Interview with George Ball

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The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

UNDER SECRETARY GEORGE BALL

Interviewed by: Paige E. Mulhollan

Initial interview date: July 8, 1971

Q: Let's begin by identifying you, sir. You're George Ball, and during the Johnson Administration you served as under secretary [of state] from the time Mr. Johnson took office until the summer of 1966.

BALL: Until the end of September of 1966.

Q: Then you came back as ambassador to the United Nations for a very short period.

BALL: A period of four months beginning—I thought it was the beginning of June of 1968, but that wouldn't make it four months, would it? No, it wasn't four months.

Q: It was April, May, and June, wasn't it?

BALL: Actually I was appointed in April, but because of the fact that Arthur Goldberg, who was my predecessor, wanted to see something through—I've forgotten what it was—I didn't actually take office, as I recall, till June.

Q: How well did you know Mr. Johnson back in the days prior to his vice presidency, when you were working for Governor Stevenson in his campaigns of the fifties? Did you have any personal contact with Lyndon Johnson then at all?

BALL: Very little. I knew him casually, not only because of my relationship with Stevenson, but because as a lawyer in Washington I had had some very casual relations with him. But I didn't know him well, no.

Q: Did that include the 1960 convention when Mr. Johnson was an outspoken candidate on his own, as well as Mr. Stevenson?

BALL: Actually in 1960 I was at the convention. I didn't take any part in it. I was simply there on the sidelines, holding Adlai's hand. It wasn't a very happy affair, because none of us expected him to be nominated, but one had to see it through.

Q: What about Mr. Johnson as vice president? You were in the State Department throughout that period, first as under secretary for economic affairs and later as under secretary.

BALL: I had a certain amount of dealings with him, and they were all very satisfactory, very pleasant. One got the very clear impression of a man who was quite unhappy with his lot. Here was a-man who was an activist, who was used to being at the center of power in the Senate, who suddenly found himself with substantially no power whatsoever, working with a president who, for reasons I've never been able to understand, treated him as apparently every president treats his vice president: fails to include him in serious councils, rather ignores his advice, and gives him the most menial tasks.

Q: Does that mean that Mr. Johnson wasn't really very close to any of the foreign policy decisions that you worked with while you were working for Mr. Kennedy?

BALL: He was not at all close to them. He was actually involved in very few of the decisions that were taken during that period, or in very little of the discussion. Now, an exception to that was in October of 1962 when he came into the meetings of the so-called Ex-Com during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Those meetings were held in my conference room at the State Department. We had a kind of continuous session that went on for that week while we were trying to decide what action to take.

He came into the meetings. He said relatively little. He didn't take a dominant part at all in the discussions. The rest of us did to a much greater extent. He was inclined to take quite a hard line, as I recall, but displaying at the same time a kind of deference to the rest of the group, almost making it clear that he recognized that he didn't have the background and experience, that he had not been through this problem in as intimate a sense as most of the rest of us had been.

Q: The stereotype of the man always concerned with domestic things and not very knowledgeable about foreign affairs is fairly true then, officially.

BALL: That's fairly true. Then, of course, he went on certain missions. He went on the mission to Berlin at the time of the Wall. But it was again in a kind of public relations role rather than a substantive role.

Q: From the department's point of view, how did he perform as a public relations ambassador, either in the Berlin case or in his Vietnam trip? Acceptably or unknowledgeably?

BALL: He was very hard to work with, I think partly because of the insecurity of his own position. It was much more difficult to work with him as vice president than it was as president, much more demanding, less reasonable in these demands, in my observation. After he had become president and was secure in his mastering of the situation, I always

found him relatively easy to work with, but he certainly was not during his vice presidential period.

There was one time when he complained very bitterly to me about some speech that someone in the department had written for him. I rewrote his speech myself, wrote him a letter of explanation, and he acknowledged it with a good deal of grace, in effect, not exactly apologizing, but recognizing that the fault had not been all on our side. But I can't say that even during that period I got to know him extremely well, although he always treated me with a great deal of warmth, and from time to time would give me what I suppose was the maximum praise for Lyndon Johnson. [He'd say], “You're a can-do man. {Laughter}

Q: Specifically on the Vietnam issue, you signed I guess the so-called critical telegram August 24, 1964 that is alleged to have led to Diem's downfall. This was when I believe Kennedy and McNamara and Rusk were out of town. Did Johnson get involved in that because they were gone?

BALL: No, he didn't get involved with it at all. I'll tell you the situation. It was during the period when Dean Rusk was at the General Assembly in New York. He went up every year for a couple of weeks at the beginning of the General Assembly because the foreign ministers and the heads of government from all over the world were there, and it was a great opportunity to consult.

McNamara was off on a holiday, as I recall. I believe I saw the President in the morning, and then he went up to Hyannis Port. I think it was one of the four times in the six years that I got to play golf. I think twice I did it with Rusk and twice with Alex Johnson. Alex and I had gone out to play golf for a couple of hours at the end of the day. I had been on the phone with Rusk all day. Obviously I always left word as to where I was.

Just as I was finishing up the ninth hole, or eighteenth, I think it was probably only the ninth hole, we normally didn't have time for more than that—it was a public golf course

contrary to what was in the paper at the time, it was not Chevy Chase, I don't belong to any golf club—Averell Harriman and [Roger] Hilsman appeared in a great sweat. They had a telegram that they wanted me to approve because I was acting secretary, [a telegram] that could be sent to Saigon.

So we went back to my house. I looked at the telegram; I recognized that this was a telegram of considerable importance. I personally was not unsympathetic with what it said because I had felt that we had really run our course with the Diem regime. Unless he got rid of the Nhus and straightened up, II felt] that it was impossible to go forward. If we were prepared to get out, that was one thing, but I had found no sympathy with my general views that we ought to get out of Vietnam. So if they were saying to the generals as this telegram did, saying to Saigon, to the embassy, “Make one further effort with Diem, but you can tell the generals that we're certainly not-encouraging a coup and we're not going to assist a coup, but we will support any respectable, non-communist government that is established, that existed.” It was perfectly clear that this could be taken as encouragement and would indeed be taken as encouragement by the generals.

So I talked to Rusk in New York and gave him a rather [general briefing]. I don't think I read him the text, although I probably read him the critical paragraphs—we didn't have a secure line—and told him that I was going to call the President and see what the President thought of it. Rusk said, “Well, go ahead.”

So I called Kennedy at Hyannis Port, and I went over the whole thing. He asked me what I really thought. I had told him that Averell and Hilsman very much wanted to do this. I had made some changes in the telegram; I had watered it down myself actually over their earlier version. I read him the critical paragraphs. I told him that this would certainly be taken as encouragement by the generals to a coup. But I said I thought that, in my judgment, the situation with Diem was becoming an enormous humiliation to the United States, that we were supporting a regime which was behaving in the most unconscionable and cruel, uncivilized way toward a significant minority of the population. Madame Nhu

was making the most outrageous statements, and Nhu was a very devious and unreliable fellow. I thought to send this telegram to Lodge, who had just arrived there, was probably all right. So he approved it

He said, “Where's Bob?” I said, “He's away.” He said, “Get hold of Ros Gilpatric and see that it's cleared with him.” So I left it with the Pentagon people to prepare and get out. I notice the accounts now say that Ros says he cleared it because he understood the President had cleared it. Well, that wasn't exactly what the President did, and that wasn't the instructions I gave. The instructions were that the President said that if it's agreeable to Gilpatric, to go ahead.

Q: I guess [John] McCone was gone, too.

BALL: McCone was gone, too, yes. Anyway, we went ahead.

Q: Johnson was not involved in any of this?

BALL: He wasn't involved in any of it. There's been a squib in the newspapers that his book is going to say that this was just cleared by underlings, which isn't the case. It was cleared by the President of the United States.

Q: Apparently he's supposed to have held this against Hilsman, too. Is this what led to Hilsman's departure shortly after the President took office?

BALL: No. I fired Roger Hilsman, with the full approval of Mr. Rusk. He had become very difficult. He was so full of his own omniscience with regard to Vietnam, and he was lecturing the generals on strategy. He became rather a nuisance. So we got rid of him.

Q: I'm glad to get that story on the tape because I suspected that that was indeed the case. I'm glad to have you put it on there.

BALL: I can tell you another story, if we're going to put any time limit on this. And that is that Dean Rusk once said to me later, “You fired Roger Hilsman, but would you do a great favor for me? I said, “What's that?” He said, “Would you let me say that I fired him?” {Laughter}

Q: The good things, the Secretary wants to take credit for himself.

It's strange in light of some of the revelations of the so-called Pentagon Papers that apparently one of the things that Hilsman was very strong on was the covert operations strategy, and that was being undertaken at just the time that he left. Of course, he later said that he left because the President wasn't doing what he wanted to do.

BALL: Roger spent a great deal of time in his own self-justification, taking a lot too seriously.

Let me just add one thing on this, just to complete the record. I don't think that this telegram was what precipitated the coup. Nothing happened after this telegram. The generals decided they couldn't do anything about it. This telegram, as I recall, was in August. The coup took place the first of November, and that's quite a long time afterward. In the meantime a lot of things had been done. President Kennedy himself on television had made some very tough remarks about what Diem has to do to straighten up, and this could very well have been taken as that kind of encouragement. In fact, we had already started putting the squeeze on by withholding aid, so that I think we had established the causal relation, one way or another. I think this was only one of a number of things, and to put the total focus on this, I think, was a great mistake.

Q: It may have been done by Hilsman putting it in his book so prominently, as a matter of fact. After the assassination, I believe you were one of those who accompanied the new President Johnson back from Andrews [Air Force Base] on the helicopter that night. Can you describe that?

BALL: The situation that night, as you recall, the members of the cabinet were on the plane that had taken off from Hickam Field en route to Japan for the annual joint cabinet meeting with the Japanese and United States governments. I was acting secretary of state. Bob McNamara was in the Pentagon. Mac Bundy was in the White House. In fact, the whole rest of top level government was out of town.

So I telephoned Dean Rusk and told him that the President had been shot—on the plane—and he said that they had just had word from one of the press services and what was the situation. I told him all I knew. He said they were going to come into Hickam Field and he would call me as soon as he got to Hickam. He called me from Hickam Field, and I told him the President was dead. He said, “Where shall we come to? Shall we come to Washington, or shall we come to Dallas?” I said, “Come to Washington.” Of course, they weren't going to get in until much later that night.

In the meantime, I found myself suddenly with a great number of duties imposed which I didn't ever think of as attached to the Office of the Secretary of State. There are all kinds of statutory proclamations and actions that a secretary of state has to take on the death of a president. It derives from the fact that the Office of the Secretary of State as originally conceived was really the Secretary of State; it wasn't the foreign minister. There was going to be an associate foreign ministry. Then they put the two things together, but there were still some residual obligations that were left over from the original conception. So I was very busy drafting proclamations and doing all kinds of things that afternoon.

Then Bob McNamara, Mac [Bundy], and I went out to meet the new President. We met him; we got in the helicopter with. President and Mrs. Johnson, and the five of us rode back to the White House together. We talked a bit. The President, of course, was enormously moved by the dreadful experiences he had been through. He talked principally of how gallant Mrs. Kennedy had been, how she had insisted on standing with him even though the blood was still on her stockings and dress and so on.

He assured each one of us that he was going to count on us, that we had to stand by him, and that the government was going to go forward. [He said] that the one thing that heartened him was the fact that he was surrounded with fine people like us, the things that I suppose one would normally say.

We got to the White House. We went in through the Cabinet Room. The President was going to meet with the leadership. So I went back to the department, because I still had a thousand things I had to finish that night. Then I went out later to meet the cabinet when it came in.

Q: That was not a policy-discussion evening. That was just a recovering-from-the-shock-type of conversation.

When did he finally get into starting to try to master the issues outstanding in the area of foreign affairs? Right away?

BALL: As I recall, when we got off the helicopter we stopped very briefly in the Cabinet Room, and he said, “Now, what do I have to do right away? What are the things that have to be done in the next forty-eight hours? Apart from the funeral arrangements, what substantive problems are there?” I think I may have mentioned two or three things that were on top of the agenda.

Q: Lodge was in town, I think, wasn't he? Or just about to come into town, or something of that nature?

BALL: Yes, he was. He had come back for some kind of briefing.

Q: What about the funeral itself and Mr. Johnson as a personal diplomat with all the world leaders who came in? I know in the case of De Gaulle it was rumored that this was the beginning of a sort of breakdown of relationship between the two.

BALL: I obviously had a great deal of conversation with the President about how we organized this reception: whom he should see and whom he shouldn't see; the fact that De Gaulle was coming over; what attention should he pay to him and what attention should he pay to everybody else. We agreed that for the De Gaulle visit that he would go into the Secretary of State's office, as I recall, since the reception was on the eighth floor of the State Department. I'd asked the General to come in. To the best of my recollection, when he met with the General ! think I stayed in the room with them, but I'm not certain on that. I can't really recall. There were so damned many things going on. If I didn't, Dean did, and I don't know which one of us did, very frankly. We always operated on a kind of interchangeable basis. He may have felt he had to stay with the other heads of state.

