would. And the only difficulty about that was going to be how do you explain to Lyndon Johnson that you want to go and be a professor? It's all right now; now everybody is a professor. He's a professor and Hubert's a professor.

M: Walt Rostow's a professor.

B: Walt's a professor. So that's no pain. But in that day it would have been a far cry. Then that all got changed by the Ford job, and while the disengagement from the administration is never easy, this was less bad than I had feared. And it would have been less bad still if Scotty [James Reston] hadn't leaked it. Somebody leaked it to Scotty at a time when the President had an operation and was not easy to talk to. But we got that

sorted out. And really from that point on, in a way, we became closer and closer in human terms. He's an easier man to deal with when you're not working for him.

M: The further you got away physically, the closer you got to him?

B: In a way, in a way. We had nothing but roses in my brief but quite intense exposure to the Middle Eastern thing, except I tried to talk him out of Glassboro and into Princeton, where he was right and I was wrong. And we were in great shape up until the thirty-first of March, and he didn't like the advice he got there. Well, he took it. That was fine, really not so bad. What really did drive him up the wall was my DePauw speech--

M: Yes, I want to talk to you about that. We'll come back to that and talk about Vietnam. I take it that was not an inspired speech.

B: Absolutely not. The exact relation of that to the President was that--in a way we can do better when we get to the substance of it. Let me just talk to the personal thing. I called Walt and said, "I'm going to make this speech. I'm sending you a copy, and I want the President to know about it, although I want the position to be clear that I have not consulted him about it, as indeed I have not." He said, "Message understood." And he called me back at DePauw and said, "The boss wants you to know that this is just the worst moment for a speech"--see, he knew of my views--"saying the things we think you think." I said, "Walt, it's too late. I had to be the judge of that." I don't know whether I told him, but it was in the hands of the papers by that time so that it was beyond recall. Well, he never said anything back direct. It was not true, as some of the papers said, that he had Rusk call me up. I'm quite sure that his own imagination is responsible for that, that he told Marianne. Marianne Means and Bill White were the best way in Washington

in all those years to know about whom was he popping off at any given moment, and I got mash notes in both of those columns.

M: They were the ones who were being called in to hear it, right, to the very end, too, I think.

B: Absolutely, and nobody can [better] record what the President was thinking it pleasant to leak, which may not be what he's thinking, you know. This is another important point, that right up to the end the President used this as a safety valve, as well as a way of flicking the off-horse. For example--this is an aside, but it illustrates the point--I talked to Joe Califano in the last week of the administration and I said, "How are you doing on the surtax?" knowing that that would be a big joke. "Well," he said, "the surtax has now reached the point where he's not talking to me, and I think that's a good sign." It's that kind of a thing.

M: Do you think he held it against you at any point that you were associated with the Kennedy aura, the Kennedy years, a Kennedy man?

B: Well, I think that he was a shade wary about that, especially at the beginning. But I think he knew that on the issues we didn't have any issue. Let me start that again. I was very eager to have Bob Kennedy run as vice president in 1964, and I said that to the President. In that period, as I recollect it, he was constantly swimming around the pool telling me of the awful things the Kennedys were doing, and by "the Kennedys" he could mean anything from soup to nuts. It might be Bobby himself or it might be some freshman congressman that he thought was a Kennedy agent or whatever. The Montagues and the Capulets had the most exaggerated views of each other's conspiratorial powers all through this period, and there was just nothing to be done about it. But I would say, on

the whole, Bobby was sorer at me than the President was, even there. I had trouble with Bobby over whether he should announce that he was no longer a candidate, because I thought if the President made a decision, that was the smart thing for him to do, and he was furious.

M: Did the President use you as a contact?

B: Yes, he asked me to try that out, yes. And maybe I wasn't smart to try it, but it actually was the sensible thing for Bob to do. It would have been better for all these fellows if they'd talk it out more directly. This business of using a third and fourth and fifth party that you get into in politics is seldom a very sound way of communicating unless you do your dealing with very deft and skillful people. I got my fingers burned a little bit the way Clark [Clifford] got his fingers burned in the other direction, trying to carry messages from Bobby to the President about a review committee on Vietnam, you remember. That didn't bother me because Bob had so much to put up with that year that having him sore wasn't--it was too bad and disappointing in human terms, but not crucial, and we got over it, he and I, later on.

Then after that, you see, the next time we had any serious trouble was over Bob Kennedy's views on Vietnam. I guess that was way back toward the very end of my time there, but I remember the President saying a very generous thing. Do you remember Bob Kennedy had a press conference or a statement in which the word "coalition" turned up, and we all jumped on him in different ways. I happened to be scheduled for one of those "Meet the Press" things, and I said to the President, "You know, I think this is very unhelpful. I don't want to get in a fight with Bob, but I have been reading his earlier book

and it says very different things about Vietnam and what you ought to do there. Why don't I quote that?" "Well," he said, "he's a friend of yours, and in politics, if you want to keep a man a friend you never quote him against himself." That was pretty generous.

I don't think the President thought that I was a Kennedy agent. I think he thought I had some of those soft-hearted ideas about aid programs and helping Indians and give, give, give to foreigners, and "Now, don't you fellows ever stand up for the flag?" and all that sort of thing.

