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MCGEORGE BUNDY ORAL HISTORY, SPECIAL INTERVIEW II
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McGEORGE BUNDY

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McGeorge Bundy
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Date

Ralph C. Bledsoe
Archivist of the United States

October 21, 1994
Date

SPECIAL INTERVIEW II

INTERVIEWEE: McGEORGE BUNDY

INTERVIEWER: Robert Dallek

DATE: November 10, 1993

PLACE: Professor Bundy's office, New York City

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

D: What I wanted to first ask you about is the Dominican Republic. That was not a topic we spoke about last time, and so I wanted to get you talking about that a little bit; this affair in 1965 and what with everything else going on. What I would like to do is, there are really three or four topics I'd like to cover today. One would be this Dominican invasion, and as much as we can focus on what Johnson was doing, thought he was doing, and hoped he was doing. I'd appreciate it. And then we'll look at the 1967 Middle East war. I believe you were out of the government by then, but I also know that you were called back and played a central role in dealing with this. And then I'd like to come back and talk about Vietnam, and not so much, as you said at lunch, the issue of what happened, because we have that documentary record. But I'd like to have your reflections on what these major decisions of 1965 and beyond meant, and what they added up to.

B: Sure.

D: Why don't we begin with the Dominican Republic?

B: Okay. Where do you want to begin with the Dominican Republic?

D: Why was Johnson so inclined to push this invasion, as people described it, and why--I

think what I'm really after is the question of why did it get him into so much difficulty with the press, because a lot of the feeling that there was a credibility gap, that he dissembled, that he misled the press and the public, and certainly Eric Goldman describes that in his *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, a lot of this feeling seems to have come out of that episode.

B: It was very sudden, wasn't it? That is to say that the feeling that you have to move because of the kind of atmosphere that he describes later--overdescribes, I agree, although I couldn't give you the exact reasons for it or the chapter and verse; I don't have that in my head. But he does get the feeling that he's got to move, and he's got to do enough, and he's got to move fast. And the forces driving him in that direction are, of course, the American reporting from there, and backed up by strong feelings--

D: Do you mean the reporting of the press?

B: No, I mean mainly the government, the embassy, and backed up by the interested agencies in the U.S. He gets the feeling that this thing is really genuinely getting out of control, and that it's important to move in there. And it all really happens very fast. I don't remember the details, but I do remember that it seemed like a very fast process of decision making. And then the government collectively has to run to catch up with itself: What are you doing about the OAS [Organization of American States]? What are you doing about some form of peace making down there? And in effect, the action has gotten ahead of all the necessary parts of behavior, because the President thought time was short.

D: Why did he think time was short?

B: As I say, I can't reconstruct that. But if you read any one of the later quick books, you'll see that that's clearly what happened. And I can't honestly tell you in specific terms as to which day, what time of day, and that sort of thing.

D: He--in general of course--spoke a great deal about not allowing another Cuba to take place. Do you take that--?

B: I don't think that's just drama in his voice; I think that's a real sort of, "I don't want, on my watch, to be the guy who lost another island." I can't spell it out for you, but I think that was a strong motivation.

D: Because a lot of the criticism that is voiced in the press, and in Goldman's book, is that in fact it was a very small--

B: It's a different point; it's a different point, and it's a very important one, that he thought there was a risk of a takeover by "bad hats"--to avoid definition, because I don't remember exactly what his picture of them was--but he was certainly being told that this revolution can go very sour. And there were intelligence reports--I can't now tell you whether they were Agency or FBI, or how good they were--but they made him fear that these people were really bad news. And so he decides to act, and to do enough.

D: So what you're saying is that it may well have been that there was exaggeration, but this was not the product of his--

B: Not his own fevered brain all alone, no.

D: He had some basis for real concern.

B: Yes. I think so, and I don't think I thought then that it was as alarming as he made it out, but there's an element here that we were talking about at lunch: when Lyndon Johnson

has made up his mind to do things, he doesn't go light on developing the reasons for it.

D: So he kind of--a bull in the china shop.

B: Well, I wouldn't put it that way. The instinctive thing to say is, I'm the man on watch, and I'm going to do what's enough, and there is a situation--and some of the things he says plainly, and this is much better in these books that you refer to than it is in my memory, are hard to verify, chapter, verse, and number count, and all the rest.

D: That people were being beheaded.

B: I can't replay it; there's no point in my doing that over a nonmemory.

D: What I am doing is echoing what I've picked up from these books, and the press conference he had in which he talked about--I mean, there was a kind of hyperbole--

B: That sort of thing, no doubt. Yes.

D: It gets him into trouble later on. In your memory, did he ever express any regret about having oversold this to the press, or--?

B: I never heard him engage in that kind of regret about anything, that I can remember. Maybe I can hear him saying, "Now, that's just kind of a nitpicking point."

D: Since I'm on this, it takes us a little [inaudible] now, one thing is I want to go back to [?], Abe Fortas had some significant role.