But it wasn't a substantive conversation of any significance.

Q: So far as you know, it didn't lead to any long-term [consequences]?

BALL: I don't think so. The General felt honored, I'm sure, to be given even this brief meeting under the circumstances. I can't imagine anything serious came out of it. But let me say that President Johnson was extremely awkward at that time and ill at ease. This was just out of his experience, I mean not a part of his experience.

Q: Did he take your advice on who to see, for example, and what to say, how to say it?

BALL: Yes, by and large. He resisted at some points if we crowded people on him he couldn't quite understand why we had to see then. No, I don't say that—he was not [adverse to] the arrangements.

Q: During that first two or three months, as you watched the new President sort of start settling down into the job he'd suddenly come to, did he frequently display a shortness with the Kennedy men, a blow-up at Kennedy men, an abuse of subordinates?

BALL: I think he was doing his best to lean over backwards to make them feel a part of the show. Certainly during that early period he gave every indication that he wanted them to stay, that he certainly didn't want anyone leaving. He wanted them to feel that they had a place with him.

Now, when I say that was the attitude of the President, I'm not suggesting that some of the people that he brought in didn't have fairly abrasive relations with the Kennedy people because this was certainly true.

Q: Of course they were replacing them, and they were. .

BALL: They were replacing them, and even if they weren't replacing them, they were working alongside of them. And they were perfectly open in making clear that they had better access to the President than the Kennedy people did. But I think the President did his very best.

Q: How would you in your now considered hindsight estimate the situation in regard to Vietnam when the presidency changed? Was it such, for example, that Mr. Johnson could have disengaged? Was that a time when a basic change could have been made?

BALL: There was always a time when a basic change could have been made. I never subscribed myself to the belief that we were ever at a point where we couldn't turn around. What concerned me then as it did much more intensely even later was that the more forces we committed, the more men we committed to Vietnam, the more grandiloquent our verbal encouragement of the South Vietnamese was, the more costly was any disengagement.

I think it would have been terribly difficult for him to have disengaged immediately, because it would look as though he were repudiating the policy of Kennedy. I think that this is something which would have been almost impossible for him to do. At that time there was no particular opposition to the war amongst the public. I think he would have been

subject to all kinds of attack—that the moment he gets in, he turns his back on the policy of President Kennedy and gives something to the communists. I just don't think he could have done it then, as far as the domestic political situation was concerned.

But actually what he was most concerned with was not Vietnam at that point. While Vietnam had begun to fill up more and more of the kind of screen through which we view things, at that time it was just one of a lot of things that were ongoing.

I've got something—I don't particularly talk about it, but one of the very few things I took away from the department was telecons of my conversations for six years. I could tell you a lot more, actually, if I sat down and reviewed them.

But I got the impression that the President's instinct was to do what came naturally to him. It's easy to forget now, but at that time it was almost a constitutional crisis as far as President Kennedy's program was concerned. There was a kind of constipation on Capitol Hill that was really very serious, and the President turned immediately to the problem of how could he get the Kennedy program through. I think he felt sort of a personal responsibility to Kennedy to get his program through. I think he deeply felt this, and he did it superbly. He did it much better than Kennedy could ever have done it. Whether Kennedy could have done it at all, I'm not sure, because by that time he was very worried about it. He was not getting along well with Congress at all.

So this was what consumed an enormous lot of his [Johnson's] time. He was much more intent on this than he was on the problems of Vietnam which were cranking along. It was in the hands of exactly the same people who had been advising Kennedy, and I think he was more or less inclined to let those of us who had this responsibility continue with it.

Q: I've had people tell me that Vietnam didn't really engage him probably until after the 1964 election. Of course, now we're being told that all these decisions had occurred before then.

BALL: That's absolute nonsense. They weren't decisions. What was happening was that after he got the legislative program through, or even before, he became immediately involved in the election campaign, the convention and the campaign. The Tonkin Gulf occurred in the middle of that, in August.

I remember at the end of September I had become so deeply concerned about the situation in Vietnam that I sat down during the nights—because I couldn't do this in the office and I couldn't use any staff—and dictated a memorandum which turned out to be about seventy-five pages long.

Q; Is this the one that got leaked to Joe Alsop ultimately?

BALL: Yes. He never saw the memorandum. All that was ever leaked to Alsop was the existence of the memorandum, the fact of its existence. This was a memorandum that challenged every assumption of our Vietnam policy. And then the second section was a kind of plan for disengaging. I don't have this with me. I've got it, but I don't have it here.

Q: Will it be in the presidential library somewhere?

BALL: Yes.

Q: It did get to the White House, then?

BALL: Yes, it got to the White House. What happened on that was that the memorandum was written the last week of September. It took me about two weeks, because, as I say, I'd get up at three or four in the morning—I had a dictating machine in my house—and I would go into the library there and dictate through the night.

Q: That's sometimes the best time.

BALL: Yes. I had a very strong conviction that I should never treat with the President on an ex parte basis. So I sent a copy of this to McNamara, and one to Rusk, and one to Mac

Bundy. I think there were only five copies made, altogether. McNamara, in particular, was absolutely horrified. He treated it like a poisonous snake. The idea that people would put these kinds of things down on paper!

We met then for two Saturday afternoons to discuss this thing. As I say, the general attitude of the conferrees was to treat it as something that really shouldn't have been done. Although I think that Rusk and Bundy were more tolerant of my effort to put it on paper than Bob was. He really just regarded it as next to treason, that this had been put down on paper.

Q: Was anybody else saying such things at that? Anybody in a senior position?

BALL: No. None of them. Not at all.

In some way the fact that I had written the memorandum challenging the assumptions of our Vietnam policy did get to Alsop. I have a theory that Mike Forrestal knew something about it. Whether this is true or not, I don't know. It would be unjust to leave that accusation in that form, because Mike said he had not done so.

Anyway, Alsop had a column in which he said that I had written a memorandum challenging our policy in Vietnam and that while I knew something about Europe, my knowledge of Asia one could put in a thimble. So I wrote Alsop and said, “Dear Joe, You are quite wrong in your state-merit that my knowledge of Asia could be put in a thimble. It could be put in a soup plate. By this, I mean it's much broader than you suggest and also more shallow.” (Laughter)

Q: Which he probably accepted at face value.

BALL: The President was very upset that this thing appeared.

Q: In the column, you mean? Not with the memorandum?

BALL: Not with the memorandum, which he had not then seen. I didn't press to show it to the President, because he was occupied with the campaign at that time. But about the first of January, after the election, Bill Moyers was over for lunch with me one day, and I gave this to Bill. He read it, and he says that this was the beginning of his conversion on the Vietnamese issue. So then I said, “Well, if you feel that this is something serious, I had intended it for the President, and I want to give it to the President.” Which he did.

And the President read it not once, but twice, so he told me, and he was very impressed, or shaken, by it. So he insisted that we sit down and start arguments. Well, that was the beginning of a process I then employed, because then I wrote the President every few weeks setting forth, in effect, what I thought were quite serious reasoned memoranda which were difficult to do because, as I say, I had to do them all myself. But each one was addressed at some particular proposal for escalation, challenging the proposal and arguing that we were losing the war, that it was an unwinnable war, that the whole objective was an unattainable objective, that we could commit any number of—500,000 I think was the figure I used at one point in a memorandum—and that we still would not win. All the reasons I've set forth. And each time I ended up, “Therefore we should cut our losses,” that this would be the consequence in short-term problems, but in long-term we would gain by it, which I set forth in relation to each country: countries in the Far East, countries in Europe, the neutralist countries, and so on.

The President always read these things. And the reason I know he read them is because he always insisted on having a meeting then, and he would call on me to present my views, which I would do. The reason I know he read them was that he would sit there without looking at them and he'd say, “Now, George, you say on page nine” so-and-so. “I don't see how you can possibly defend that.” So then I'd defend it. “And on page fourteen you say” so-and-so.

Q: You're not bluffing when you can do that.

BALL: No, he wasn't bluffing. I always sat next to him at the table. So I know he wasn't reading from anybody's notes. He read them, and it was perfectly clear that he read them. And invariably without exception I think he always thanked me, as he put it, for disagreeing with him.

Q: Did they ever occasion, in being presented that frequently, what you considered really a basic reconsideration of some of the premises by the other principals?

BALL: Not basically consideration of some of the premises. But what did happen was that the President on two or three occasions said at the end of the day, “Look, I agree with George. I think he's right. We're not going to do this thing. I don't agree with you, Bob, you've got to make your case. I don't agree with you, Mac. We're not going to do it.”

But we ended up by doing it a couple of weeks later, because events moved on and pressures built up and so on. I think I slowed the process, let me put it that way.

Q: And didn't destroy your effectiveness with the President, as far as you know?

BALL: Not so far as I know. My relations with the President, by anything he ever indicated to me, always remained very good. I always had the feeling that I could say anything to the President.

Q: He didn't block you out because he knew you were going to be unsympathetic?

BALL: No. Let me say if I had found myself excluded from meetings as the Vice President did, for example, then I would probably have quit. But, on the contrary, I was always involved. And very often when we'd have something up, he'd turn to me and say, “All right, George, let's hear what you have to say against this, because I know you will.”

Q: Does that mean, though, that you became kind of the house critic? I mean, just going through the motions?

BALL: He used to use the term, “You're my devil's advocate,” but it was never a stylized affair, as far as I was concerned. I think that he did this rather deliberately, and I was prepared to accept it on these terms, because after the Alsop leak I think he wanted and I think they spread the word around the White House that, “George Ball is just sort of doing this on an institutionalized basis, just always filing the brief for the other side.” Which was not the case. What I was doing was deeply felt out of my own guts here. I wouldn't have sat up until three or four o'clock in the morning doing it.

Q: You don't stylize something at three o'clock in the morning!BALL: The interesting thing about all of this from my point of view was not only the President's response, but the fact that we had very, very hot arguments that never affected my relations with Dean Rusk or Bob McNamara. Bob McNamara may have felt angry at me from time to time—and the others [may have]—but it was never a personal matter, let me put it that way. And it was never taken that way.

Q: And you said the first memorandum dated from September of 1964.

BALL: It was dated October 5, as I recall, but it was written [beginning in late September].

Q: That came after the Tonkin attack, and you also were a primary principal in that, I understand.

BALL: Yes. But at that time I think my views were fairly well known, but they hadn't been put down on paper. I mean, I would urge them in the councils. This was the first time I deliberately sat down and reduced to paper my very strong feelings about it.

Q: Can you describe the Tonkin affair from the vantage point that you occupied in it?

BALL: When the first Tonkin Gulf thing occurred, Rusk was away. I was again acting secretary of state. That always seemed to happen during a crisis. There is one interesting thing which actually I discovered the other day reading one of these telegrams, telecons,

and that is I talked to McNamara and I talked to Bundy in the course of the afternoon following the [Tonkin attack].

Q: When you say Bundy without a first name, you mean Mac?

BALL: Mac, yes. Bill Bundy was really a—

Q: He wasn't even an assistant secretary—oh, yes, he was by then in September, 1964.

BALL: Bill is offended with me because I apparently said in the Star the other day that Bill was more the technician than the man of substance. Well, this was certainly true. He was not in the top councils. He was an assistant secretary of state. From time to time, we would have him there but this was simply to outline a plan, something of this sort. But he was not one of the top three or four people that were always talking to the President about these things.

I talked to them in the course of that afternoon—I believe it was the afternoon after the Tonkin Gulf, because one gets mixed up there because of the international date line. But talking to Bob McNamara, talking to Mac Bundy, our principal concern was one thing: that there would be a kind of orgasm of outrage in the Congress and that some of the right-wing hawk Republicans might take such action that would be in effect a declaration of war or would put the administration in a position where we had to do things which we thought would be very unwise, that might involve bringing the Chinese in or offending somebody else. So we talked about it. And I think it was McNamara who suggested it to me that wouldn't it might not be a good idea to leak it out that there had been a 34-A attack, and that while they were not related, the other side might have thought they were related, and therefore if it attacked the Houston. . It wasn't the Houston first. It was the other one, whatever it was.

Q: It was the Maddox first.

BALL: The Maddox, yes. It was because they were confused by these things—in order to blunt the effect.

Now, that was the first attack. The second attack was a different matter. We didn't know for a time whether it was a real attack or not. The only real confirmatory evidence which came in later was the intercept of the radio from the mainland. But I think that the President always had considerable doubt during at least part of that period and even afterwards in a sort of kidding way, he would say to McNamara, “Well, those fish [certainly] were swimming,” or something.

But anyway during the time that we were seriously considering action we thought it was genuine. Then we thought it might not be. And then when the instructions were finally given—they were given subject to there being confirmed that there had been an actual attack—the President decided that this was the time to go up to Congress, that we were going to probably have to do some more things, and that was the time to go up to Congress and bring Congress fully in, and that this was a very good occasion to do it. And the fact that we were giving some direction to a congressional action might save the Congress from doing something more extreme.

Q: Who actually wrote the resolution as it was sent up?

BALL: I can't remember. I think I had a slight hand in tinkering with the language, but I don't know who wrote it. I think it was based on an original Bill Bundy draft. I think it was redrafted in the White House. I think I made some lawyer suggestions at the end.