M: Well, there was some truth to the Georgetown cocktail circuit sniping--

B: Oh, hell yes!

M: --they did at you for staying on, even.

B: Well, sure.

M: How important is that type of thing?

B: Not important to me.

M: I mean, was that a great contributing factor in tarnishing the LBJ public image though?

B: Well, this is one of the most sensitive, difficult and uncertain subjects in the world, because you're talking about several different kinds of things. There certainly was a circle of people who felt that their happiness and hopes died on the twenty-second of November, unless they could be revived by the younger brother. How intense and passionate they were and how much of a single circle they were, I'm nobody to judge, because I wasn't in that. I was on the job, continuing, much too busy to go to cocktails, God knows, and it's a cocktail circuit.

M: You couldn't be gone that long anyway.

B: Any parties I went to were people the President--when he was sore at them he put them in this circle, and when he wasn't sore at them they came to candlelight dinners--Joe Alsop or Kay Graham. I'm talking about people I happened to be most personally intimate with in Washington, or even people who've written books the President probably regards as Georgetown cocktail books.

M: Evans and Novak, in particular.

B: Rowland Evans, Phil Geyelin. I wouldn't regard those people as having constituted themselves a cabal against Lyndon Johnson, but in his bad days he would. Now, when you get over to the immediate Kennedy cries [?] or to the heartbroken personal followers, you have to make another set of distinctions. Sorensen was never this kind of mean sniper. On his bad days [Arthur] Schlesinger certainly was. The difference is in the temper of the two fellows. I think the President saw more devils than there were, but on the other hand I think that he got rough treatment from a lot of people. Now, you'd have to take it case by case to know how to go much further with that. People will argue about that forever. I don't really believe that this kind of fundamentally regional thing is that interesting.

M: Unless it's responsible for affecting opinion-makers who have more than a regional impact.

B: Well, Walter Lippmann, for example, had a love affair with the President until he had a falling out on an issue of principle. It wasn't an issue of style. And Joe Alsop never did have a falling out with him fundamentally; he really didn't. He would write these articles and send the President right up the wall on specific issues, and then you could get

perfectly horrible stories about what a ghastly fellow Joe was, all drawn from some ten-year-old FBI report.

One of the troubles with dealing with the President was that he had that goddamned sewer J. Edgar Hoover flowing across his desk all through those five years. Like many extremely skillful politicians, he had a weakness for under-the-rug information. [German Chancellor Konrad] Adenauer was another great statesman the same way. You could send Adenauer thirty-seven embossed assertions of the policy of the United States and have them hand-carried by John Foster Dulles, but it wasn't half as good as one message through a private agent delivered over on a dark night on an old piece of yellow paper.

M: That's the one that's believable.

B: That's it. Because in a suspicious world where you can't trust anybody, the information you're glad to get is the information you're not supposed to have. I suspect that in the world of both Texas politics and business that's a lesson you learn very early. And incidentally it's also true in Harvard faculty meetings.

M: All faculty meetings, I might add, from my experience anyway.

B: So, yes, there was a problem there, but that crowd is just as rough, they were just as rough on Foster Dulles as they ever were on Lyndon Johnson. Foster Dulles, whatever else he was, was not a Texas cornpone. He was a New York smoothie.

M: Style would be no problem there, but the result in a way is the same. Dulles' reputation publicly became--

B: All right, if you want to say that if the opinion-makers dislike you, that's important, then

you're right. That's certainly true, but it wasn't because he was from Texas.

M: No, no, I see the distinction you're making. These curves that you mentioned in your personal--

B: Mr. Sam [Rayburn] never had this trouble. Jack Brooks doesn't have it. John Connally never had it. John Connally gets into trouble with people who don't like his particular opinion. What hooks the President is that he is an uncannily canny man, and candor is not a part of his canniness.

M: That's a good alliteration, too.

When you have these ups and downs in your personal relationship with him, did it affect the way that you worked with him? In other words, did the accessibility to the President change?

B: No, the accessibility never changed. That's a very interesting point. The number of times he called you might change, but your accessibility to him, except on very urgent matters--this was a lesson I learned with some difficulty. I had been in the habit of telephoning JFK, at least at the end, because that was the way he liked to get information. Lyndon Johnson likes to get information in writing and hand it out by telephone. It's a very interesting phenomenon, and I think you'll find there's an overwhelming evidence for it in the way in which, as people learned his ways, they accommodated themselves to it. Now, that doesn't mean you don't call him up, if the marines have just moved or something else. But most of the time he preferred to get it on paper, and get it on paper damned fast! And as you learned to do that, you learned that he had an unending appetite for it. He'd sometimes say that if he got anything more from Orville Freeman, he'd go

crazy, but he would have gone crazier if he hadn't heard from Orville. And I never found any difficulty in getting materials in to him. I did find that this ambivalence I was talking about earlier as to how you said or raised a subject with him that he might not really want to--he wanted your opinion, but your opinion was going to make him sore if it wasn't going to fit in.