B: He did indeed.

D: Could you tell me something about that?

B: He knew the grand old man on the left; what was his name? We were talking about him just the other day, the Dominican leader who was in exile in Puerto Rico.

D: Right.

B: Juan Bosch. And Abe knew him, and Abe was sympathetic to that side, and the President of course trusted Abe. And one of the reasons for his sending me along with [Cyrus] Vance was, as I recollect it, that we could keep in touch with him. I stopped and saw Bosch on the way down, in Puerto Rico. He was a very interesting, very bright guy. He wasn't really in the center of this enterprise at all. It was really being handled on the ground, and he was in touch with those people, but he wasn't the mastermind. There wasn't any mastermind on that side, the constitutionalists, and they had to consult with themselves before they could decide what kind of process to get into. But that was where Abe got into it, and stayed in it.

D: Stayed in it in the sense that--

B: In the sense that Johnson would always be in touch with him.

D: Be in touch with Bosch, too?

B: I don't know about that, because I don't know how much Abe himself thought Bosch was central to it, later on.

D: And even when Fortas got on the Court, he'd continue to--?

B: I can't tell you about the dates.

D: Because this was before Fortas goes on the Court, in the late summer of 1965.

B: I can't tell you; I just don't remember, because I wasn't really that close to it after the spring episode.

D: So it just sort of peters out, as far as you are--

B: Heavy [inaudible].

D: I was going to ask you, because in my work I've been seeing an awful lot of concern on

Johnson's part about the press, and about the kind of image that his administration had in the press, particularly over Vietnam, but this Dominican issue was a vital concern to him.

B: Yes.

D: I have some memos that I found, from Jack Valenti, from Bill Moyers, that frankly will not be very flattering to them when they get printed in my book--

B: Oh, dear.

D: --because they talk in ways about the press that are a little bit distressing. On the other hand, the press is not going to come off smelling all that good in my book either, because I find in the 1964 campaign they were intensely preoccupied with assuring that Johnson won that election.

B: (Laughter)

D: They were fiercely anti-Goldwater, and there was even, for example, spying on Goldwater's plane by people in the press, and feeding information to the White House, because they were so concerned--

B: (Laughter)

D: Now, Moyers was involved on Vietnam, and so was Valenti, in trying to, as they might have put it, create the right impressions and create the right image in the press, for the American government. Or I guess this is another way of saying, discouraging dissent and encouraging cooperation and support and [a] positive picture of [policy in] Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. Was there anything that you saw that comes to mind about Johnson and the press, and--?

B: Oh well, of course he watched the press. They both did, the two men I worked for.

D: The two men you worked for, meaning Rusk and--

B: No, meaning Kennedy and Johnson. Sure they noticed the press, and worried about it. I always thought LBJ was quite naive about the press; he really felt that the only really good reporter, in a way, was that guy that he would always leak to.

D: William White?

B: William White. "Bill White got the story straight;" that was another way of saying, "Bill White came and had a long talk with me and he's printed what I told him." (Laughter)

D: They were close.

B: They were very close, and White was uncritically friendly. And that was the kind of fair-minded press Lyndon Johnson wanted.

D: I found among those memos in which they talk about trying to get editorial writers, both the anonymous folks in places like the *Washington Post*, and the well-known ones like James Reston and Walter Lippman, to write the kind of editorials that--

B: They did try to have good relations and supportive reporting response, and I guess I did as much talking to Lippman as anyone in both administrations, because I'd known him before and he was an old friend. But I never kidded myself that you could write Walter's column. I did think that it was useful for him to be informed about the way we saw it.

D: And he was always receptive to listening on it [sic].

B: Of course, but not necessarily to agreement. He got very mad at Lyndon Johnson later on; I don't know the details of that, whether there was some particular case where he felt he had either been misled or they'd tried to use him, or whatever.

D: And the *Washington Post*, did you have anything to do with the editorial board, or--?

B: Oh, I did indeed. I forget his name; he retired to Maine, a nice guy; had a place in Turkey. A very good guy. Of course I saw them. Both presidents wanted me to talk to [the] press when they wanted it, and not when they didn't. That's been true in every White House since Roosevelt.

D: Sure. But what I was struck by was how much of a preoccupation there was on the part of people like Valenti. Now, I'm not saying--you don't find Johnson in the papers.

B: (Laughter)

D: But you find all these memos.

B: See, Lyndon? You got away with it.

(Laughter)

D: CYA, I guess was the--Valenti, Moyers, what's his name? Doug Cater?

B: I can't help you on any of them; I don't--whatever was going on was not a concerted enterprise, so I don't know what they were doing.

D: This was their own operation that assembled [?].

B: Sure.

D: --and who were privy to it [?].

B: Well, it depends. Sure, I might have been told on a particular day that somebody had had a very good talk with so-and-so, but I just don't have any recollection of it.

D: That's always the trouble with these oral history interviews. I'm skeptical of them myself, because unless you come in with a mass of documentation and say, "Look, this is what you wrote on August 11, 1965"--

B: Exactly.