Q: Was it based strongly on a contingent draft that had been drawn up back in the spring?

BALL: Yes, the draft that Bill Bundy had written earlier which was too long and wordy, as I recall.

Q: But they do bear a lot of similarity, the two.

BALL: To my recollection. I haven't looked at it for a long time.

Q: Did you talk with some of the congressional leadership about it?

BALL: Yes, I went up. I was always the President's ambassador to Bill Fulbright. I went up, as I recall, and I spent quite a lot of time with the Foreign Relations Committee, trying to get this thing through.

Q: Fulbright, of course, later claimed that he had been fooled. Do you know of any reason why he might think he had been fooled as to the intent of the resolution or its content?

BALL: I think that what happened with him—and I like Fulbright, I don't mean to be unfair to him—he simply hadn't given the matter all that much thought at the time; perhaps didn't read all the implications into it that one might have if he'd studied it more carefully. The language was perfectly clear; it was extremely far-reaching language. But, even so, it didn't go so far beyond that Near Eastern Resolution at the time of the Lebanese invasion, or the—

Q: Nationalist Chinese one, I guess.

BALL: Nationalist China say that Matsu [?] ....

Q: You were already having doubts, obviously, about the general direction of our policy at that time.

BALL: Oh, I'd always had doubts.

Q: But you favored the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

BALL: Yes, I don't recall having opposed it. I just felt that—

Q: Did anyone?

BALL: I don't think so. “Let's go get this authority.” It didn't seem to me that implied in this was much more than that. “Let's get some authority from Congress,” rather than act entirely—again, this was perhaps a lawyer's instinct—on the basis of the implied powers of the President, war powers of the President. I just thought we ought to tidy up. That was really what it was.

Q: That was obviously a presidential decision, to go for the resolution?

BALL: Yes.

Q: So he was engaged in Vietnam to that extent. Had he been in on any of the so-called decisions that had been so much subject to discussion in connection with the Pentagon Papers? The 34-A decisions, contingency plans?

BALL: No, I don't think he had ever heard of it. I can't be sure of this. My recollection is that he had never heard of the 34-A. I'm not even sure I had myself.

Now, on all of those 34-A decisions, let me say that, as I recall, the authorization which was approved by the Ten-Eleven Committee or some damned thing.

Q: I think that's the name of it.

BALL: Too, the command in the Southeast Asia theater was fairly broad, so if they wanted to run a particular 34-A operation, they ran it. I don't think the individual operation had to be approved, just the program of operations. With respect to that particular committee, our representative on the committee was Alex Johnson, and Alex had the practice of before going to one of these committees, he would bring in the proposals and the files which they were going to consider and show them to me, and he would get my instructions as to the position that the department would take. This didn't always happen because sometimes I was away, but I had confidence in Alex, and he acted on his own. But when I was there, this was always done.

Q: And this is as high as it got.

BALL: This is as high as it got. And in the Pentagon, it was Ros Gilpatric who was doing it.

Q: The same level.

BALL: Yes.

Q: Was it your understanding that there existed in early September of 1964, as the Pentagon Papers seem to be saying, a consensus that we were going to start bombing?

BALL: There wasn't any consensus. There were a lot of people thinking, you know, “This situation is not good. Let's think of all the contingencies." And everybody who was working on South Vietnam was writing papers about this or that type of program. There wasn't any consensus at all.

Q: And certainly not a presidential decision?

BALL: Certainly not a presidential decision. No, he definitely didn't make it. He didn't want to make this decision. He was always a very reluctant fellow, but he always got kind of dragged along, kicking and screaming. The impetus toward escalation never came from Lyndon Johnson, I can assure you of that.

Q: There did occur that fall several instances that might have provoked the same kind of retaliation that we took in Tonkin Gulf and we didn't take retaliatory action.

BALL: That's right.

Q: Did they involve presidential refusal?

BALL: Usually. The President would say, “Yes, we're not going to do this.” And then what happened really, the reason why the bombing started in February, it didn't have anything

to do with any very clear decision that something had to be done to the North, but that something had to be done for the South. There had been a whole sordid series of coups, a feeling that the whole political fabric of South Vietnam was beginning to disintegrate, and that we had to do something very fair and affirmative if we were going to keep this damned thing from falling apart. That's what happened. It was a great bucker-upper for South Vietnam. That was the Whole reason for it. I say the whole reason. That was really the reason for it.

Now the problem that I was encountering at that time, particularly with Bob McNamara—and, again, I don't want to be unfair to him. He was the one who had the responsibility for the war in a rather special sense, in the military sense. He was under enormous pressures from his own soldiers and sailors and airmen to escalate, and he resisted. He made his own decisions, and he kept the thing under very considerable control and under great restraint. But the reaction I always had from him was—he would put up a proposal, and I would say, “Well, I don't think it's demonstrated that this is going to achieve the purpose at all, and I don't think that the argument has been made in any convincing form that this can succeed or that it's going to do any good. The cost could be very considerable, and it's one more step on this road,” and so on. He had a set answer, which was, “All right, George, what do you propose to do?” I had a set answer, too. I proposed that we cut our losses and get the hell out. But that was no [acceptable] answer.

Q: It would have been a banker's solution, maybe not a Ford executive's solution.

BALL: Well, they did with the Edsel, but ....

Q: That's right. They did. (Laughter)

BALL: It was an unacceptable answer in the current mood at the time.

Q: Had anybody joined you by February of 1965 in that point of view in regard to the bombing when the bombing decision was being made?

BALL: No. That was the general attitude I had toward every act of escalation.

Q: But you were still alone as late as February of 1965?

BALL: I was alone in the top councils. If Bill Bundy tells me he had lots of reservations, and I suspect he did—Bill is an honest man—he never argued them in any direct or vigorous way, even to me. He would always say, “You're overstating. You've overestimated this thing. It isn't as bad as you say,” and so on. I think there were people in the department who were beginning to feel this way.

Q: Lower down, you mean?

BALL: Yes. My own personal assistant, George Springsteen, I think agreed with me. Abe Chayes, who was in the consular department. But they were in a position where they couldn't make their voices felt.

Q: When the bombing did start, was it clearly understood by everybody that this was going to be a permanently instituted policy?

BALL: No. It started on a so-called tit-for-tat basis. Max Taylor was pressing this idea of gradually escalating the thing. I had a kind of sense of fatality that I wasn't going to keep it from happening. It would indeed happen. Once you get one of those things going, it's just like getting a little alcohol; you're going to get a taste for more. It's a compelling thing.

Q: Was it seriously considered that the bombing program itself might call for a greatly expanded ground force, if for nothing else, to protect the air activity?

BALL: I wrote one paper which is not in the presidential file. I guess to make this complete if you want any documentation on paper, I'll get you a copy of it.

Q: I'd like to, if it's not in the presidential files particularly.

BALL: I'll tell you why it isn't in the presidential files. It was a paper that I wrote to President Johnson describing the escalatory steps which would follow one another until we got into deep trouble—a war with China and a war with the Soviet Union and so on—because I wanted to take him through this. I wrote it, and then I tried to negotiate it with McNamara and Bundy. We spent a whole afternoon going over this, and they disagreed with me on one significant point. They weren't going to be a part of that. Llewellyn Thompson went with me pretty much the whole way. So then I wrote it for the President as a paper which reflected the views of Thompson and myself and of Bundy and McNamara, with the significant differences which we noted. I sent this to the President and he called me and said come over. I went over with Mac Bundy. I think this was on a Saturday. We sat down and C went through it step-by-step and explained the logic for each step. Then he did something that he had never done before. At the end of I suppose an hour and a half or two hours with him, he handed the paper back. So I have the original.

Q: That's why it's not in the files.

BALL: That's why it's not in the files. I suspect it would be in the files of the Pentagon, although it hasn't appeared, to the best of my knowledge. But I'll get you a copy of it.

Q: One of the things you suggested was that ground troops would be a necessary follow-up.

BALL: Yes.

Q: Do you think that was fully understood by the people who were so avid that we begin a bombing program?

BALL: Nobody was prepared to concede that any particular step would require any further step. This was kind of a standard assumption which I kept repeating again and again was a false assumption. The argument that I kept making through these memoranda. I remember quoting Emerson about “things are in the saddle” and “You're losing control.

You go forward with this further step, and you will substantially have lost control. Finally, you're going to find the war is running you, and we're not running the war."

Q: The Pentagon Papers imply that the decision to go up fairly hard and fast on troops on the ground was made as early as April l, 1965. Was it your impression that it was a hard decision that early?

BALL: No, it wasn't made that early. As a matter of fact, the very big review that we had wasn't, in my recollection, until June. Then we spent a week fighting this thing out, and there had been no decision taken.

Q: That was the occasion for another one of your major memoranda?

BALL: Yes, I think I wrote two at that time.

Q: Seeking to disengage. Are you still fighting a pretty lonely battle among the higher echelon at that point?

BALL: There wasn't anybody else.

Q: Did You get again as serious consideration as [always]?

BALL: I always had my day in court. That's the reason I always felt I ought to stay around. I was listened to. People didn't agree with me, but I was listened to. If I hadn't been there, nobody would have been raising any restraint.

Q: What about after the bombing began and the department attempted to justify its position with what became a rather well-known white paper that the critics always thought was a weak effort to ....

BALL: A terribly weak effort. That effort was written really I think under Bill Bundy's supervision. They gave it to me at the very last minute, saying, "It's just going into page

proof," and so on. I read it and said, "I think this is absolutely appalling. It doesn't prove a damned thing." So then I made an effort to strengthen it, and I rewrote parts of it, and so on. But even so I thought it was terrible. I always thought it was terrible.

Q: Essentially, why? Just a poor job of drafting, or were there just not the facts to demonstrate the argument?

BALL: I was a trained lawyer. I thought this was a most unpersuasive brief. It never seemed to me—and particularly this technique of taking a special case history and tracing it through and drawing lots of conclusions from it, I didn't think you could do that.

Q: What was the general view of the top inner circle advisers regarding what our chances were of doing what we wanted to do in Vietnam by this time? Was there optimism in the State Department?

BALL: It depended on what parts of the State Department you're talking about. I remember saying to Bill Bundy once on a certain measure of escalation that, "I don't think this thing has a chance. I think it's absurd to be putting this up and seriously going for it." I said, "What do you think the chances are?" "Oh," he said, "10 or 15 per cent." I said, "That's absolute nonsense for a great government to go ahead on as potentially costly a program of this kind in terms of lives, in terms of ancillary breakings that might occur on that kind of a risk. It's just a lousy business judgment. You can't do it."

I think it differed from one man to another. I think that McNamara up through that period was absolutely convinced that one could make a quantitative demonstration, given the disparity in resources between the United States and the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong; that if we didn't impose our will on the country, it was simply because we weren't using those resources properly and weren't being sufficiently skillful and imaginative. Therefore, it was a tremendous challenge.

Q: But doable?

BALL: It was doable, because the figures demonstrated it. With Rusk, it was quite a different thing. He was enormously influenced by his experience during the Korean War. He had been a key element in the Korean situation and Korea, so far as he was concerned, had been a great success. So I would say, “Look, you've got no government. It's impossible to win in a situation where you've got this totally fragile political base. These people are clowns.'! Whereupon, he'd say, “Don't give me that stuff. You don't understand that at the time of Korea that we had to go out and dig Syngman Rhee out of the bush where he was hiding; there was no government in Korea either, and we were able to come through. We're going to get the same breaks down the road. One of these days something is going to happen, and this thing is going to work, just as it did in Korea.” I think he believes that almost to this day. He said on television the other night that he had misappraised the will of the staying power.

I had quite a differing... I resented the idea that there was any particular wisdom on one side or the other. Everyone was responding to his own set of experiences. Bob McNamara was analyzing this thing as a man who was trained in quantification, who believed in systems analysis, who believed in application of games theory to strategy, who was enormously persuaded by the disparity in military power. This was his approach.

I think that Mac Bundy saw this as a fascinating set of operational problems. I think he assumed that we were so clever, somehow we could find the key hook.

For myself, I had a whole different set of experiences. As a practicing lawyer, I had had among my clients various agencies of the French government when they went through the Indo-Chinese experience. I had heard everything before. I used to tell this to the President when McNamara was present, and it would just drive him up the wall. I'd say, “Look, Mr. President, everything that the Secretary of Defense has been telling you this morning, I used to listen to with my French friends. They talked about the body count. They talked the relative kill ratios. They talked about the fact that there was always a new plan, and with a little increment of effort, the Navarre Plan, the DeLattre de Tassigny Plan, and so on,

that was going to win the day. And they believed it just as much as we're believing it sitting around the table this morning. I can tell you, however, that in the end, there was a great disillusion. And there will be one."

Q: But it didn't get through.

BALL: It didn't get through. And as you will note, if you ever see those memoranda, a lot of them were filled with references to the French experience. That was no particular wisdom on my part. I just had a feeling that this was a terrible place to commit power, that there was no political base on which it could rest, and that the physical terrain was awful, what President De Gaulle described to me as "rotten country."Q: I'm not, as I move along here, leaving out a lot of important things, particularly the peace initiatives. I want to go through them chronologically together, if you don't mind. I'd like to get the rest of these escalation decisions in chronological order.