He wrote a marvelous letter to Dean Acheson on his seventy-fifth birthday, which Acheson quoted to me the other day, roughly to this effect: "I am aware of the fact that you were one of the few men in Washington that didn't mind giving me advice you knew I would not want to hear, and one of the few men who didn't mind when I didn't like what you had told me, and these are the kind of very few men that a president needs most," or something like that. That is rather like taking a very cold shower; it's much easier to rejoice in afterwards than it is to march up to beforehand.

On the other hand, the door was always open. So I always felt that any time you didn't do that, it was your fault, not his. The way things crowd a president, and the way a man of that kind of mountainous energy will go his way, it's the adviser's job to give the disagreeable advice. Sometimes, you know, you'd have a little private huddle, go and see Valenti or go and see Moyers and say, "Look here's the problem. Who's got the most moxie to bell this cat? Why would it come better from who?" Of course, if he had known we were doing that, whew!

M: Right.

B: I once went in there with Moyers early in the administration. I think it was Moyers and Valenti and I went in, and we said, "We all three think--" and we didn't even get a chance

to say what we thought, because he regarded that as a gang-up on my son, the cat, and he wasn't going to have that. So we learned better. There were other ways of catching the cat.

I think the ups and downs had a kind of a different--they were really not that important in terms of the conduct of the job. They were important, I think I would have to say, in terms of the sort of general psychic satisfaction, but there's a paradox there, too. It was almost as tough to be closely in his favor as it was to be out of favor, because if you were way in then you had to be at everything. Things that were none of your business you had to be at. Come to the congressional briefing; come to the dinner; come to the corn-husking; don't leave my side.

M: Don't go out to lunch; don't take a weekend.

B: That's right. It's a backdrop of a problem, a very, very unusual man who was wearing to work for whether you were in or whether you were out. But I would have to say, I think really, that there was in my own mind's eye at the end of 1965 a kind of a feeling that if you continually do give this kind of advice, and you regard yourself as having that responsibility, there is a kind of a half-life to it that wears. I don't believe I would have been as useful to him a year later. I think that this sort of, "Oh, my God, there's the fellow that always turns to the next page to find out if he can't find any blot and then shove it under your nose," this was there.

And we had a strategic difference that came up in a variety of ways over whether you should explain this war or not explain it. He had admirable reasons in the summer of 1965: he had a legislative program as long as your arm, and he made a conscious

decision that he was not going to explain it. I just knew in my bones, or felt in my bones, that that wouldn't work. I was temperamentally uncomfortable with it, and that is the sort of large-scale underlying difference of view that relates back to this question of whether you go to a teach-in and how much you will argue about it. And that, I guess, was what gave me a feeling of underlying belief that deprived me of that sense that everything I was doing was in reinforcement of a man who found my reinforcement helpful and who therefore reinforced you. Because working for a guy, and he needs you and that makes you feel big and so forth, that was wearing not out but thin by the latter part of 1965.

M: How did the organization of the national security shop in the White House change with the advent of the Johnson, as compared to the Kennedy, Administration--significantly or not?

B: The organization didn't change much at all. The habits of the individuals concerned, the habits of the President, the temper and the desires of the President changed, obviously. There was almost no change in the staff. There was a little flurry the first few days that didn't have anything to do with the President. It had to do with the State Department thinking that really we didn't need as much information anymore because the President wasn't as voracious as [Kennedy]. We stopped that really I think out of our own bureaucratic strength, and they didn't want to make an issue of this. I just said, "I'd have to have to tell the President that he's not getting telegrams that his predecessor got," and that stopped that. That was not the Secretary of State. It might have been George Ball, I don't really know. His direct interests in subjects that did not have an immediate U.S. political impact went way down as against his predecessor. Kennedy wanted to talk

about the development of Africa because he was interested in the development of Africa. Johnson wanted to talk about the development of Africa because if he could get an African policy and really say it at the right moment, the right speech--but he didn't want to talk about it until then.

M: Or until a crisis arose.

B: Or until a crisis arose. Then, of course, he was all business twenty-four hours a day. Now, we had this enormous flurry of what I would call--we're seeing it again now--a kind of surface business in which your object is to go through an act, have the television camera see you go through an act, have the ambassadors say afterwards what a good act it was. But nothing happens. Right at the funeral he began with that. And the only serious conversation of the lot was the one with [Anatas I.] Mikoyan, which was a serious conversation which the President conducted admirably.

M: That's a point that I think might be interesting to pick up right here. The publicity on the President as a personal diplomat always includes his dressing down of the Pakistani [Zulfikar Ali] Bhutto.

B: Oh, well, these are marginal things. The Bhutto thing I may have been responsible for, to be honest with you, at least as much as the President. I think that Bhutto is the biggest four-letter word in the international political world, and the President--Bhutto put out that stuff. That wasn't a shock to State Department witnesses, I don't believe.

M: So this was not typical of his personal diplomacy?

B: Absolutely not. The President was extremely good at personal diplomacy. He took a brief in that case that it would be to his advantage to tell Bhutto just what he thought,

which may not have been smart. But I think that one could add that one could well ask in dealing with the Bhuttos and the Krishna Menons in this world whether they're good messengers. To say some of these things can't be to our view. Quite another matter, very effective. But we, I think, may easily have made a tactical blunder in the briefing paper for that particular interview, whether it be the first or last that we made.