D: --"and what is your memory of that?" And even then--

B: Even then it's an uncertain proposition, yes.

D: Let's talk a little bit about that 1967 war. You were called back to--

B: He calls a bunch of people in when it breaks out. How does it break out? By an Israeli attack, doesn't it? And--

D: June 1967.

B: --we are called down there and, one way or another, out of that first day's discussion, or maybe it comes the second day, the idea comes--I think Bob McNamara may have had it first--that we've got to have a kind of central sort of information and reporting and keep-things-coordinated place, and it's hard to do with the regular people that are also busy, and why don't you get Bundy; he's done it before. And so the President said, "Come on down and be the White House man on this war." So I did.

D: This is after the war has begun.

B: After the war has begun.

D: There was a lot of anxiety--

B: There was a, "Come down and talk about the crisis." I may have been down there once or twice to listen to the very complicated, mixed-up processes that they had there, but I wasn't directly involved. Then all of a sudden I was right in the middle of it, and it was that kind of a job. I saw some notes of my work the other day, and they are, "Here are the four things we are going to say in the next twenty-four hours," and, "These are the authoritative sentences that I've been able to find, and let's everybody say the same thing," and that kind of thing. And there might be something else about, "We are going

not to do thus-and-such." But there was a real need, because things were moving very fast, for somebody to know what the state of play in each interested department was, and know that the appropriate people knew what the state of play was elsewhere.

D: Wasn't there some considerable anxiety about the possibility of a crisis with the Soviet Union over this, and some anxiety--?

B: There was anxiety about it, but it wasn't dominant. It wasn't anything like as acute as the one that our friends had in 1973.

D: You mean Nixon and [?]

B: Yes.

D: What do you think was Johnson's general objective here? To try and get this settled as quickly and--?

B: I think that first, if it's going to be a real threat to the Israelis, which it isn't, after the first twenty-four hours, that would have been very serious. If it's going to escalate, it would be serious. The Soviet inadvertent, or whatever it was, attack, the exact cause and history of which I never knew then and haven't restudied since, that was trying. And when you got the cease-fire, the process of beginning to communicate, and especially to communicate with the Russians, I really sort of stayed around with it through the Glassboro meeting, which was very largely on that subject. Not altogether, because Lyndon Johnson was getting more and more interested in real progress on armaments, and Bob McNamara came and handled that part of it, wonderfully well I thought, at the Glassboro meeting.

But there really is less than meets the eye in that crisis, in terms of my direct

observation of it, because Lyndon Johnson did what I think any president would have done: watch closely, and watch against escalation, watch out for the safety of the Israelis, and try not to let it get out of control.

D: And the Vietnam concern, did this--?

B: I don't think it was overlapping with Vietnam in any very serious [way], that I remember.

D: What about the *Liberty*?

B: Very tough, and very mysterious, and Johnson was very careful about that. He wanted not to jump to conclusions.

D: As to why the Israelis--?

B: As to how it happened and what the cause was.

D: Richard Helms has told me that in his estimate this was purposely done by the Israelis; this is his conclusion. He was very eager to talk about this when I saw him. I asked him why he thought this was the case, and he emphasized that the Israelis were about to move against Syria when this occurred, and he felt they were very concerned that the *Liberty*, monitoring Israeli military moves and intelligence, might spill the beans in some inadvertent way, so that the Syrians would know the Israelis were coming and that, according to Helms, the assumption was that they had to put this ship out of commission in order to protect their forces from possible danger--

B: I don't even remember hearing that theory. I may have heard it from somebody, but I don't have any recollection of having heard it, and I certainly haven't had it live in my own mind in the last ten or fifteen years. I read that same story, either in the papers or somewhere.

D: Johnson you don't think necessarily came to that conclusion, or--?

B: I certainly have no affirmative evidence that he did, in my own head.

D: So he was cautious, as to--

B: I didn't say that, because I--I think he was cautious, but I just don't have any recollection of his being exposed to that theory and what his reaction was.

D: Do you know if he ever came to any--at the time--conclusion as to--did he take the Israeli explanation--?

B: I really don't know what he thought about it. I think the written record shows what he did about it, and I can't go behind that.

D: So you really didn't speak to him about it.

B: I can't say that; I don't remember speaking to him.

D: You don't remember, then, I see. So you may have had conversations--

B: I could easily have; I don't remember them.

D: Obviously I have to consult that documentary record and see what's there, as to what--but I was struck by--

B: There's nothing here; that's all I'm saying.

D: I wanted to ask that, because Helms was so emphatic.

B: It very often happens that the guy who's close to a particular piece of information will have a very clear recollection of what he thought about it and what he said about it, and how much his saying so had an influence on events. I don't have any such recollection.

D: Let's go on to the endless discussion that revolves around Vietnam. Nineteen sixty-five, of course, is a very, very important year in the whole Vietnam experience--

B: Yes.