BALL: What is your time situation?

Q: I'm at your disposal.

BALL: Are you going to be here tomorrow?

Q: I can be.

BALL: We could do some work tomorrow morning for a while. Tonight I ought to leave here by six.

Q: We've got probably twenty minutes or so on this tape to go. Then tomorrow morning we can probably do a vast portion of it. Let me check on the situation. (Interruption) The Honolulu Conference: of early 1966 coincides with Fulbright's nationally televised hearings. What role did you play in that?

BALL: I never went to any of those conferences. I just viewed the whole idea of a conference as being absolutely appalling because I was convinced that the President got out there with whoever happened to be the head of the government in Vietnam, and we were going to get in deeper and deeper and deeper. So every time anybody suggested a conference I shuddered.

Q: What do you think his purposes were in all of the whole procession of conferences?

BALL: I'd get the feeling that he really wanted to see these people, but the response of one politician to another, you know, is automatic and usually rather overstated. What we were doing was visibly, before the world's eyes, tying ourselves onto one sordid little politician after another, and this just disturbed me.

Q: Of course, right after that one, South Vietnam went through one of its really worst periods of chaos, I guess, the struggle and movement of early 1966. That apparently occasioned another full-scale review of policy and another one of your memoranda, I suppose, opposing it. Was that basically different than any of the others that preceded it, that review? Had it gotten a lot more serious then?

BALL: If you want to wait just a second, I think I've got that book of memoranda there. (Interruption)

Q: What I was really trying to do was really see if there's a real difference in the way that the reviews took place over time. Did enough people begin to take your doubts more seriously by early 1966 that there was a difference in the way the review came out?

BALL: No, because actually what happened was in a curious way the persuasiveness of my view diminished with time simply because we were deeper and deeper and deeper in. Therefore, people could always say, “Well, it's too late. And even if we wanted to get out, it's too late to get out.” Bob McNamara took that position at the end. “Well, it's too late.”

This was the problem. That's the theme that runs through these memoranda, as you can see.

Q: I guess the last really drastic military decision that was taken while you were still under secretary was the decision to bomb the Haiphong POL in the early summer of 1966. How were you involved in that?

BALL: I tried my very best to stop that. I think there's a memorandum in there about it. I tried to get them to follow it.

Q: And again simply were unable to get anywhere.

BALL: That's right.

Q: McNamara was as strong that late in favor as he had been previously?

BALL: Toward the end of the time I was in the department, I got a sense from Bob of real anxiety that “We've got to settle this thing. Let's get the diplomatic machinery going and get it settled.” His idea of diplomacy, as I have gathered, was just to send a lot of people out to talk to a lot of people. Well, I didn't think we had any absence of channels, any lack of channels. The problem was we weren't prepared to say anything that could be a basis for settlement. So that while I felt this anxiety, I knew it was genuine.

And John McNaughton at that time had developed very serious doubts. John would get me aside and say, “Gee, I agree with you, but Bob won't quite buy this.” But John comes out very badly in the Pentagon Papers, I think quite unfairly because he was a rather early dove.

Q: Our oral history tapes will make that quite clear. He'll get his, revenge at that time.

BALL: Good. Well, I hope so.

Q: Now by this time did you ever have specific authority from the President to be his seeker after peace, looking for initiatives?

BALL: Yes, as I recall, I was scheduled in a unique position where I think he told me, “My God, do what you can.” I did launch one venture.

Q: Was that the XYZ Gullion affair?

BALL: Yes.

Q: There are some prior to that.

BALL: Wait a minute. There was the Gullion affair. There was another one, whether it was subsequent or prior I don't know, in which I used a fellow I had known, who was a retired Foreign Service Officer living in Spain.

Q: Sturm.

BALL: Yes, Paul Sturm.

Q: That's subsequent to, I think, the Gullion. But there were, then, the inklings of things far earlier than that. I've been told, for example, that the Seaborne initiative, which has been played up in the Pentagon Papers, was in fact, at least in part, an effort to get discussions going. Was that your impression of this?

BALL: It was. Don't think these weren't genuine efforts to get discussions going. They were foredoomed efforts, because we weren't prepared to make any real concessions. Negotiation at that time still consisted pretty much of saying to Hanoi, “Look, let's work out a deal under which you will capitulate.” And therefore I never had much optimism about any of these things, but I thought it was useful to keep things going. But the problem was

that while people say they desperately wanted to negotiate, they never were prepared to make any real concessions.

Q: Was there an agreement as to what we would say if Hanoi had agreed to talk?

BALL: Yes, but it was not an agreement that really conceded anything.

Q: Can you sort out the Adlai Stevenson-U Thant alleged initiative in the fall of 1964?

BALL: This is a real headache, and I was in the middle of it very much. What happened was that Stevenson called up Rusk one day and said that he had been talking to Thant and Thant had had this signal. I've forgotten the exact form of it and I once knew it intimately because I got deeply engaged in it. And at that time we had some other things going; Rusk didn't want to encourage a new channel, particularly because he had no particular confidence in U Thant anyway who had a real Burmese view of the whole situation. So he didn't make any note about this thing, and he didn't mention it because he didn't regard it as very significant. All this was really was a kind of suggestion that there might be another kind of channel started. We had lots of channels going. I don't think he really thought anything about it. It was not deliberately brushing aside the possibility of making peace. He just thought this was Stevenson's anxiety to do something. He never mentioned it to me.

Then after Stevenson died there was that curious piece that Eric Sevareid wrote which, knowing Adlai for thirty-five years, was just Adlai blowing off. I don't think it was anything very serious. Stevenson was a great complainer, and he was always seeing things. But if you'd known him well, I think you could have understood it. If he happened to feel unhappy that particular evening. . And he hated his job at the U.N. by and large; he never wanted it. But that's another very long story.

Q: Unfortunately the story came out as if this was said in all sincerity, and people who don't know Stevenson are likely to take it at its face value.

BALL: Then I found myself in the position of talking to Thant about this thing. As I recall, I had two long sessions with Thant, in which Thant insisted on telling me this story from the very beginning. And each time he told it differently. (Laughter)

Q: So there's no straight version of it, not even in Thant's mind.

BALL: In Thant's mind, it expanded and it enlarged and he embellished it, and it was a much more attractive thing the second time than it was the first. So I decided it was hopeless.

Q: You mentioned the other channels that we had going. These were in the fall of 1964? What kind of channels were we using then?

BALL: You know, the assumption that we had channels through the Hungarians that we played with a long time and which Rusk got rather excited about, this Hungarian foreign minister.

Q: Peter?

BALL: Peter. And this fellow who defected ....

Q: Janus Radvanyi?

BALL: Janus Radvanyi has written a piece on this, which explains the total deception that took place on Peter's part, because Radvanyi was, of course, at that time the charge in Washington. I talked with Radvanyi about it at great length. He has just got a job. I had word from him just yesterday. He has gotten his Ph.D., and he has gotten an appointment to the University of Mississippi.

Q: Holy smoke! He'll go over well in Oxford, Mississippi.

BALL: A very good guy. But there was that Peter initiative.

Q: We weren't actually talking to North Vietnamese that early?

BALL: No. The Polish initiative didn't amount to anything. I think you've probably seen this stuff now.

Q: Early in 1965 we undertook some talks with the British and Russians as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference apparently. What did we have in mind at that point with them? Anything serious?

BALL: Sure, it was to see what the possibilities were. The Russians were always leading us on. We'd get rumors through the underground that the Russians really wanted some approach from us and wanted to play some role; then when we'd test it out, nothing would ever happen. This was pretty much the normal thing.

Q: In May of 1965 the President did go through a very short bombing pause. Was that in connection with any program design to get anything started?

BALL: It was hopeful that we could, yes.

Q: How did you convince him to do that?

BALL: We had a session down at the Ranch in which we were all down there. McNamara took the lead in that, and I joined him.

Q: Early in the first pause, as well as the second?

BALL: What was that? May of 1965.

Q: May of 1965. I'm not doubting you.

BALL: I don't know. Let me just say one thing. Looking at my telecons at that time, it's perfectly clear that I was spending no more than one-tenth of my time on Vietnam.

Q: Right, and I want to talk to you more about the other things, too. It's hard to understand now, because it became such a big part of the show, but during this period we were having Congo crises, we were having crises—Cyprus.

BALL: Cyprus. On all of these things I was spending far more of my time thinking and acting with regard to other things. I spend an awful lot of time on that Beef Import Bill and things of that sort that people are quite not aware of now. So it's very hard for me to keep a chronology straight about these particular things. I don't know. You asked me about...

Q: Obviously, it's not something that sticks in your mind as being a key point of any kind.

BALL: If you wanted to take this book home, if you would like to look at it tonight ....

Q: Okay, that would be very helpful. I have no plans and I have time to do it.

BALL: I mean, you have to guard it with your life, because I have no business having this, you can well understand.

Q: Oh, yes. The episode with Ed Gullion came, as I understand it, in the late part of the summer of 1965. That was peculiarly your operation. It was my initiative. It was my idea. Did you sell this to the President?

BALL: Yes.

Q: On what grounds?

BALL: On the grounds that I wanted to get a disavowable contact with him to see what would come of it.

Q: Did it seem for a while to be more hopeful than some of these other earlier ones that you've talked about it?

BALL: I thought it might be, and particularly the Sturm one. Was that afterwards? I guess it was.

Q: Yes.

BALL: The Sturm one. I don't know that at that time.I just mentioned to the President, “I've got something going, and I'm not going to tell you what it is,” or something like that. So he accepted that. You know, a disavowable contact.

Q: And the Sturm one and the Gullion one were not connected?

BALL: I think the Gullion one didn't get very far; therefore, I fell back on the Sturm one. I think that was it. I don't think Gullion ever knew about Sturm. Maybe he did, but I don't think so.

Q: Did anything happen to make it come to nothing? I'm thinking in terms of military activity that might have been unfortunate, as has been charged in some later events after you left office.

BALL: I don't know. Has anything ever been published about these?

Q: No.

BALL: I don't know whether they read it.

Q: That's the one initiative, in fact, that I can think of that I've never seen in print anywhere.

BALL: No, it's never been in print.

Q: That's about the only one that hasn't been so far. But so far as you know, there's nothing about that that is outside the papers—

BALL: He saw Mai Van Bo three or four times, as I recall. But I think at the end it just petered out. Now whether there were some military events that may have effected the thing, or whether Mai Van Bo got instructions from Hanoi: “Don't go anywhere with this fellow,” or what, I don't know.

Q: Were we trying to sell any particular package, any particular set of activities to get something started?

BALL: I had a set of instructions, which I worked on very carefully, as to just what we were prepared to do. I couldn't reproduce them now if my life depended on it. They are in that file. They'll be in the White House.

Q: The Sturm one wouldn't if you hadn't told the President who you were dealing with, presumably.

BALL: I don't think he ever knew. I mean he knew that I—he was willing to let me do a certain amount of this stuff on a disavowable basis.

Q: If it turned out badly, you could always ....

BALL: “Well, this guy was acting on his own.” And Sturm was the kind of fellow that could be trusted. I'd never use a newspaperman. I'd never use the normal volunteer in this business.

Q: Ashmore and Biggs, you don't use.

BALL: Oh, God, they'd drive me right up a tree. But if you have a fellow who is a trained Foreign Service Officer, you could be pretty sure, particularly if I'd known him personally for a long time.

Q: At the end of that year, we went through the very long pause, thirty-seven days. How was this sold to the President?

BALL: This may have been the one—was this the one.?

Q: Yes, McNamara was in favor of this one, according to the Pentagon [Papers] documents. So quite possibly..

BALL: I think he was in favor of both of them

Q: The first one is not mentioned very much in the Pentagon [Papers] documents. So quite possibly ....

BALL: He was in favor of both of them.

We all went down to the Ranch, and I guess it was probably early December. Both Bob and I made quite strong pitches for the pause. Rusk was not very much in favor of the pause. He just felt that we would get nowhere and we'd be in worse shape at the end of it. As I recall, there was no decision taken. We came back to Washington. And then I have a house in Florida and I went down for just a week, which was about the only vacation I had gotten in six years. I think I was away from the department for twenty-four days which included Sundays. And the President called me and said, “Look, you wanted a pause, and now, dammit, you're going to have a pause. You'd better get on an airplane and get back up here. I'm sending you a plane.

Q: That's the first that you knew that the decision had been favorable? Is that the way he frequently did things?

BALL: Yes.

Q: What about the aftermath and the sending of people all over the country? Was that something that he was advised to do by the State Department, or was that his own [idea]?

BALL: He wanted to make a great demonstration. He called me in. “Who should I send?” I was out in Virginia for some reason. He came out with that, on who we should send. So I was recommending people to send all over the place. The people I recommended were people I thought could do business, and the people he wanted to send were people who were too conspicuous.

Q: And sometimes the two didn't coincide, or they'd never coincide. Did any of those traveling salesmen get to do any business?

BALL: I don't think so. I mean it was too flamboyant an affair. You can't begin to negotiate that way because the other side immediately reads this as a major effort to put them on the spot.