M: Also, [Charles] de Gaulle, there's the belief that he offended de Gaulle.

B: Well, he misunderstood de Gaulle. I think that is probably true. I don't think he offended him, but he misunderstood him as to whether de Gaulle was planning to come. And he rushed to put that out, which was never smart with de Gaulle. That was a misstep of marginal proportions in what was otherwise a very skillfully handled interview. Mikoyan, when I say it was important--because I think the general notion of communicating to the Soviets that the president of the United States wants to stay in touch with them is terribly important. I think he did it skillfully and well throughout his administration, without the smallest doubt, and he started doing it right there at that first meeting. And he knew that was important. He knew that that was important substantively as compared to the window-dressing of whether you are or not back in business with Charlie de Gaulle.

Now, we're back on the NSC [National Security Council] organizational processes. The President felt it very important to emphasize his cabinet officers against his staff officers. I think he genuinely had two or three reasons for that. One is a real one. He really feels that way. He thinks the cabinet officers are more important than the staff officers. The second was the obverse, that he meant to use his staff officers

ferociously and didn't want anybody to catch him. I mean, I'm sure that story that [Hugh S.] Sidey tells about him not being able to remember Dick Goodwin's name at a time when everybody in the building knew who was writing his speeches, I'm sure this is true. He did this with a lot of people. And he'd alternate between saying--he did this with everybody--he never met Bobby Baker, when everybody had heard him say that Bobby Baker was his strong right arm. And I've been called his strong right arm. Then having Marianne Means explain that all his serious business is done with the Secretary of State. It's just a fact of life about the guy, and if you love him it doesn't matter. If you're looking for something to snipe at, it's a perfect target. This is one of the facts that was a part of Washington all through the Johnson years.

Well, nevertheless, the real view, aside from how much he might use Califano to push six cabinet officers around, if you asked him today, sort of Lyndon Johnson's book view, will be that cabinet officers count and White House staff are White House staff. I don't know what the reasons for that are. It's the way the government ought to be. It is not the way he ran the government.

M: I think that's fairly clear, in both national security and domestic affairs as well.

B: Well, more in domestic affairs. I mean, I'm quite sure that with McNamara--certainly the years I was there. I think their relationship got more complicated later on, through no fault of either one of them, through honest differences of what they thought really was happening on problem number one. But McNamara, when I was there, sure I would transact some business with him, but it would be because both he and I felt that we could handle this without taking up the President's time. It wouldn't be because I was the

President's mouthpiece to McNamara. Rusk, a little different, because there you have a man of enormous integrity, intelligence, but of almost incurable reticence, so that the President often didn't know what the Secretary thought. And the Secretary didn't believe in the telephone. It was insecure. The President never put anything in writing because that wasn't the way he did business. So--

M: That makes it pretty hard to communicate.

B: It made it complicated. Now, they became and are right now--they always were--men of sympathetic understanding in human terms. I think that those who say that they were both southerners who moved into the big world are right; that was a help. And on a big, tough issue, they did always communicate. But on lots of little ones, even issues as big as the MLF [Multilateral Force], they didn't communicate at all until the thing got precipitated. In that particular case, I was the precipitant. Part of this is that although they had this perfect sense of human trust--I think Rusk felt at ease in the Johnson Administration as he did not in the Kennedy Administration. The President felt at ease with Rusk, as I would not think he really did with Bill Wirtz. But Rusk is a professional diplomat; Lyndon Johnson's a professional legislator. Dean Rusk's opinion of Bob Kerr, if you ever could get him to give it to you, would require you to go down below the subway to dredge up adjectives. The President regarded Bob Kerr as one of the most effective men in the Senate, as simple as that. Well, Bob Kerr--now, this is legend, you'd have to check it, but the impression I have is that somewhere early in the John Kennedy Administration he said to Dean Rusk, "Mr. Secretary, there's only one thing I want out of you, and that's a little protection for oil."

M: As simple as that!

B: As simple as that. Dean Rusk is a patriot. He hasn't got a private interest in the world and he despises people who do. Lyndon Johnson has been accommodating in meshing, puzzling out, making things happen out of, the assemblage of private interest all his life. So in that sense they were in different worlds.

M: And the staff has to bridge that.

B: Somebody has to. Somebody has to.

M: You said or you were quoted as saying one time in the Kennedy Administration that 80 per cent of the initiatives came from the White House in foreign policy.

B: I never said that. I never said that. Schlesinger may have said it, but I would think I would have been smart enough not to say it, and I'm not even sure it's true. For example, in the Kennedy Administration, the Alliance for Progress, yes, that's White House. But the Kennedy Round, that's George Ball. The Test Ban Treaty, well, in a sense that's John F. Kennedy himself, and in another sense it's everybody, from Norman Cousins to Hubert Humphrey. The Multilateral Force, that's the State Department. We give them credit for that one. The negotiations with Nasser, that's the President, but with help from Phil Talbot, who was in the State Department. It's pretty near fifty-fifty. The Cuban Missile Crisis, [Nikita] Khrushchev. Berlin, everybody's baby. Southeast Asia, the Laotian judgment, sending [W. Averell] Harriman, that's Kennedy. The rest of it was joint enterprise. The unseating of [Ngo Dinh] Diem, insofar as we did it--we didn't really intend to do it, Kennedy certainly didn't--that's a partnership. That's [Roger] Hilsman, [Michael] Forrestal, and the rest of us all saying, "Okay, try it out."