D: --and of course Rolling Thunder, the bombing campaign, beginning in February, I guess, and the introduction of troops--I mean, this is all well known, and there are no revelations here. But there is this controversy about Johnson's role in all this, and there are people who would argue that he was pushed into this by advisers.

B: Yes, I've seen that. Moyers tells people he had--remember that he had to--if he hadn't gone in to either--had to deal with Rusk and Bundy and McNamara. Baloney. I mean, I'm sure that's what Bill honestly thinks, but it's not, in my view, the reality. I think that it is true that McNamara and I sent him that memorandum in January, that some people call the "fork in the road" memorandum. Both Bob and I, I think you'll find--I know what I think about it--it does say, "We lean toward increased action." But what it really says is, "You've got to decide." That's the major clause, and what that comes from is the enormous weight and sort of sense of dissatisfaction and of either opportunities lost or people deluded, or whatever, in the fact that the election year had turned out to be a year of nondecision. And you couldn't even get him to look at the memoranda, and he wouldn't--you know, most of the business of George Ball's famous memoranda is that he wouldn't read them, not that he didn't get them. And so here was--

D: This was in 1964, during the presidential campaign--

B: The campaign. He had other things on his mind.

D: I've seen your comments in that symposium at the Johnson Library [*The Johnson Years: A Vietnam Roundtable*], in which you recalled a CIA--or you asked somebody at the CIA; or they asked, I can't remember which way it worked--"Will we make it through the

year?" Because what you were both saying, it is clear, [is] Johnson is not going to do anything--

B: I don't know that I asked for that reason; I don't remember saying that I asked for that reason. If I did, in Texas, I don't remember that anymore, either. (Laughter) But I do remember that 1964 was a year in which, except for the Gulf of Tonkin, the President didn't want to stir the pot. He would deal with that later. And he's still not dealing with it when we send the January memorandum, and efforts have been made after the election--that's a sort of a two-month period--and he's still not looking at Vietnam. And we--

D: So what you're saying is that you and McNamara were saying to him, "It's time to--"

B: "You've got to look. You've got to make up your mind." And we were; we then said, partly because we both thought it, and partly because we thought it would be reassuring to him to know that we weren't saying, "Get out of Vietnam"--because I think it never crossed his mind to get out of Vietnam. It was that he didn't want to have the war louse up the election; a different proposition. And I think he turns out in the end to be a very determined nonloser, and quite willing to do anything that is safe, from the point of view of not triggering the Chinese.

D: So what you're saying, in essence, is that he is not being shoved--

B: He isn't turned into a hawk by any adviser; he is one.

D: He is acting out of his own inner compass here [?].

B: That's where he is; he doesn't want to lose there, he thinks that he mustn't be wishy-washy, and that the thing to do is to stand up strong and straight--and doesn't, in my

hearing, ever use the Alamo analogies, but he is thinking about what he wants is for the United States to defend it successfully.

D: This is his strong, clear view; no one is beating--

B: No one is beating him into it, absolutely not.

D: I must tell you that this largely confirms what I've been finding in the first, roughly, year and a half of the presidency.

B: There are lots of arguments about which particular things you do, and there are arguments about timing and there are arguments about ways and means. My particular argument with him is about explanation, which I usually lose. (Laughter)

D: Please, could you elaborate on that, because I think you are touching on something that is of great interest and concern to me.

B: I mean that it's pulling teeth to get him to give a speech that really explains what he is doing, and he finally does it in [the] Johns Hopkins [speech]. That doesn't cover the next step, which is what are you going to do about it? But it at least says that we're not going to give up, and we are going to stay with it, and why we're going to stay with it. And he formulates it his way, which is at least a distance from where he has been; he had been saying there's no change in policy. And then he gets needled by Eisenhower's people. He doesn't want you to say that, because he never was going to put troops in, or never made a decision to put troops in. So he says, "It's not a change in policy, it is a change in what policy requires." And has it both ways, in his own head. But at least he's saying there's a change in what policy requires. He doesn't want to announce how much; he wants not to make a headline with any one of the moves, whether it's the limited

bombing, or the marines to guard the airport, or the 200,000 men that Westy gets in July.

He gets the public announcement as limited and as late and as low key and as out of the fancy hours of news and as little subject to criticism and emotion and feeling as possible.

And I don't agree with that and he knows I don't agree with that.

D: You are touching on what--and I play this off you as a way to engage in some discussion now about the--I see this as the greatest failing of his leadership on Vietnam: namely that if he had allowed a debate, a genuine discussion to have gone on in this country over what people wanted to do about Vietnam, it might well have saved his presidency and saved the country an enormous amount of grief.