Q: The initiative presumed to have been taken at that time by the Poles—what's his name, Neolovsky?—going to Hanoi was more show than substance?

BALL: I suspect so. I don't think there was anything serious there. I suspect it was no more serious than the whole Peter affair.

Q: What about Norman Cousins' charge that he published a year or so ago, that at the last moment he had—

BALL: I'm going to do a piece in this little Newsweek column for next time on the frightfulness of self-appointed peacemakers. I think they really get in the way more than they ever help.

Q: As far as you're concerned, no real chances was missed through this period?

BALL: No. The trouble with the self-confessed peacemaker is that, in the first place, he always goes desperately wanting to hear the other side say what he wants them to say. So he always hears them say that. He always comes back and reports that, when they haven't said anything different from what they've been saying for a long time. He reads everything into it. Then he insists on going to the press and announcing exactly what he's been doing. I think these fellows confuse the situation terribly.

Q: The last one, I suppose, that occurred during your tenure as under secretary was a Canadian in the early summer of 1966, Chester Ronning.

BALL: That was a different story. That was not a volunteer.

Q: That was another professional one.

BALL: That was a professional, yes.

Q: And so that was of more consequence than the others.

BALL: Sure, that was something we initiated. These other things were—you know, like Bill Baggs and Harry Ashmore, these characters just wanted to get a Nobel Prize.

Q: Did the Ronning thing move things forward at all?

BALL: No, I don't think it did, because again the problem was always the same. We really weren't prepared to concede anything significant.

Q: Still, by mid-1966? Did you have anything to do with any of those that have been published after you left office? The Marigold, or Harold Wilson, or Glassboro, or any of those?

BALL: I knew vaguely what was going on. For a period again of course in 1968 I was in the government. Not really, no. I didn't have any confidence in this. I didn't have any confidence ever after a very point in a negotiated solution.

Q: Because of our viewpoint?

BALL: Because we weren't asking for a negotiated solution. We were asking the other side to capitulate, in effect, to give up everything they had been striving to do for twenty-five years. And this I was convinced they were not going to do. This reflected to a considerable extent my French period.

Q: That takes us through the various initiatives until you left office and pretty much through Vietnam. I may think of some other things after looking at these tonight, but why don't we put in tomorrow talking about the 90 per cent of your time doing other things and any specific questions I might have?

BALL: Sure.

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Q: I think maybe a good thing at the beginning would be to put on [tape] that I've read through your file of memoranda, and your caution to me, I think, is worthwhile for anyone who may be doing that in the future.

BALL: Right. At this point I know you last night read the file of memoranda which I sent to President Johnson during the period from October, 1964 through the middle of 1966.

I think I might say one word in explanation of these memoranda. As you no doubt noticed, the successive memoranda represent on my part a falling back from a more categorical and original position. The reason for this was, of course, that I was fighting, as I saw it even in those days, a rearguard action. I was trying to slow down or prevent the escalation

of the war. I was trying to persuade the President and my other colleagues that we should systematically seek to cut our losses and disengage from what seemed to me from the very beginning a quite untenable position, primarily because I thought that both the political and physical terrain of South Vietnam were impossible for the effective utilization of the American force and that we should not commit it to such a terrain.

The result is that, as one reads the memoranda, it becomes clear that I was prepared at various times to concede things that had already been decided. This was tactically necessary if I were to have any credibility with my colleagues whatever.

Q: And I think it is important to keep that in mind when reading any individual one of the memoranda.

BALL: Yes, if they're taken out of sequence it would appear that, say, by the middle of 1966 I was ready to concede that what had been done with respect to a great many things was quite right. This was necessary, simply because the decisions had already been taken, and to have challenged them at that time would have been not only futile, but it would have created unnecessary argument and led to the questioning of the credibility of everything I was contending to do.

Q: Most of the questions that the memoranda raise, so we mentioned at least yesterday—there are a few that we didn't... In the summer of 1965 you're talking about something you refer to as the Acheson plan. Do I infer properly that this was to be a joint United States-South Vietnamese announced program?

BALL: As a matter of fact, there is a memorandum in there which is not mine. I should explain this. Let me get the memoranda in front of me, so it'll be easier to explain.

Q: I think I can pick it out.

BALL: It was with a number of supplements. Let me give you the background for this.

Q: It's June 1965 or slightly before?

BALL: Here it is. On April 21, 1965 I was at a meeting with the President, and some proposal for escalation was under consideration at that time.

Q: Troop commitment at that time.

BALL: It was a matter of troop commitments. And I made a very strong argument against going forward with this. I said to the President that, “I am satisfied that there might be a chance of transferring the contest from the battlefield to the ballot,” that we ought to take advantage of what appeared at that time as a possible diplomatic opening provided by the North Vietnamese in its answer to the Seventeen Nations' Declaration. I stated that I could very quickly give him a memorandum that outlined a serious diplomatic possibility that we ought to consider. And he said, “All right, let me have it by the end of the afternoon.”

So that was the memorandum of April 21, 1965 entitled, “Should We Try to Move Toward a Vietnamese Settlement Now,” in which I outlined the arguments for doing so, and then suggested that there might be a program that could be worked out for this.

I gave this to the President, and we talked about it. I said if it was agreeable with him that I was going to enlist Dean Acheson to come in and work with me in the developments of such a program and in working it out in detail. So he said, “Fine.” I asked Dean to come in and we worked for two weeks together on the development of a program which now appears as something entitled, “A Plan for Political Resolution of South Vietnam.”

Q: I see. That's a joint Acheson-Ball recommendation.

BALL: What it was was an effort on Acheson's part to translate into rather specific terms a plan which I had outlined in rather general terms, which called for a series of actions to be taken by the South Vietnamese government.

Now after the Acheson plan was developed I sent a young man who was on my personal staff by the name of Tom Ehrlich, who is presently the dean of the Stanford Law School, on a secret mission to go over it with—who was it, Lodge or Max Taylor?

Q: I think it was Taylor by then.

BALL: It must have been Taylor. With Taylor and Alex Johnson, who was there. And they threw cold water all over it.

Q: That's what happened to it ultimately, then?

BALL: Yes. They simply took the position that it would be very awkward for them even to raise these questions seriously with the South Vietnamese government.

Q: This was not something that grew out of any senior advisory group? This was a straight relation with Acheson by you, to come up with solutions?

BALL: Oh, sure. The senior advisory group never really functioned in this area.

Q: During the 1965-66 Christmas pause, you have a long memo in the file there—the original I think is at the very back of the book—referred to as Pinta-Maria, in which you are suggesting a secret communication for a six-power conference. Both that original and the copy that's attached to it are marked, "Not sent. D.R." What were the circumstances of that suggestion on your part? Apparently it was an attempt to get something started while the bombing pause continued, and you're laying out some options with the six-power conference as the most preferred one.

BALL: Offhand, I don't remember. That is Dean Rusk's handwriting. I must have shown it to Dean and found that he was so opposed to it that we just decided not to bother the President with it.

Q: It did not become a major issue that sticks in your mind?

BALL: No. Actually, as I mentioned to you, I followed one practice invariably. I never sent a thing to the President that I didn't send to McNamara, Bundy, and Rusk to give them a crack at it, because I didn't believe in mixed party dealings on these things.

This, to the best of my knowledge, is the only memoranda that was not sent to the President. Everything else was considered by the President, except there is one memorandum which we spoke of last night and which won't be in the Texas files—but it's here—and which the President read and which we discussed at some length.

Q: I know what the code name "Pinta" refers to. What about "Maria?"

BALL: I don't remember at this time.

Q: One of your memoranda there mentioned, when you were arguing that the resumption of bombing should not occur, some initiatives that took place in Laos through ambassador [William] Sullivan and Souvanna Phouma. Were these more hopeful than perhaps had been indicated before publicly, in your opinion? The North Vietnamese charge in Vientiane apparently approached Souvanna, who then ....

BALL: Oh, yes. I thought at the time that something might be stirring. It looked a little possible. I never had great confidence that we'd ever work anything out, but again I was seizing at straws, as you can imagine.

Q: Nothing came ultimately out of that?

BALL: No. I've forgotten. The meetings, as I recall, just never came off, or if they did, there was one that turned out to be rather stiff and formal. I can't remember exactly.

Q: Is the same thing true of the contacts in Rangoon with Ambassador [Henry A.] Byroade?

BALL: Yes, same thing.

Q: Just formal, non-substantive. That is apparent, but it could raise a question. When you were strenuously opposing the resumption of bombing, were you joined by anybody? [Did] anybody else who was basically in favor of the policy think that that might be a good thing to do at this time?

BALL: To the best of my recollection, there wasn't anybody else. I think I was alone.

Q: You said a while ago that the senior advisory group was not in fact an institutionalized —

BALL: Let me say one thing: one of the things that President Johnson used to say to me about the bombing pause was, “If I say we'll have a bombing pause for thirty days, I know that at the end of that thirty days, George, you're going to argue against resuming.”Q: Do you think it's true that that long bombing pause really affected the President adversely in the long run? I've been told that once that occurred he thought that he'd been tricked into it or pressured into it.

BALL: He was always very suspicious of the bombing pauses for a reason which is hard fully to appreciate at this time. He was deeply convinced, I think, that the real danger in American public opinion was the hawkish right wing, that they were all the time pushing him into things that he was doing his best to resist. The last thing in the world that he wanted was to get into a war with China or with the Soviet Union, and he remembered very well the Korean experience. So his concern about a bombing pause was, “If I go through a long bombing pause and nothing happens, then the pressures to escalate are going to be almost irresistible.”

Q: It wasn't the fact of the pause that bothered him so much.

BALL: It wasn't the fact of the pause, although it did bother him that in the meantime it was giving the other side a chance to move through the end zone. But the big consideration in his mind was the one of the play of forces on the domestic scene. I think he was deeply and very honestly concerned at the fact that this would give a very big advantage to the extreme hawks.

Q: Which it could have done. When did this so-called senior advisory group start?

BALL: This was an idea of Max Taylor's which he put forward—to have a senior advisory group. Now, which one are we talking about?

Q: I'm talking about SIG, the so-called Wise Men—"Let's finish off Vietnam quickly"—the Wise Men of the 1967-1968 time.

BALL: I see. We had had a meeting—and I can't tell you when it was, but it must have been toward the middle of 1965, I guess—of the Wise Men. I was in the government at that time. So I obviously wasn't in the group. It was Arthur Dean and Dean Acheson and, I think, possibly John Coles, a miscellaneous lot of characters. The President had talked to them about what action should we take, and they were extreme hard-liners. "Don't give them an inch. Go in and bomb and raise hell generally." At the end of it he turned to me and said, "All right, George, what's your contrary opinion?" So I had spoken to them and made no impression.

After the meeting I went over to Acheson, and I think Arthur Dean and somebody else was standing there, and I said, "You goddamned old bastards. You remind me of nothing so much as a bunch of buzzards sitting on a fence and letting the young men die. You don't know a goddamned thing about what you're talking about."

Q: That's a real problem for these people out of government.

BALL: Of course it is. I said to them, “You just sit there and say these irresponsible things!” And I said to Dean, “Would you have ever put up with this if you had been secretary of state?”

Q: What was his answer to that?

BALL: He said afterwards that I shook the hell out of him. He said he was very upset by it. (Laughter)

Q: And I'm sure the way he ran the State Department he wouldn't have been very happy with that kind of intervention. Did they meet regularly after that?

BALL: No, not very regularly. Every now and then they'd be [called together]. I don't really recall another meeting until—I think it was one I was involved in about November, 1967. Whether there had been another one or not, I don't know. Personally, I just regarded these old characters as nuisances, as I'm sure the people who succeeded me regarded us when we came in.

In the one in November, 1967 it went very much according to plan. Everyone spoke his little piece; I spoke my customary dissent; and that was the end of it. But I don't think I had a friend among the group, with the opinions I was expressing at that time.

Q: So there was a striking difference between that one and the one in 1968?

BALL: This was why the one in 1968 had such an effect. There were so many reversals of position.

Q: You say the one in 1967 went according to form. Did the people in the government realize how the one in 1968 was going to change when you called it?

BALL: No. I think Clark Clifford, who told me was the one who instigated it, was just hoping to God that the group coming in from outside would change things.

Now, there's a story that should be told, and it's never been told so far as I know. I've never heard it and never read it. And I can't even give you the timing, but it must have been—when was the long bombing pause? That was in—

Q: 1965-66, December 24 to January 20 something.

BALL: All right. It must have been about the middle of 1965 that we had a meeting. The President had asked Clark Clifford to come in and sort of give his appraisal of the way things were going. And Clark, who had been there once or twice on earlier occasions, had taken a rather hard-line view, I thought, although he hadn't been particularly vocal. On this occasion he gave a long analysis of the situation of the war, which almost completely agreed with what I had been telling the President. And then said to the President, “This war is going to destroy this administration. If things go on as they're going now, and we keep escalating this thing, the American people aren't going to accept it.” He stated it in most lurid terms. There was no particular discussion of what he said and a sort of an embarrassment.