M: You mean a State-White House combination?

B: Arthur would say the opening to the left in Italy was very, very important. I think it was of marginal importance, but was a constructive--that's White House. That's Schlesinger. So you'd have a mixed bag here, and 80 per cent would be an exaggeration. In any event, really, one of my cardinal rules was never to play that game, never.

M: Would the same judgment be true of the Johnson years?

B: In the Johnson Administration there were fewer White House initiatives, relatively speaking, because--oh, I should say the Berlin and European trip shared [initiatives], which was an important trip. President Johnson wasn't keen on initiatives that weren't going to work, for one thing. And I would say that he gets more credit than the State Department for the Nonproliferation Treaty. He would get more credit than the State Department for the even balance of our whole relationship with the Soviet Union, more credit than the Secretary anyway. I think that the State Department--Vietnam had become so big that that's clearly presidential, but that is mostly a matter of reacting to crises in the sense that you get to points where if you don't do this, it is said to you that this or that awful thing will happen.

The balance on the whole is with the President on European policy. He makes the MLF decision with my staff assistance. The European speech of 1966, which is an excellent speech, he makes with [Francis] Bator as the staff man. The doctrine of regionalism, for what it's worth--I don't think it's worth very much--is White House.

M: Certainly it's made quite a lot of.

B: That's Walt Rostow. And the Asian Development Bank is the President's. The whole

Gene Black enterprise, and that's very much more serious, that's real business, that's White House. The Mexican policy, really--I wouldn't know in detail, because I was never that close to it, but I think there's a very heavy Johnson input there, and it's a very important and a good policy.

M: Is this some kind of institutional imbalance or is it a failing of this State Department?

B: I think, to be candid with you, a failure of that State Department. I don't think there's any need for the State Department not to be the engine. It has been, when there have been strong secretaries of state with a good relation to their president; always has been. [Dean] Acheson's, for the whole period between 1947 and 1958 the State Department was the focus of foreign affairs. It weakened somewhat under Chris Herter, but also Eisenhower's attention; you know, Eisenhower was traveling the last years. That's an exaggeration, but not too much. And then you get two very active, strong-minded, independent presidents with quite different temperamental interests in foreign affairs. LBJ meeting in any given week the fifteen most interesting foreigners who come through town just because they're in town? No. But LBJ hanging on in the negotiations with the Indians in such a way that they finally actually have a better food policy than they would have had if he hadn't hung in. You can't see JFK doing that. So, you see, it doesn't all tilt one way.

M: Is there some connection between the fact that the State Department focus of leadership ends at approximately the time there is created in the White House a national security staff?

B: No, no. There was a national security staff twice as big before I got there.

M: Yes, organized without exactly the same functions apparently.

B: Well, you know, you can't have it both ways. My friends in the new administration are now revitalizing the National Security Council.

M: That's right. Bromley Smith said that's going to happen. The first thing they're going to do is come in and say exactly opposite than what they said eight years ago.

Your job, briefly, was staffing the President for all foreign contingencies--

B: It was presidential business dealing with national security affairs that I thought had better also be my business or I wasn't doing my job. I don't mean that he couldn't have a totally private conversation with the Secretary, either one. He did, with both of them, mostly about personnel, but sometimes about other issues. I never got myself into personnel except at the invitation of the parties and never got into it direct. I interrupted you.

M: Well, how did you see your job as staffing? What information and what sources did you go to to provide the kind of crisis staffing that a president has to have when one of these international hot spots jumps up?

B: Crisis staffing, in terms of source, is not so difficult. We obviously learned from some of our early mistakes. We had very spotty staff work on the Bay of Pigs, partly because we were beginners, partly because it was supposed to be one of those nonexistent covert operations nobody would ever know about--biggest nonsense you ever heard of--and partly because we could hardly tell one end of CIA from another. We didn't realize that while we were listening to the operational types we were not listening to the estimators. It's not very difficult in a crisis to get information. Actually, the principal problem in a really hot crisis is to keep the irrelevant information out, because everybody sort of rises

to the occasion and wants to help. It's the most honorable thing. Everybody also wants to defend his own personal interest in the matter.

The last time I was involved in that kind of a hot flap was in 1967 and therefore it's freshest in my mind. Let me describe that. It's characteristic of what happens when there's a real flap, except perhaps that I was more experienced then than I had been in earlier ones. The fundamental thing is that someone should in fact be at the crossroads, and in a crisis that is plainly presidential, that somebody has to be in the White House. And in a way, because that was not clear in the first days of the Six Day War, McNamara said to me, "This thing is all snarled up, and what are we going to do about it?" I was down as a one-day consultant, and I said, "If you want my honest opinion, there ought to be someone over here in charge. Walt's got another war on his hands, and in any event it's very difficult to have a fellow named Rostow in charge of this war," which was already on the President's mind. The President was for that reason sort of not using Walt as he'd used him in other matters. And there were one or two other reasons why there seemed to be a need for somebody. McNamara said, "Would you come back?" And I said, "Well, if the President wants me, I would. I'd rather not, but I would." And so he did. In that sense, I was in a relatively favorable position to write a ticket as to what I was supposed to do. We wrote it that way, and we did it that way while the crisis lasted, which really was only until after Glassboro and then I faded away and went home.