B: You've got a deeper faith in the good results of a rational, nationally-conducted democratic policy than I'm going to sign onto, without some wariness. But I was on that side of the argument; I thought the negative consequences of not explaining yourself were predictable and bad, that you really ought not to build the whole thing on the Gulf of Tonkin; you ought to find another basis. And of course telling Lyndon Johnson how to handle the Congress required a certain amount of presumption in the first place. And he would say, "Look, I have consulted people in the Senate, and they don't want to decide this again. They tell me they've decided it." I'm making up the words, but this is the difference of opinion that we had, and you can see the--a) he is the president; b) he knows more about the Senate than I'll ever learn; and c) he's just consulted six senior senators, and they've told him they don't want to hear about it.

D: But it's not just the Congress.

B: No, no; of course it's not just the Congress. But that's the obvious way to do it, if you are

making a decision to put troops into action. You have another resolution and you have another debate, and you are in front of the country in the manner that the Constitution prescribes.

D: What I've puzzled over--

B: But none of that happens, and it's not accidental, obviously.

D: Exactly. I'm delighted to hear you say that, because that's exactly where I found myself in trying to understand this. But what puzzles me is that here's a man who was such a keen student of the FDR presidency, and he admired, for the most part, Roosevelt's--

B: Absolutely.

D: --political genius, and capacity to lead the country through that terrible crisis of 1939 to 1941, in which Roosevelt was so skillfully taking one step at a time to bring the country along toward the understanding that we've got a crisis--

B: Well, that's one way of reading Roosevelt, and the other way of reading him is that he tricked the country into a war without explaining it.

D: Okay. Do you think this is the side that Johnson was--?

B: I don't think Johnson thought about Roosevelt in this context, very much. I didn't hear him say so. I don't say that he didn't, because that's proving a negative; I can't do that. But what he had in mind about Roosevelt was that Roosevelt had had one great legislative season, or maybe he'd had two, one in each term; I can't remember. He was going to have one only, in this term, and it was going to be in the first year or the first eighteen months, everything you do, and everything even Franklin Roosevelt did, he did in his first year--that kind of argument. "I want to do that. I don't want to louse up and

lose a month of laws over a resolution that will preoccupy the Senate and make people angry, and upset half the people. They don't want it and I don't want it."

D: So in other words, what you're saying is that in January-February of 1965, his focus is on getting those Great Society measures--

B: First priority. "I'll do what I have to do in Vietnam. I can see why people like Bundy and McNamara are saying it's not going well. I don't want to have history say I neglected it." And then the next thing I think he does is to do what he [had done] in the Senate, is to organize his majority. And that again is done in a way that I don't think would have been the one I would have recommended, and he knew that, too. That is to say, he gets a consensus; he organizes the votes. McNamara goes and negotiates so that Westmoreland will be on board. It's not the way my school books tell me a commander in chief makes a decision like that.

And Westy wants a lot of troops. I've been surprised to find, in recent years, that I actually wrote a memorandum about troops. "Two hundred thousand troops. We're going to send all these ground troops. We haven't used any, practically; we don't know what we're doing." Who do I send it to? It's very interesting to me: I send it to McNamara. Why do I send it to McNamara? Because my communications with Johnson are breaking down.

D: This is already in the middle of 1965?

B: That's in the middle of 1965.

D: He begins to see, by the spring and summer of 1965, even before putting in large numbers of ground forces, that there is a growing dissent in the country--

B: That's right.

D: --that there is the teach-in at the University of Michigan.

B: I forget the episodes, but certainly that summer has episodes. There aren't very many, and there aren't as many in July as there have been in May because the summer season is in, and he's not neglecting that. That's true.

D: But you also begin to have sounds of dissent in the press, and he's worried about this. I do find the evidence--

B: Sure he is. Oh, absolutely.

D: --he's worried about this dissent on the campuses, in the press, and yet he still won't sign on to the idea that you open the door to some debate and some--I mean, as you put it, to make that speech, to give that explanation--

B: He doesn't want a debate; that's where I get into trouble with him. I agree to have a debate, and he's furious. That's why he sends me to the Dominican Republic.

D: And you were agreeing?

B: The proposal for a debate comes from one of these student, or post-student New Left [inaudible] groups, and it's going to be under their auspices and they're going to run it, and I just think, "I'm an ex-college teacher; they all know I am. Who am I to say that I won't go and explain the administration's position?" I say yes, without consulting Lyndon Johnson, which was a mistake.

D: But the underlying issue here is between you and him as to--

B: The underlying [issue] in his view is that that's absolutely absurd, that you don't give the other guy a hearing and White House publicity for a view that you disapprove of. So he

sends me to the Dominican Republic, not because I was his first choice, but that gets me believably out of town. And then he really gets angry when I come back and Fred Friendly calls up and says, "You missed a date." Fred is the director of news, or whatever he's called, for CBS. "And I'll give you a radio hearing, and you can talk to critics of the war and defend yourself at the same time, and I'll keep it fair." And I say yes, without telling Lyndon Johnson.

D: Now this is when?

B: Whenever it was; you'd have to look up when the Friendly speech was. It's after I come back from the Dominican Republic. Fred calls up and says, "You missed that date."