I got hold of Clark .immediately after the meeting, because he and I were old friends. I said, “Come into the Fish Room with me. I want to talk to you.” So we went into the Fish Room and sat down at the table and I said, “Look. You have said the only sensible thing I have heard said by anybody in that group for a very, very long time. I can only tell you that you and I are in total agreement on this, and I think that your influence with the President is tremendously important. I want to put into your hands for you to read a series of memoranda which I have sent to the President. “Can you handle it?” And he said, “Yes, I am a member of the Intelligence Advisory Board,” or something, “and I have a secure safe in my house.” Which is wired downtown; we all have secure safes. “You have it hand-delivered to me, and I will see that it's taken care of.”

The next day he called me, and I think I dropped by to see him at his office. He was extremely excited about the memoranda, saying that he thought I was absolutely right.

Q: These are the ones you refer to here?

BALL: That's right. And [he said] he was going to have a very hard and long talk with the President. I think he had one talk with the President the day before. When the President saw Clark I was never clear, because at that time they were very close.

So Clark Clifford was a very early dove. This is something that nobody understands.

Q: But the President must have understood it.

BALL: The President must have understood it, and I don't altogether understand. Someday I will have a talk with Clark and try to straighten it out.

At the time of the bombing pause the end of the year, when we were discussing the bombing pause, Clark came in again and made a very strong argument against the bombing pause. It seemed to me almost as though there had been a kind of total volte-face on Clark's part. Clark told me afterwards that this was not any change in his position whatever, but that he thought that a bombing pause was going to spoil whatever chances we had to get this thing slowed down because the escalation that would take place after the bombing pause would be at such a higher rate.

Q: It's his argument about that bombing pause that has convinced people that he was a hawk still.

BALL: He was not.

Q: That's the kind of thing that makes all of this activity worthwhile.

BALL: And I've never told that story to a single person.

Q: And it will stay on this until—

BALL: Clark's going to be interrogated, isn't he?

Q: Yes. I am the one who interviewed Clark Clifford, and he didn't tell me that story either, although he did give some indications that he might have been a dove.

BALL: You don't have another crack at him, do you?

Q: I may make one, because I'd like to go into that with him.

The meeting in 1968, then, that did turn around, that he called, was it—

BALL: He got the President to call it. I think this was to kind of slow down this possible sending of the 175,000, or whatever the figure was.

Q: And it was organized the same way? It wasn't stacked to produce that result?

BALL: No, it wasn't at all. If you'll remember the dramatis personae, it was Arthur Dean, Doug Dillon, Acheson, Mac Bundy who was by then out of the government, Omar Bradley. I don't know whether Jack McCloy was there or not. He may have been.

Q: No.

BALL: I don't think he was.

Q: But the briefing was the same as before?

BALL: It was also Bob Murphy and Abe Fortas.

This time, I think there was more briefing, a little more systematic briefing. We came down the night before. We had dinner with Rusk, and I think Bob McNamara was there. Then we went in the Operations Center of the State Department and sat at that green baize

table there. And we sat around, and we heard these briefings. This was, as you will recall, right after Tet, and the briefings were very pessimistic. I was absolutely delighted with the briefings, because it seemed to me that these were so different from the kind of stylized briefings that department officers and Pentagon officers usually gave that the people were at long last telling the truth. The briefings, as I recall, were by Carver of the CIA, [Philip C.] Habib, I think, wasn't it?

Q: The State Department. And DePugh from. .?

BALL: General DePugh. And they were first-rate. They obviously had a very great effect. Then the next morning we had a meeting, I think in the same room. And we discussed it. Then Rusk and Clifford came in. It was clear that there had been a profound change of sentiment.

Q: You were in the majority for a change.

BALL: I was in the majority. Well, actually, when we finally got into the Cabinet Room, I think Mac Bundy's opening statement was, “Mr. President, I must tell you that I'm about to say something I never thought I'd say in my life, that I now agree with George Ball.” (Laughter)

Q: Of course, Bundy had made some noises like he had changed his mind by then in a speech somewhere in the fall.

BALL: He'd made a speech in Ohio, in which he tried to justify our going in and tried to justify our coming out, which, as I told him afterwards, was the greatest apologia in history for the old Duke of York.

Q: Did the President seem obviously affected by the consensus?

BALL: I thought he was greatly shaken by it. Then there was an effort on Walt Rostow's part to some extent to say that these guys have been prated by a very unfair briefing. This

was Walt's theme particularly. So then, as I understand it, the President tried to get the briefing officers back and have it repeated to him. Whether they repeated it in quite the same way or not, I don't know.

Q: You never will find out, I'm sure, too.

BALL: The theme that ran around the table was, “You've got to lower your sights. We can't achieve these objectives.” And even Omar Bradley took this line for a truce.

I think the thing that shook the President most was Acheson, who had been pretty much of a hawk up to that point, although had been willing to work with me on this, because I had used Acheson a great deal. I used him, as you may recall, very greatly on that Cyprus thing, and I'd even had him go to Geneva for a whole damned summer.

Q: So Acheson is a professional. He was willing to work that side while he holds contrary views.

BALL: I don't know that he held contrary views. If we could have gotten a settlement on the basis of Lebanon—we never could.

Q: You mentioned in your memoranda a number of times when you are trying to convince the President that we should disengage that one of the first things that had to be done was a basic decision by him to accept something less than a flow low [?]. Do you think that after this briefing in March of 1968 and his announcement of stepping down, of the bombing withdrawal, that he really made that kind of a decision?

BALL: He made that decision.

Q: To take less.

BALL: Yes.

Q: It wasn't just a tactical change?

BALL: I don't think it was a tactical change. I think he really made that decision. I think he Was torn. Because Rostow, on the one hand, was telling him all the time that Tet had really been a great triumph from the end of the North Vietnamese effort. But I think he was shaken by this kind of advice from people in whose judgment he necessarily had some confidence, because they'd had a lot of experience.

Q: You were very shortly thereafter made U.N. ambassador-designate. Did the change-about in his Vietnam views have anything to do with your appointment to that?

BALL: I don't think so. The President and I always got along perfectly. Oddly enough, we never had problems; at least, I was never aware if we had problems. He treated me with great consideration and courtesy all the time. He rather liked the idea that I was reasonably independent in my judgments of things. At least, he knew that I was honest with him and that I wouldn't double-cross him, and loyalty was very big in his vocabulary.

Q: You were in some of the meetings after the North Vietnamese responded favorably, and the discussion of where the talks might be held was taking place. How did it get into that mess about, “”We'll go anywhere, but we won't go to A, B, C, D,” and so on. What was the President's position during that period?

BALL: His concern was that, in the first place, he didn't want to give the French the triumph of having Paris chosen, and furthermore he thought De Gaulle might double-cross him. So he resisted even Paris. He resisted Paris.

Q: How did you convince him that—?

BALL: I didn't convince him. I think that he finally accepted it because the position was an impossible position—that we would go anywhere anytime, but we wouldn't go to Paris, which was an ally.

Q: And had all the facilities that we had claimed were necessary.

To get off of Vietnam, I suppose the best way to get off of it is to ask generally. The critics have always said that one of the great horrors of our Vietnam effort was that it distracted us so badly from everything else. Was the fallout that serious?

BALL: I think it was. I think it made it very hard to get attention on everything else, that judgments tended to be colored by the Vietnamese situation. For example, we pressed the British so hard to stay in line on Vietnam, and I'm sure we were willing to pay some costs for it we wouldn't have paid otherwise. We did this with other countries in a rather shameless way, I'm afraid. This was one of the arguments you may have noted I was making myself, that we were getting things totally distorted. In fact, I once drew a map for Dean Rusk and said, “This is your map of the world.” I had a tiny United States with an enormous Vietnam lying right off the coast. (Laughter)

Q: Strategic preponderance location.

BALL: And then a little bit of a Europe over here.

Q: Did President Johnson come to office with any clearly defined ideas as to what kind of European policy he wanted the government to pursue?

BALL: I don't think so. I had always sort of taken the lead on European policy, and I didn't get much interference on European policy. Mac Bundy was the only fellow that had some independent views. I always suspected and used to accuse him of being a Gaullist, and he had a different appraisal of the General from mine.

Q: Was it good or bad that you were given a pretty free hand? Good, I guess, as far as ....

BALL: Good. From my point of view, it was fine.

Q: What was the earliest issue? Was MLF still alive at the time Johnson came to office?

BALL: Very much so, yes. Actually, Bob McNamara was very good on the MLF, as far as that was concerned. During most of the period, he and I sort of fought shoulder-to-shoulder for it. He was in favor of it.

Q: What happened to it?

BALL: We worked very hard on it, We sent teams around. On the fourteenth of January of 1963, which is a date you may remember as having some significance, I met with Chancellor Adenauer. This was the day of De Gaulle's press conference, and I met with Adenauer. I had been in Paris the Friday before, and while this is really not relevant to the Johnson period, it's rather interesting. I had gone over to talk about the question of British entry and see what I could do, and also I had a meeting on the MLF in Bonn. In Paris on the afternoon of the Friday preceding the Monday, which was January 14, I met among other people Couve de Murville, who was then the foreign minister and a very old friend of mine. I had worked with Couve; I had been his lawyer when he was in Washington, and so on.

I had been told earlier in the week by some friends of mine—a chap who was the editor of Francois, whose name was Georges Gambeau. He had brought a young reporter, correspondent, to my hotel and had the correspondent repeat to me what he had learned in a private press briefing in the Elys#e Palace, which was almost a complete outline of every point that De Gaulle made in his Monday press conference. This was indicated to the correspondents as the line De Gaulle would take. So I repeated this to Couve de Murville. And Couve de Murville said, “Look, George, you've been around a long time. You ought to know better than to believe anything you hear in press circles. There are absolutely no ideas of that kind in this house.”

That was on Friday. That night Ted Heath came to my hotel at the Plaza. I had a private room where the two of us had dinner. We had a very long dinner, and a lot of wine, and a rather jubilant evening, because he had been doing the same thing; he had been talking to the French government. He was convinced everything was going to be dandy.

Q: Do you know what happened? Was there a change?

BALL: No, there was no change, no change at all. De Gaulle had been working on this press conference for a long time.

Q: That confirms your view of De Gaulle to you.

BALL: It did. And it also caused a lot of mental reservations about my old friend Couve, too. I only mention this because on Monday I met with Adenauer, and Adenauer started first thing in the morning with the meeting by saying, “I should tell you, Mr. Ball, that I had a very bad dream last night, and I'm still suffering from it. I dreamed that tomorrow I am going to have a terrible fight with Mr. Ball, because I am not going to be able to accept any of the things he tells me.” So I said, “Well, Chancellor, why don't you reserve judgment on that until we finish this morning?” I then made the presentation of the MLF and answered all kinds of questions. We went at it all morning. At the end of the morning he said, “Mr. Ball, I want to tell you that that dream which was haunting me this morning has completely dissipated. You've completely persuaded me. You've answered every question. And I am going to announce this afternoon that the Federal Republic is completely in support of the NLF.”

He gave a lunch then, and he said, “You know, since you're an old friend and since this is a special occasion, I have both of my foreign ministers here. My old one,” and he put his hand on Von Brentano's shoulder. “And my new one,” and he put his hand on [Gerhard] Schroder's shoulder. Of course, they both hated him. The old man was mean. He really was mean.

So he announced it in the afternoon. Then I had a party at the American Embassy for the members of the German government, and in the middle of the party we got word from the press conference. Yes, the answer is that the MLF Was still very much alive.

At the Ranch I suspect it was the meeting just before the bombing pause, Bob McNamara and I were still arguing for it. This must have been in—

Q: In late 1965?

BALL: Late 1965.

Q: Still wasn't dead then?

BALL: Still wasn't dead then. As a matter of fact, the President agreed to it then. We were going to go forward. Then it was clear that the French were going to raise hell, and they started an offensive against it. We finally had a meeting in the White House at night in which' McNamara and I made a fight for it. But for the first time in my life I really got very angry at Mac Bundy, because the President started to read a paper that Mac had written which Mac had not sent me in advance. I want to say that Bundy was extremely fair in all of his dealings. We used to have a lot of arguments, but we never had any problems between us. This was the first time, and I think the only time, I ever really got angry at him.

Q: He was arguing the contrary view to the President.

BALL: Yes. And I felt if he were going to give the President a memorandum with that argument, he should have let me see it and let me have a copy before we got into the meeting. But anyway, that was a very minor thing, and it was, as I said, the only time I ever knew Mac to deviate from being scrupulously fair.

Q: Did the President then just kill it?

BALL: Then he killed it.

Q: Is it true, as I have heard, that you saved the jobs of the so-called cabal, or theologians, or whatever they were known as, of the MLF?

BALL: They needed some protection at that time.

Q: And you were able to?

BALL: Able to focus [?] at that time.

Q: Most of them did survive rather well, actually.

BALL: One of them survived and is now our ambassador to the SALT talks.

Q: I was going to say, George Smith and Henry Owen turned up all right, and most of them landed on their feet. Was the President vindictive in things like that? Would his inclination have been to remove these people from positions of much authority?

BALL: There was a certain amount of that. on the part of the White House staff. down, then they became fair game.

Q: I see. And they needed a protector in a high place.