M: That's a good one compressed in time to use as a kind of a sample.

B: Yes. What is required there is simply that <u>nobody</u> does business, <u>nobody</u>, not even the Secretary, does business with the President without your knowing exactly what they're

doing, so that you can sort out the things that do require to be decided from the things that do not require to be decided by the President and make other arrangements for the things that can be decided by somebody else. And I did that, it was easy to do.

I also got, naturally, the phone calls from the oil executives and the friends of American Jewry and, God knows, who not. Those were easy to flag as to which ones at some point the President would want to have fifteen minutes with three oil presidents. I had a little bit of a problem with the political Jewish circuit, which comes in straight and has the habit--the President <u>takes</u> the call from Abe Feinberg, because it might mean another million dollars. Anyway, he likes Abe Feinberg. He likes Arthur Krim even better. He's dead right. He hasn't got a more loyal, abler, in the wide sense more disinterested friend than Arthur Krim. But if you think Arthur Krim is disinterested on Israel, Arthur Krim doesn't think so. But I like Arthur, he's an old friend, and that was lucky. One of the things that helps in crisis work and one of the reasons for being very cautious in a new administration is the troops don't know each other, and that was the reason why it was useful to have me there. Where the hell else were they going to find somebody who was used to dealing on a senior White House staff level with this particular cast of characters?

M: So communications come naturally.

B: Easy. I know that if I'm going to get an up-to-date detailed account, I don't call the secretary of state; I call, in that case, the under secretary of state or I talk to the Middle East man, Luke [Lucius] Battle. The way the State Department was set up at that particular stage, I actually found I had better call Battle, because the [Nicholas]

Katzenbach-Rusk relationship was rusty at that point, for reasons I don't know, but I observed the rust. But in the case of the Defense Department, you call McNamara and you ask him who you talk to. He'd say, "Better talk to me," "Better talk to [Paul] Warnke," "Better talk to [Earle] Wheeler," or "Talk to Cy [Vance]," but he'd be very, very clear which one it was--Paul Nitze, I guess it was, then. I think Vance was out. Yes, he was. He was dealing with riots by then.

M: Yes, he was. [inaudible]

B: So, you do that, and everybody knows *per contra* that they can reach you. And you have a couple of good staff guys. One was Hal Saunders and we borrowed a couple of others, really watch officers, but bright, discreet watch officers who could take a message. And then you have an Op Center and you're in business. It does mean that you've got to take a separate phone call from Arthur Goldberg, because Arthur doesn't really believe that the seventh floor will ever transmit his highly imaginative views with precision, and you have to play it with that. You see, it's disorderly, in that sense.

M: And you have to make decisions about what the President is to decide that sometimes make the agencies and departments perhaps unhappy, I take it.

B: In that case you didn't have that problem so much, because everybody knew the President was going to decide it. What made the departments unhappy in the Johnson Administration was the number of things that the President would neither decide nor let anybody else decide. If I had to say what was Lyndon Johnson's greatest executive weakness, I'd say that was it. That only extremely strong and self-confident men were willing and able to steer ahead, making their own channels wide enough. McNamara

would be the best example in the area I was familiar with. The President was really pretty good at [big issues]. He excessively delayed things that were not critical because when he got into a problem at all, he was obsessive about getting into it all the way, keeping all the threads in his own hand. This I think is a weakness; it's a weakness matched by very great strengths. His control over big issues--everything in the Middle Eastern case--led to an extremely sound, basic policy. His unwillingness to trust us with marginal things led to some unnecessary costs, both with Arabs and Israelis, which I kind of think, supposing you could get him to sit still and rehearse the set of events in detail, you might even get him to agree to now. His reasons, well, he got very badly burned in that case by letting some people out. One of the reasons I was called back was because of this neutral in thought, word, and deed business--

M: [Robert] McCloskey.

B: --that came out of the State Department. I think I persuaded him. I didn't spend more than 78 per cent of my time trying to find out who was responsible for that the first three days I was here.

M: I think that was an overheard conversation is what the State Department claims that it was.

B: Well, what it was was a comment made in a State Department staff meeting, which was misunderstood as a directive.

M: That's how something important can get blown out of proportion, I guess. You've got a very good reputation in this type of thing for not prejudicing the advice that the President got by funneling all kinds of advice to him. But how do you keep from influencing the

advice he gets accidentally?

B: You can't. You can't. Two ways you can't. In the first place, the president, any president, no matter how much he trusts the most perfect staff man, he is going to be interested in the odd, separate piece of information. And that was more true of LBJ than of JFK, although it was true of both of them. In the second place, your own biases do exist and you have no way of controlling those. You have to be extremely precise, I think, about how you report the other fellow's views.