D: It was probably May, or--

B: I can't tell you whether it was May or June or July; I just don't know.

D: Okay, I'll find it. How does Johnson express this . . . ?

B: Rage? (Laughter)

D: Irritation?

B: I don't remember the particulars. (Laughter)

D: How does it come back to you; how do you--?

B: It varies. He stops talking to you; that's his simplest device. I don't remember that he flatly stopped talking this time. It happened three or four times.

D: It seems to me this is a crucial matter that really has not gotten significant attention in the history books, about this--

B: Well, I haven't told it to everybody; I mean, I'm not criticizing Lyndon Johnson.

D: But I mean the large issue here, regardless of--okay, Mac Bundy and Lyndon Johnson are

having a falling out; this is significant--

B: This is over a real issue; yes, it is.

D: --but it's over a real issue, and that's what I'm saying I'm interested in, because it looms so big in my mind in terms of what Johnson might have done to have--and it gets back to the issue of what Jack Kennedy might have done.

B: That's an element. I lose that argument; I don't even know that I got to make the argument with him over Vietnam, but I had that argument with him on varying issues over time. And he thought I was, a) a hopeless naïf politically, and just going to get him into trouble; that it was not to your advantage to have a debate when it was to your advantage *not* to have a debate. And in the tactical sense he was right, in a sort of that-summer sense.

D: But in the strategic sense--

B: He wasn't right.

D: --he was wrong.

B: That's right.

D: Because in my book, I think--

B: But you're more of an opposite to Lyndon Johnson; you'll never get elected president, because you're much too honest.

(Laughter)

And you like to believe that honesty is the best policy and is the American way, and so do I, but not quite as much as you do.

D: The real truth is, I don't want people to find out about my income tax and those other

things I've been doing.

B: (Laughter) No, that's not your failing.

D: Corruption.

B: I'm not impressed.

(Laughter)

D: But I find this crucial. This is an absolutely central point, in my mind, because my supposition is that John Kennedy, who also had escalated the war in Vietnam--I think it would have been irresistible for him not to have done something more--

B: Less, though; less, I think. Much less. Not the ground troops.

D: But I am speculating on--of course it's all speculation, none of us can know.

B: Yes, of course it is; we'll never know.

D: But there's a wonderful memo--Johnson, in early 1964, Mike Mansfield is telling him to neutralize Vietnam; let's get neutrality. And Johnson asks you and he asks Rusk and he asks McNamara; and he asks everybody under the sun, including Ted Sorensen, "What do I do about this?" And all of you, uniformly, are saying, "Neutrality means surrender of Vietnam to North Vietnam, to communism."

B: Yes.

D: And Sorensen, however, has a very interesting point that he makes in his letter to Johnson, which is not in the other responses, which I think is a reflection of what Jack Kennedy's thinking might have been, namely, "Neutralization is a very bad idea, but what you want to do is to ensure that the Saigon government is forced to act in ways that make them the responsible party." The way Sorensen is putting it, this is our side door out of

this situation. And Johnson didn't take, it seems to me, that precaution, and I think Kennedy would have, and my guess is that it would have given him a way out of that--

B: You and I ought to have a separate argument about Kennedy sometime, because my hypothesis is a little bit different from that. One of the reasons is that Kennedy remarked somewhere, I'm pretty sure, that "Neutrality doesn't play out there." But the notion that the South Vietnamese--in the end it's their war; that is in Kennedy. That's in the record; he said that in the fall of 1963. And I think it's not an accident that he said that as much as he did in that season. I don't think he would have used 1964 any different from Johnson, but I think he would have used 1965 very differently.

D: In the sense that he wouldn't have escalated with troops, or--?

B: I don't think he would ever have wanted to have the ground war become our war. I think he had learned enough about that war to know that that was not a good idea. I may be just giving him my preference, but I think not.

D: But what we're also talking--

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B: --true-blue, temperamentally true-blue southern hawks.

D: So in a sense what you're saying is they both come to this out of a long history of--

B: Out of a--this is what we do when we get tested. I think.

(Interruption)

D: You were saying that you can't say that about Vietnam--

B: No, there is no easy way, and no unambiguously good way. It would have taken a lot of determination to say--and it's a very important and difficult question that people like you

and me need to ask ourselves. I can't say I ever really sorted it out. You're saying it's a good deal better to tell the truth, but one of the things you have to do is, [when] you take, say, Sorensen's position, it seems to me, that you want this to be the South Vietnamese's fault, you have to play a not-quite-straight game to get there. That's a very tough one.

D: Well, that's the nature of the democratic beast.

B: It's the nature of the *international* democratic beast; it's a very tough problem. But we don't get there, because we don't really--the problem that Lyndon Johnson sets up is a different one, that he's going to do whatever doesn't produce a China war, and whatever keeps his coalition together. And in his own way, he keeps that goddamn coalition together for a long time. Nobody predicted, really; nobody would have said to you in 1964, "You're going to have something like the separate campaigns and the convention of 1968." One of the things you might want to look up is Bobby Kennedy in a book of interviews--about world war--that he gave in 1964 for the JFK people.