BALL: Yes.

Q: What about Mr. Johnson and De Gaulle?

BALL: I think the President respected De Gaulle as a brilliantly effective politician. He had sort of a high professional respect for him, and at the same time totally distrusted him.

Q: But he did apparently favor a rather soft policy?

BALL: Oh, yes, Because he thought that any harder policy would play into De Gaulle's hands. It was a tactical matter.

Q: Did you advise that policy?

BALL: No, I would have taken a tougher line, particularly on such things as just walking out on our NATO agreements, because, actually, it was a repudiation of a solemn agreement.

Q: You would have advised to hold their feet to the fire?

BALL: I did. I preached it very strenuously.

Q: The President personally rejected that?

BALL: Yes.

Q: On the grounds of his respect for De Gaulle?

BALL: No. On the grounds that this wasn't the way to be treated, and it would just make the situation worse. He had a different tactical view from mine. I'm not saying for sure he wasn't right. I think a part of it was also that De Gaulle was very popular in the country then.

Q: In the United States?

BALL: In the United States. And it would be against public opinion.

Q: What about De Gaulle's efforts in Vietnam, the neutralization speech and so on? Did that have any prospect at all that the President would buy De Gaulle as a peacemaker in Indochina?

BALL: No, I think just exactly on the contrary. There was during this early period a very strong kind of rejection by our own government of any neutralization talk. Neutralization

was, in effect, giving them what they wanted. I went to see De Gaulle during the Kennedy days and had a long talk with him about it. I found myself in the position which is familiar enough with anybody who is working at the business of arguing a brief which didn't represent my own conviction at all and hearing De Gaulle say a lot of things with which I thoroughly agreed, but which I obviously had to try to negate.

Q: You saw De Gaulle in late 1965 at least and other times as well. Do you think he was inclined to try to be helpful, or was he, as the President seems to suspect?

BALL: I think he was playing his own game. I think he was playing, as he always did, a very pecuniary game which was designed for the aggrandizement of French interests, in prestige terms, in terms of regaining a position of some authority in that part of the world.

Q: What about the President and NATO?

BALL: Which didn't mean at all that he might not have been a good force if he'd been given a little more opportunity.

Q: Did the President's willingness to let De Gaulle violate a solemn agreement on NATO indicate that the President wasn't very firm himself in his commitment to NATO?

BALL: No, I think the President was very firm. The President was very clear on this, just as he was on the maintenance of troops in Europe, just as he was on the Berlin issue. But I think it was tactical from the President's point of view. I think his feeling [was that] to put himself against De Gaulle given the prestige that De Gaulle had would only enable De Gaulle to claim that there was an argument between France and the United States.

There was a good deal of merit in the President's basic instinct on this, and that was, France was not a power that was equal to the United States. It was at best a second-rate power. Therefore, for the President to get, as he said, into a “pissing match” with De

Gaulle would only serve to build De Gaulle up and to build France up. Therefore, he was inclined to give him a very soft treatment.

Q: Did the President have any views on what NATO ought to be doing, other than what it was doing, that he pressed hard for?

BALL: No, I don't believe so. I think he thought NATO served a necessary purpose.

Q: What about the so-called "bridge-building" programs of the administration? Did that come up as advice to the President which he took, or was that an initiative that he came up with?

BALL: No, I think this was advice that he took. There was quite a little agitation for this in the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, and I think [Zbigniew] Brzezinski had had some influence on this policy and Walt Rostow was interested in this policy. Quite a lot of people were. And I think it was not much more than that. Nothing very much ever came out of it.

Q: I was going to say, was there much substance? There was a lot of rhetoric.

BALL: A lot of rhetoric. But when it came down to a quite simple issue, were we really going to get an East-West trade bill through, for example, there was no particular inclination on the part of the White House to make a fight for it.

Q: So the quite good-sounding speech, the East-West trade bill speech, I guess, in 1966, was really just about that.

BALL: I think the President would like to have done it, but he just wasn't prepared to risk the rest of his program in a fight with the Congress. So the thing went up and died. It went up and just sat there.

This was the trouble. I mean, rhetoric was quite easy on these things, but to turn them into anything very serious was wholly another matter.

Q: You have said that any initiative toward East-West improvement that didn't attack the German problem was necessarily incomplete. Was there any presidential inclination to do anything on the German problem?

BALL: No, not really. During that whole period we were in what I always regarded as a rather false position, because we were making all these noises about ultimate reunification and so on. As a matter of fact, I wrote this not long ago in a piece I wrote for an Italian foreign affairs magazine which created quite a row in Germany—on the Ostpolitik saying that one of the reasons why the Ostpolitik might get some receptivity on the western side was that it relieved the West from a position of some hypocrisy, that actually none of the western countries would have been prepared to have accepted a unification. Given the present structure of Europe, they would have been as appalled by it as the Russians. De Gaulle actually said that to me. Q: Was that in fact the position of our government during the Johnson Administration, that we would have been appalled.

BALL: I don't think anybody ever thought of it for the simple reason it was obviously so far off and so remote a possibility. I thought of it in terms of some rational structure for Europe, because I was always making the argument and writing a lot of stuff during the period, that the only hope for the reunification of the German people was within some kind of a larger European framework, that this was the only basis on which it could be acceptable to the rest of the Europeans, either East or West.

Q: Did the President really pay enough attention to a complex situation like that to master an issue like?

BALL: When a specific one was up that required a concrete decision, then the President did his homework, and we got rather searchingly into it.

Q: But as far as mastering the general European situation, he would not have been likely to—?

BALL: I think he was rather content to leave it to me.

Q: That speaks well of you.

BALL: As I say, there wasn't anything unless you got a concrete issue like MLF which required a fight with Congress. And let me say the reason the President abandoned me on that was that he didn't think Congress would take it.

Q: So it had to do with domestic politics as much as... ?

BALL: Far more. Let's say if this was something he could have done without congressional action, he would have done the MLF. I don't have any doubt about that.

Q: That's fairly clear-cut then, as to what his motives were.

BALL: Yes. But we were in a dilemma with respect to the MLF, because we were never in position to go up and lobby Congress for the MLF, because there was no final White House decision and the President wouldn't let me do it. But at the end of the road when the President was prepared to make a decision there was no preparation in Congress, and therefore he had a sense that Congress wouldn't take it. And it was this dilemma that we weren't able to resolve.

Q: So one predestined the other, then?

BALL: Yes.

Q: What about issues such as disarmament that are big today? Was the President interested in such things as that?

BALL: Yes, I think he was very much interested. I don't think he had too much confidence that we'd ever be able to achieve anything, but he desperately wanted to be a peace president. If, for example, there had been any kind of a signal such as President Kennedy got with regard to a partial test ban treaty, I think the President would have been absolutely delighted to have gone full ahead.

Q: But none came.

BALL: None came.

Q: And that applies to the NPT negotiations? Of course, I guess they climaxed after you left the department.

BALL: They climaxed after I left the department. I was never an enthusiast for them, because I thought. As a matter of fact, I did a piece in a book I wrote, about the NPT, which was rather unorthodox.

Q: Did the President ever take a personal interference or involvement in the discussion that went on pretty much all during the period?

BALL: Oh, yes, from time to time. But, again, when there was something he had to decide, and so much of the disarmament stuff never required that kind of a top-level decision.

Q: What other European topics got to be presidential in those two years? I guess the offset pressure came mostly after you left.

BALL: Well, it was there, and the President was very disturbed about the balance of payments, just as President Kennedy had been. It was never quite the same almost “King Charles' head” that it was for President Kennedy. That, I think, related in large part to what his father was saying, because on at least a couple of occasions when I would make a rather eloquent speech, or what I thought was an eloquent speech, to President Kennedy

about the fact that we were distorting policy in a very false way to try to accommodate it to the balance of payments which wasn't all that important—I would try to explain to him why I thought it wasn't all that important—he would say, “All right, George. I understand you, but how will I ever explain that to my father?”

Q: What does a presidential adviser do when faced with that kind of response?

BALL: I must say I always tried to get any decisions on the balance of payments to the extent I could influence the situation during the winter months when the President wouldn't be going up to Hyannis Port. Every weekend he went up to Hyannis Port he came back absolutely obsessed with the balance of payments.

Q: Was Johnson that obsessed with the issue?

BALL: He was concerned, but he wasn't.

Q: It got worse, of course.

BALL: Yes. It got worse. And this was a situation where McNamara got deeply upset about it, too. Because Bob was prepared to distort any kind of policy in order to achieve some temporary alleviation to the balance of payments, which again to my mind was a function of his preoccupation with quantification.

Q: That's right. That's something that could be quantified, measured.

BALL: That could be quantified. For example, I think he seriously proposed—and he may actually have done it on “buy American” issues—that if the American goods didn't cost more than 165 per cent of what it would cost abroad, we bought it in the United States. You know, this is the most horrible misapplication of resources)

Q: Was the President that concerned about...?

BALL: Oh, yes, He would go along with Bob. In other words, they were willing to take a great deal of punishment on the budget in order to help the balance of payments.

Q: What about the trade issues? Was the President interested in...?

BALL: On the trade issues, the President was generally good. There's no point in making any comparison with President Kennedy, because we had rather different issues come up. But then there would come something very specific like the Beef Import Bill. I spent any amount of time on the Beef Import Bill.

Q: That was a Texas issue.

BALL: That was a Texas issue, and he was getting heat very directly on that. He didn't care how I settled it. I don't think he really cared whether anything was done for the beef interests, but I had to quiet them down somehow. So we finally got a bill through that was just about as meaningless as it could be. This was a triumph of my young friend Tom Ehrlich because I turned the negotiations of the cattle interests over to Ehrlich and he did an extraordinary job. And they only realized afterwards what had happened to them.

Q: That's the best kind of negotiation you can have.

One of your crisis points in European affairs, I call it European, was the Cyprus episode in 1964.

BALL: The Cyprus thing was my issue in a funny way, because when the matter first came up, when David Harlech, whom I'm seeing this afternoon actually, came to call on the Secretary to explain that the British were going to get out of Cyprus, I was there and said to Dean, “Look, I'll take this one. Don't worry about it.” So from then on, I handled Cyprus almost singlehandedly.

Q: Did the President like to have someone like that that he could turn a crisis over to and say, "It's yours. Go to it."

BALL: Oh, yes, he was quite satisfied with it. And I got wonderful support from him on everything about it, wonderful support. He let me do it. He'd give me an airplane when I'd ask for it. I remember when we really had a tough crisis, when I went to see Makarios and Inonu and Papandreou, it was just a terribly precarious thing, and I had a feeling that Inonu and Papandreou each had to be given terribly tough treatment by the President if we ever were going to get any kind of a settlement. Oh, no, this was a different occasion. No, this was a later trip, when I stopped the bombing, or something out there. I hadn't gone to see Makarios on this trip. I had been to see Inonu and Papandreou, that's right.

Q: They were coming here, weren't they?

BALL: They weren't until I went out there. The thing was so touchy that I flew from Ankara. I had one of these converted tankers—what we call a McNamara kit. It was perfectly comfortable. Anyway, it was better than Air Force One because I could always get a bed not only for myself but for my staff. This day we didn't need a bed, because I started dictating when we left Ankara—I had two secretaries on board—and I had finished this memorandum just an hour out of Washington. I was met at the plane by someone from the White House saying, "The President wants you to come immediately."

I was able to go see the President and hand him a memorandum, saying, "This summarizes everything I can tell you, Mr. President." Among other things, that the President must immediately invite Inonu and Papandreou for separate visits. Which he then immediately agreed to do. We had them over there within a week.

Q: How did he perform with them? Did he do what you wanted him to do?

BALL: He did what I wanted him to do very well. The President was very, very cooperative on this kind of thing. If he were convinced that I knew what I was talking about, and he was

willing to give me the benefit of the doubt, and I felt that something was necessary, he'd do it.

Q: Even if it involved a tough session with a chief of state.

BALL: Oh, sure, a couple of tough sessions in this case and disarranging all his plans—you know, some entertainment program and this kind of thing.

Q: Are there European issues of consequence that I didn't at least mention here? None come to my mind, sitting here.

BALL: Throughout this period there was the general question as to how we would deal with the British and the French on the effect of the British entry. Of course, after the De Gaulle veto in July of 1963, it hadn't been as acute as it had been in Kennedy's day. Kennedy had pretty much let me handle all of this myself, and Rusk, too. They weren't as interested in it as I was. I was very much interested, and again I had complete support.

Q: Now we're coming up to 1971. It had been eight years, and now we seem to be getting to a point where we might finally succeed.

How much did you get into crisis situations such as, say, the Dominican Republic intervention in 1965?

BALL: In every one of them. On the Dominican Republic, I was with the President when we made the decision to send the troops in. I had gone over to see the President about something. I guess it was the Dominican Republic. There was a little tiny office right off the Oval Office, just half as big as this room. And the President, Mac Bundy, and I were there. I can't recall whether anyone else was there-maybe McNamara, I'm not sure-when we got the telegrams in from the Dominican Republic about the five hundred Americans, or whatever it was, who were there in the parking lot next to the Hotel Ambassador, or

whatever it was, and were in imminent danger of being killed. So we made an instant decision.