Incidentally I think my successor in the job has been much unfairly criticized on that point. I think Walt was as near a pane of glass as makes no difference in reporting views, because I have often telephoned down and said, "Would you tell the President thus and such?" and had a conversation back in which it became clear that my message had gone through very, very plainly. I think Walt, where he may have had trouble was in filtering out as not very important, or as maybe even misleading, evidence not from qualified advisers, but sort of in the general take and thinking, "That isn't going to be very interesting to the President. That's probably not so."

M: So don't bother him with that.

B: Yes. We all had that trouble to some degree. But if you get a message from the secretary of state, you send it to the president. Where I used to have an argument with them was that I think that it is for the president to decide, not for the department to decide, whether separate from that, he wants your opinion as a staff officer. Now if he doesn't, then you don't give it to him. But both presidents I worked for did. In fact, they'd press you for your opinion, and they'd cuss you out if you didn't give it to them. And then you do get

into a habit of knowing, and maybe sometimes you trespass on it. Now, I think very good men would say that was quite wrong. Rusk might. McNamara I think would be unworried about it, at least in my particular case, because we became unreasonably fond of each other and had no problems. I don't think you can get away from it. The president has a right to the absolutely candid advice on any subject of anyone he asks. And what you tell the president on a matter of this sort is your business and his business and nobody else's business, unless he wants you to [discuss it]. Now, I do think you have an obligation on a substantive matter, if you are in that kind of a situation you ought to be in a position so that the secretary of state knows your view. He may not know in what way you're advising the president about it because that's harder to deal with. And this was not easy for me to do with Dean Rusk because his own views were so opaque, and the opportunity for this kind of candid discussion--I find it very hard to discuss my views except where there is a tennis game.

M: Where you're not doing all the discussing, in that case.

B: Yes. And so I would think that I probably made life hard for them once or twice, but certainly not by intent and always in ways in which I was not going to be doing the talking about who had advised who about what. Take the MLF as an example. It certainly is true that President Johnson's decision to cool that was the product of staff work in our building, but it was the President who chose to make that point, to leak that. I thought he was very ill-advised to do so. He would have done a great deal better to say, "Wise advice from the State Department has persuaded me," and let them stew in their own goddamned juice. But he didn't.

M: They would have known [inaudible] nobody else.

B: That's why I say that if there's a breach of anonymity it comes mostly from higher authority.

M: You're right. That's a good case of that happening. Johnson then did invent, develop, one new practice, the Tuesday lunch thing. How did that develop? Is that an accident?

B: It just plain evolved out of a sense of its convenience and the fact that he liked it. It was a comfortable institution and everything else that we'd tried on for size wasn't. Scheduled NSC meetings drove him crazy. He liked the NSC as an instrument for placing the great seal on a decision he'd already made, or making it perfectly clear that he was in the process of making a great decision. I never saw him make a decision in that [body] and I'm not sure any president does.

M: You hear a lot about that again now, too.

B: I don't mean that things aren't said that get recorded in minutes, but those are not the decisions. The decisions are much less easy to get your hand on than that. The Tuesday lunch had virtues from his point of view. It was an agreeable social occasion. Its membership grew larger; it got to be quite a big table at the end of the administration the times I was called in from outside. Maybe those were the Tuesday luncheons that were big. You'd need to get somebody else's evidence on that. But as it began, it was just four of us, and then it got to be often with Moyers, often with George Christian. I forget when Christian came into that office, was that after I left? I don't know.

M: Yes.

B: So I guess I got mixed up with the period I was there and the period after, but while I was

there sometimes George Ball, sometimes the Chiefs--more at the end than at the beginning--sometimes Cy Vance, sometimes Dick Helms, but not very often. The President had the same problems that his predecessor had had, what I would call--it's not quite fair to call it this. One man who gives an example of this problem is John McCone. John McCone was trained in the Eisenhower tradition, believed in being at every meeting and was a very good and useful member at meetings but wasn't, in the view of either of the presidents that he worked for, that close, and this created a complication. And we weren't able to find a comfortable way of dealing with that. Tuesday lunch didn't commit him to having anything in the presence of anybody that he wasn't comfortable with. It turned out to be a very useful way of sort of cleaning things that he couldn't clean otherwise. It turned out to be the only instrument of staffed communication, oral communication, between him and the Secretary of State that there was, really.

M: What you were talking about earlier, the problem of communication.

B: Yes, and I think that was its usefulness. There were an awful lot of things it could not do, and the government very much needed a much stronger implementation of Max Taylor's NSAM [National Security Action Memorandum], which it never got. I was a strong supporter of that NSAM and a strong supporter of the part of it that located the operational authority more clearly in the State Department than Max would initially have wanted to do. It was his temperamental instinct. The temperamental instinct of the military is that the State Department is the bureaucratic enemy and that the White House is the bureaucratic friend.

M: Put everything in the White House.

B: Put it in the White House because they can understand where you put the commander in chief. That's what they're paid for. The State Department is always afraid it will lose over there. Their idea of how to deal with the problem is the hidden ball play. Get the problem, stick it on your hip, and don't tell anybody else what the signals are. Now, that doesn't make very much interference.

M: There were no records kept, were there, in the early days of the Tuesday lunch?