D: Oh yes, I have that; that Ed Guthman book [*Robert Kennedy in His Own Words*].

B: Yes. It has him saying in 1964 that he believes in the domino theory; JFK believed in it; we all believed in it. That isn't quite true; we didn't all believe in it. But most of us did, and he did, and in 1964 he still does. Lyndon Johnson's nightmare was Bobby Kennedy on the right, have you run into that?

D: Yes, indeed. Instead of Bobby Kennedy on the left, as he later becomes; Bobby Kennedy nipping at his heels for having lost--

B: Lost Vietnam, or gone soft or whatever.

D: His brother would have saved Vietnam.

B: Yes. Because Lyndon always thought if the country had to choose, the country in the end was hawk[ish]. And of course the elections proved that. The only election in which the relative dove wins is in 1964, in the whole Vietnam history.

D: But that's what makes it all the more mystifying to me, that he wouldn't go to the country and open up and make the case for the hawks.

B: I think it's a fair question, when you put it in that context. Why did he want no debate? I think that keeping the legislative track open has a very large role in that. This debate will take a month; that's five big laws.

D: And we cannot distract ourselves--

B: And we don't need to do it. "Keep the country quiet; they trust me, I'll do what's necessary. Find out what Westmoreland wants, [but] don't tell anybody."

D: I want to get two or three more things. One [that] we spoke about at lunch, and I'd like get you, if you don't mind, on tape about [it], is Johnson as the great legislator, but not the man who follows through. You were there--

B: I'm a little careful about that, now that we're going on the record with it. (Laughter)
Let's see what we'd say. I was making the point that his experience was a legislator's experience, and in a legislator's experience the act is the achievement. You don't have to ask the question, how many actual miles of highway have been built? Somebody else does that, that'll take care of itself.

Now I don't mean to say Lyndon Johnson didn't have that kind of executive energy, because I can remember watching him on the Ranch, where he knew perfectly well that you didn't clear a field by saying, "The field shall be cleared." You rode herd

on the poor bastard until he dropped on the job. And the same thing was true about speeches don't get written, and meetings don't get beaten into agreement; you have to do that. So he had plenty of executive energy. But his political sense, of both process and result, was legislative, which was why I said that he handled the people that he needed to have [as though they were] very important senators, on Vietnam. And I don't think people in the White House *were* senators. They were staff, a different proposition. I don't know what he felt about cabinet officers, but I don't think he thought he was negotiating with Bob; he was telling Bob, and he was telling Dean. They were important people; he didn't tell them against their convictions without knowing. But they would salute and go and do it. He understands rank, in that sense. On the military [he was] not so sure. He was a veteran of the Armed Services Committee; he knows the power of the four-star officers and he respects that. "And the press, of course, you can't trust those bastards. They have real power. You've got to"--I'm making up the language, and I don't stand behind it; I'm not saying he would have put it this way--"but you *have* to manipulate them because you've got to have them, and what other way are you going to get them?

D: They're not going to just do it on their own.

B: They're not going to do it on their own, because they're dumb and they're slightly perverse. (Laughter) Don't quote all this, because I'm just making it up as I go, here. But they're a "they;" they're not a "we."

D: There are some things about which he was right.

(Laughter)

B: That's the professor and the press. That's another subject; that's a very difficult one.

So they're very odd, and it's not as open and shut as I was suggesting it was as we walked down the street, I don't think. But it is a different way of thinking about it, and it enters into the explanation problem, because what you learn in the Senate is that the explanation that you need for one guy is the opposite of the one you need for the other guy. But you have to be able to give those two explanations with equal fervor. Lyndon Johnson could do that. He wasn't telling you where he stood on a civil rights bill when he was telling Bill Fulbright that, "If you don't vote for this, you'll get one twice as bad." And he was telling Hubert Humphrey, "If you don't vote for this, you'll never get any."

D: And this of course is all in private.

B: That's right, that's right.

D: Which makes a world of difference.

B: It's all in private. The use of public discourse is a different game. There's something very important here, and you are going to have lots of witnesses and you're going to have lots of stuff on the written record that shows a process. It has some of the elements that I'm talking about, but that the whole thing is more complicated, I'm sure.

D: Let me just get to one or two more things, because time is very short. You mentioned Glassboro before, and I do have that impression, that arms control had become very important to Johnson.

B: There's no doubt about it.

D: And a lot of the first SALT agreement, the prelude to it, I think has something to do with this Glassboro meeting. Would you talk for a minute or two about--?

B: I wish I knew that better; I'd have to reread that stuff, I haven't--you're absolutely right. He gets arms control in his head, and somewhere quite late in the game he says to Dean Rusk, "I want a nonproliferation treaty, and you're the guy that's going to go and get it for me." And it is--I'm not there; this is a second-hand story. It may be in Rusk's memoirs, I'm not sure, but I believe it to be right. And it makes all the difference. Dean gets that as a clear mission; the President wants it. He himself would have walked around it for four years, seeing the problems in it, but he has an order, and he goes and gets it.