B: No. Well, the decisions were minuted, not by formal [announcement], "The Tuesday lunch today decided"--no. I think that I was, I won't say perfect, but I don't think that any decisions were made that I didn't get into operational channels in the course of the afternoon.

M: There was no disagreement after they were over as to what may have been decided during the course of the luncheon?

B: I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that no disagreement. But I am not aware of large-scale disagreements.

M: And you reconciled those by what, consulting with the parties?

B: Well, the kind of decision the President made there would either be a very concrete decision, "Were going to hit thus and such targets," or it would be, "We'll do it Dean's way, and he'll take the duty." It would not be a six-paragraph memo. The President didn't like that kind of staff work, you see. He didn't want that sort of "Here's my decision registered six ways." It would be, "You take it and do it," or, "You go and consult thus and such and thus and such and thus and such, and then we'll see what we do." The actual concrete presidential decisions were much more likely to occur in a

subsequent document which would be a memorandum from one of the parties saying, "We've now done the following, and here's what we re going to say. Would you clear the cable?" or the cable might sometimes be at the luncheon and get cleared and then become the action document. But if you had tried to pin Lyndon Johnson to the notion that at the end of the afternoon after any Tuesday luncheon he would have to sign a minute of decisions, you'd have been out of business. That isn't the way he did it.

M: How different, as it evolved then, was this procedure to the Kennedy ExCom?

B: Well, the Kennedy ExCom was an *ad hoc* enterprise used really only on Cuba.

M: This wasn't the norm?

B: Oh, they loved it in 1963, and it had a good press. They would have an ExCom meeting every now and then on Vietnam, but it didn't become an instrument really seriously on any other major issue.

M: What about foreign policy messages?

B: They're very important.

M: What role do the White House staff people play in those?

B: You mean messages to the Congress?

M: Well, all kinds. For example, Johnson's 1963 message to the UN, his State of the Union 1964--

(Interruption)

M: If you've got the time here, if we can discuss the way Johnson had foreign policy messages prepared and the problems and so on that arose in connection with them, then we can stop and start with the substantive things next session.

B: Well, I think that there's nothing very mysterious about foreign policy messages. They do permit an opportunity for all parties to get into the act, and it is certainly true, as Dean Acheson once said, that in this respect, we have at the White House an advantage tactically over the fellows in the State Department because we're generally doing the drafting, just as they have the advantage on the cable traffic because they're on all of it and we're only on a selective bit. And there are ten of them or twenty or a hundred to one of us. But in presidential messages, the President generally turns to whomever he trusts to do his kind of prose. And that guy becomes very important. My friend Valenti says Moyers was never important in national security policy. He's crazy! That may be the current position; that may be what he has been told thirty-seven times by a very good friend, but it's nonsense.

M: Because of Moyers' speechwriting?

B: Not only because of speechwriting, but certainly because of that. And Goodwin was very important. The Baltimore speech, the President keeps calling my speech. If you talked to him today, he'd say, "Bundy helped," or he might not; he might be mad this month. But six months ago he said to me, "You've got to get me another speech as good as your Baltimore speech." He knows and I know whose speech that was. That was Goodwin's speech in the sense that he did the first draft, he did the thirty-first draft. I did do some of the input on some of the questions of could we get everybody to sit still to say unconditional negotiations and all that sort of thing. But even there Dick was very important. Well, it's another way of saying that the wordsmiths and the substantive types in the White House are close to those kinds of things, and it's a great and important part

of the presidential function. Acheson's view was that the only way out of that was to get over there and get a soft-lead pencil and be there, on the critical night. They learned that.

We had that pretty well worked out at the end of the Kennedy Administration. It took a couple of years to get it formalized. Sorensen would do the drafting and I would do the clearing, and that saved him from having to listen to people who didn't like his adjectives--he could put them all back in later. People became incurable draftsmen, and a committee never wrote a good draft. But it protected the departments in a fairly systematic way from the chance that they might not have an opportunity, and a proper opportunity, to register where their substantive overtones and undertones would be heard, what it was they didn't like. Instead of saying, "I don't like this sentence; I like this," I would say, "Why don't you like it? What's the problem with it? What does it do wrong? What shall I say to the President as to why you don't like it?" We could do business that way.

Broadly speaking with the ebbs and flows, because of the extraordinary view of President Johnson--President Johnson's view of time is like King Canute's view of tide. You can push it around. And sometime he could to a greater degree than anybody I ever saw, but it wasn't indefinitely pushable and sometimes things got lost in the corners that way. His Dominican Republic speech on the famous Sunday is an example of that,

M: I had that down as a specific point to ask you.

B: Well, just in passing, what I would say about that speech is the President was busting to make it. He knew goddamned well that the rest of us wouldn't let him make it unless he made it impossible for us to prevent him from making it. So he set up a series of

impossible deadlines and goddamned well made it. Even then the worse things in it were not in the script, they were put in or--

M: Ad-libbed?

B: Yes.

M: So you never can be sure, no matter how many times you--

B: I'm sorry to say that I want the record to show that that's his fault, that speech.

M: That's probably a pretty good place to stop at this session, and I hope it'll be convenient for me to come back soon and go into the substantive things, as I've outlined there. It's certainly nice of you to give us so much time.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I