D: It's at Glassboro that--

B: No, Glassboro's not--I don't know where Glassboro fits into that. It would be very interesting to know. Glassboro is when? In the spring of --no; somewhere in 1967.

D: Right.

B: Spring-summer of 1967, and the nonproliferation treaty is ready for signing in 1968, and it's not a long process. I don't know where the orders are, and I don't know whether it's in Rusk's book, but if it's not it's because his son didn't ask him the right question, because I have heard him on that subject.

D: There's also, of course, the agreement on outer space.

B: Lyndon Johnson thought he owned space. He'd owned it as vice president, and there were a lot of people in Texas who cared about it, and it fitted his sense of a problem of the right size for Lyndon Johnson. I was always a skeptic on space, so I probably wasn't a very good witness on that.

D: So the connection to the domestic economic--

B: Yes, but that's--

D: There's a lot of pork that was involved in that.

B: Yes indeed, and I can hear him now, rumbling around in his grave saying, "They'd have that goddamn supercollider if I'd been in charge." (Laughter)

D: And more.

B: And more.

D: Anything about 1968? You were out of--

B: I'm not in the game; I'm not privy to the decision. I'm involved in some of the post-Tet Wise Men's meetings, but that's more about Vietnam than about 1968, although eventually the speech gets pulled together and has that ending on it, which I was surprised by as much as anyone else.

D: What was your reading on the Tet experience?

B: I think the big failing in Tet was--the immediate one was not to warn of it. They knew there was something brewing but they didn't talk about it. They briefed us, the same Wise Men, [at] the end of 1967, that things were going very well and we believed them. That was the last time I was an optimist about Vietnam, but I was; I thought they must mean what they were saying. And we said to them, "If it's as good as you say, tell the country it's good, because they don't think it's good." Well, that was the wrong thing to say, with Tet coming. So they said, "Everything is going great guns," and had Westmoreland back to give rosy speeches. And they could easily say, "That's what you guys told us to say." But we didn't have, and they did have, indications that a major attack was brewing. I've studied Winston Churchill's life enough to know that you always warn of disaster. It doesn't do any harm if it doesn't come, but if it's the other way

around you're in terrible trouble.

(Interruption)

B: The trouble with Lyndon Johnson is, even at a distance he can overwhelm you.

(Laughter)

There he is; he's so big and he's so all over the lot.

D: So much is going on all the time.

B: The one thing that would give him some satisfaction in listening to this is, "Well, I've got them confused, anyway."

D: I've said this to some people. I think some of the things I found in the papers he must have left there with the sense that--

B: That'll give them trouble.

D: --leave them confused, and even from the grave he's laughing at us.

B: Yes, exactly right.

D: Also maybe--

B: Exactly that kind of a guy.

D: --for showing us a little ankle, also--

B: Absolutely, absolutely.

D: "I did what I did, and I'm not going to tell-tale; I've titillated you now, and"--

B: There's a lot of that in it, and it makes you forgive him a lot, too, because in the end--

D: He was so human.

B: He's so human, and he's a bad boy, but he's not a bad man.

D: And his intentions were so good.

B: And they were very wide, just enormous, and the sweep is fantastic. You can get mad at him and he can get mad at you--ah, well.

Vietnam was a terrible thing for him, because you're right, I think, about this basic failure of communications. And I think you are right that the world does divide the people who went through Vietnam into the people who say, "For want of a nail," who think that one more air raid, or one more division, or one more year, or one more change of generals, would have done it. And there isn't any doubt that in operating fact, the team of people who were there in, say, late 1967 was a whole lot better than the team of 1965, in my own view. And if you want an ambassador who's rock-solid through thick and thin, you want--what's his name, the tall guy with the white hair who'd been in the Dominican Republic? [Ellsworth] Bunker; you want Bunker. Bunker's three volumes, if you go and read them now, [say] the war is still going fine, which cannot be true. So he is reporting not a hollow enterprise, but an enterprise all of whose measuring sticks were insufficient for the task.

D: You were gone by the time that this controversy over CBS and Westmoreland--I mean, that was in 1966.

B: Isn't that after the event? The one that got tried in court, are you talking about that one?

D: Yes.

B: That trial was what year? It's in the 1970s, isn't it?

D: Well, no, it's about eight years ago.

B: In the 1980s. I was not involved in the government when it happened. I testified at the trial--not in that trial; they didn't ask me. I testified at the trial of the Pentagon Papers

people, that there was nothing there that was revealing, [no] national security stuff.

D: It was Walt Rostow that testified at the Westmoreland trial. But of course he was there; he was national security adviser.

B: He was there and involved in it, that's right.

D: Well, look; you've got to--

B: (Laughter) Have fun; take your terrible man away--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Special Interview II