Q: Based entirely on the need to—

BALL: Based entirely on the need. Nothing else at that time. Now what happened was that this was a kind of slowly growing and developing affair, and it got rather transformed. After the troops got down there, and particularly after we began to-I don't know, we sent something like twenty thousand down. But there is absolutely no doubt whatever that the initial decision was made with only one consideration in mind, and that was a consideration which any head of state would have been derelict if he hadn't responded to: that we damned well had to get some troops in there in one hell of a hurry or our people would have been killed. Now, whether they in fact would have been killed is another matter. But let me say that on all the evidence we had before us at that time, this was the only conclusion we could come to. So I have no apologies whatever for that initial sending of the troops in.

On the question as to whether we should have sent in such a mass of troops and whether we should have so obviously then come out against a communist takeover, I think again you have to read this in terms of American domestic politics at the time. The clamor that if we had permitted the Dominican Republic to become another Cuba, which was the thing that was on the President's mind, I think it would have been devastating. I think this very deeply concerned the President; that, plus the fact that he was getting a lot of what I thought were highly dubious reports from J. Edgar Hoover about the number of communists.

But then the thing got taken out of everybody's hands. The President became the desk officer on the thing. He ran everything himself.

Q: Is that because it was in Latin America? Was it true that he felt differently about Central America, South America...?

BALL: He felt much more familiar with them. After all, a Texan has a feeling for Latin America. I think he felt that this was something right off the coast, that his own position was very much at stake on this issue of whether we had another Cuba on our hands or not. So he moved in, made every decision and did everything.

There's one thing again that I don't think has ever been printed, and that was the activities of Abe Fortas in this situation, because Abe Fortas had gone down under an assumed name to try to persuade... You see, in the days when he was under secretary of interior and when he began to practice law, he had a great friendship with Mu#oz Marin, and through that friendship he had gotten to know Bosch and these other people. Bosch at that time was in Puerto Rico. He was down under an assumed name negotiating with Bosch for a period of ten days maybe.

Q: On direct presidential instructions.

BALL: That's right. And telephoning the President always that, “This is Mr. Martin calling,” or something of the sort. This went on.

Q: Did you stay engaged in it through the Bundy-Vance mission?

BALL: Yes, I was engaged in it through the Bundy-Vance mission. I must say I began to lose interest in it after a time. I played a role in getting Ellsworth Bunker into the thing. I think Bunker was my original suggestion; quite frankly, I don't think anybody but Bunker could ever have worked it out. It cost him a year of his life down there.

Q: I expect so.

BALL: I meant he spent a whole damned year.

Q: Did the President have a specific solution that he insisted we come out with?

BALL: He just wasn't going to let the communist government run the country, that's all.

Q: Under any circumstances.

BALL: Right.

Q: Was Balaguer the President's boy, or was he willing to take anybody?

BALL: He would have taken anybody who was non-communist. I met with Balaguer myself secretly in New York on a couple of occasions at the Waldorf-Astoria during this period.

Q: Apparently Bundy was negotiating with another group.

BALL: Yes.

Q: Why was that shot down?

BALL: He couldn't get anywhere with them.

Q: It wasn't his choice of people, then?

BALL: He and Vance went down and Tom Mann went down. Tom had a very simple solution to all these problems, which put the army in control.

Q: Their army?

BALL: Yes. Tom's basic philosophy with regard to Latin America was that the only group you could count on, who had any continuity, and the only stable element of the society was the military. So that you always found the right military and put them in control.

Q: When the President got engaged like that, became, as you called him, the desk officer for the thing, did he keep those of you in the department, for example, informed as to what happened, or did a lot go on that you didn't know about that he was pursuing?

BALL: No. I think we knew about everything. We went to a thousand meetings over there. We'd get down into the minutiae, really the minutiae, and the President would preside and handle everything. It put us all—it put me in a position where I just practically lost interest. I had a lot of other things to do, and I tried to avoid the Dominican Republic as much as I could.

Q: What happened to the rest of the government business? What happened to Vietnam, for example?

BALL: Oh, it got put aside for the time being.

Q: The government can't really deal with two crises like this?

BALL: Not when the President immerses himself in the way he did at that time. This became a thing of such passion, almost an obsession.

Q: Why did it affect adversely so many of the people like Fulbright, for example, when it came out reasonably well?

BALL: They didn't know the end of the story then. One of Bill Fulbright's great disabilities was that he read books. Nobody in the Senate should read books.

Q: Don't worry. I don't think very many can be accused of that crime.

BALL: He had read books with a very strong anti-colonialist bias. One of them that he talked to me about a great deal which affected him very much was a book by a woman named Han Su Yen called The Crippled Tree, which was a book about China and the negotiations over the treaty ports. So he was always reading something that indicated the

anti-colonialist bias, and he was preoccupied with what appeared to him to be a kind of recrudescence of American imperialism, almost like the 1890s.

The Dominican Republic had some rather special meaning for quite a lot of people, because, after all, we had had Marines down there for a long, long time. I think this was Bill's reaction, and I think it was an honest reaction. I think it was impossible that he and Lyndon Johnson could over a period of time ever have gotten along very well.

Q: On foreign policy issues or on any issues?

BALL: Fundamentally on any issues. I'll tell you a story, too. I don't know if this is a good one to postpone for the ten-year requirement or not. In 1952 right after the presidential election when Eisenhower came in I got a call from Bill Fulbright or I went up to see him for something; I can't remember. He was in despair because he said, without anybody knowing about it this young fellow Lyndon Johnson had been lobbying the Senate and had got the votes to be the leader. All of Fulbright's friends were appalled by this, including Bill himself. They wanted somebody much more liberal and so on. He was deeply upset.

Q: So the seeds go back a ways.

BALL: Well, it just indicated a kind of incompatibility. These weren't the same kind of people. Fulbright thought of himself as an intellectual. He was a man who was interested in ideas; he wasn't interested in politics per se. So they were incompatible.

Q: I suppose the next high point is your resignation in the summer of 1966. Did you finally just get tired of fighting the fight, or were there more reasons?

BALL: No, I had a kind of developing feeling that Vietnam was consuming everything. This was no act of conscience on my part. I had no intention whatever of going out and denouncing my colleagues. I've just never worked with people on that basis. I was physically terribly tired.

Q: Six years is a long time.

BALL: And I had a feeling that we were all outstaying our time. The basis on which Rusk and I worked was that Sunday was like any other day. We never took a break. I had four telephones by my bed. There was hardly a week went by that I wasn't called at least once in the middle of the night on some crisis. More often than not, I had to make a decision as to whether this was worth bothering the President or not.

I had a very early experience with President Johnson soon after he came in. We had a crisis in Brazil—it was the time that Goulart was being thrown out—I had a strong representation in. At three o'clock in the morning I was down at the department, which was normal in any crisis. Rusk was away somewhere. As I mentioned, crises always seemed to occur when I was acting secretary. I don't know why. Finally, on the strong urging of our ambassador down there who was—

Q: Lincoln Gordon at the time?

BALL: Yes. I sent a telegram or issued a statement which had the effect of, in effect, recognizing the new government. Goulart wasn't quite out of the country, and I was taking a chance. But it worked out beautifully and was very effective. It was the kind of thing that marked a period to the end of Mr. Goulart.

But the President was furious with me, the only time he was ever really angry with me, I think. Why hadn't I let him know? Why did I do this without letting him know? I said, “It was three o'clock in the morning, Mr. President.” He said, “Don't ever do that again. I don't care what hour in the morning it is, I want to know. I'm not saying that what you did wasn't right, but after this I want to know.” Thereafter I never hesitated.

Q: Did that lead to him getting bothered by a lot of things that he shouldn't be bothered with?

BALL: I don't think so, not in his judgment. So I would call him. I never hesitated to call him. I'd call him at two, three, four o'clock in the morning, ask them if they'd wake up the President, I had something I wanted to talk to him about. He'd always say, “Yes, George, what's the problem?” And I would outline it. He would always say, “Well, what do you think we ought to do?” And I would always say, “What I propose to do with your approval, Mr. President, is the following.” There was never once that he failed to say, “That seems about right to me. Go right ahead, and I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for calling me.”

Q: Sometimes he was known to get angry at people who announced that they were departing. Was there any of that in your case?

BALL: No, I don't think so. I was very frank with him. I just told him that I really had to go back and repair my fortunes, that I had been away from my professional activity too long. At that time I expected to go back and practice law. And II said] that I was physically tired and I felt that it was time for a change in the guard, as far as I was concerned.

Q: Did he contact you frequently during the period you were out of government, between then and 1968? I know you were called in for the Pueblo.

BALL: The Pueblo, and, actually, the time that the Six Day War started. I was in Chicago making a speech and I was awakened early in the morning by Walt Rostow saying, “Do you know there's a war on, and the President would like you to come right down.” I said, “I've got a speech today, and if I cancel it, what will the appearance be?” He consulted the President and said, “Maybe you'd better not do it then.” So I didn't get down. Mac Bundy did get down and got stuck for two weeks, so I was glad I hadn't [gone].

Q: You didn't then go afterwards?

BALL: No. It was for a particular meeting. If I had gone down, it was reasonably possible I would have been stuck for a continued time, which I didn't particularly welcome.

Q: What did he use you for in the Pueblo incident?

BALL: I headed a group, a little committee which we got together, composed of General Mark Clark, Admiral David McDonald who had been chief of naval operations, and General Larry Kuter, an air force general—he was the vice chairman of Pan American Airlines. We examined all of the evidence on what had happened to the Pueblo and came up with a series of recommendations for the President.

Q: Which he followed?

BALL: I think so. By and large, they were carried out.

Q: Your recommendations were basically that we not do anything drastic?

BALL: That's right, and, also, they related to the conduct of these operations in the future.

Q: The surveillance thing that had led to the Pueblo trouble?

BALL: Yes.

Q: When you left your job as U.N. ambassador to go to work for Mr. Humphrey, you made it quite clear the reasons that you did so.

BALL: I telephoned the President. I had been thinking about this. I took a trip to Europe and had the impression over there that Mr. Nixon was going to be elected. My attitude toward Mr. Nixon had been formed at a time when I was working with my friend Mr. Stevenson back in 1952, and I had rather strongly-held views, as you may recall. No, I just decided that Humphrey was going to be badly beaten. Humphrey was a good friend of mine, although I'm not sure that he would have been the man among all men I would have picked as the candidate, but he was a man of great honesty and a terribly fine human being. I thought it was tragic that he was being put in an impossible position. I thought

he was going to lose and lose very badly, but I had a feeling that too shattering a defeat would have hurt the party and would install Mr. Nixon with too great a mandate.

So I made a decision in my own mind that not only was I going to quit, but I was going to be quite outrageous and see if I could contribute to reversing this trend. I had a feeling that Humphrey immediately thereafter had to do something fairly decisive with regard to Vietnam.

I telephoned the President down on the Ranch. I said, “Mr. President, for the first time in my life I am in a position not of asking your advice, but of telling you what I'm going to do, because this is a matter of conscience with me. I've come to a decisions after a great deal of conscience with me. I've come to a decision after a great deal of soul searching that I'm going to resign.” And so on. “I would hope I would have your blessing on this, and I would certainly want to do it in a way that would create the least problems for you.”

He was very nice about it and said “All right.” Then he called me back a little later and expressed deep concern. Very often his delayed reaction was somewhat different from his first one, which is true of everybody. He expressed concern that it looked as though we were being very erratic, that I was just coming in and then going out again. But he didn't make any real effort to dissuade me. He did ask me to hold off for a couple of days, because he wanted to be able to announce my successor at the time he announced my resignation.

So on the basis of this, even though I hadn't gotten the final clearance about this, I telephoned Humphrey, who had known nothing about this.

Q: This is not worked out with the candidate in advance?

BALL: It wasn't worked out with the candidate. I said, “Hubert, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to do this; I'm going to declare for you, and I'm going to go to work. What I intend to do is to be very outrageous. I want to make a very strong attack on Mr. Nixon.

I think I can command the television and newspaper attention for about three days, and maybe we can help deflect this thing." So that's the way it worked out.

Q: Did you tell Mr. Johnson that you were going to strongly push Humphrey in the direction of some change on Vietnam?

BALL: No, I did not. I read him the statement I proposed to make, which announced something about qualities which Mr. Nixon manifestly does not possess, or something which indicated I wasn't going to be an easy fellow to get along with.

Q: Why did it take so long to get Humphrey to make a more forthright statement on Vietnam?

BALL: He was terribly confused. Then he was getting lousy advice. One of the problems that Humphrey had was that he had a lot of really second-rate people around him. It's almost implicit in the job of vice president that he can't get good staff because he really has nothing important to do, and first-rate people aren't going to spend their time with the vice president. And [Humphrey] may have had the same problem, I don't know.

Q: And he emerged as a candidate so late.

BALL: He emerged as a candidate so late that he just went with the people he had with him, which was normal and he's very loyal, more loyal to them than they were to him.

So this was what occurred. I said I had a speech already arranged. "I want to fly out and join you." I flew out and joined him, I think in Seattle. I said, "We've got to get to work on a speech on Vietnam." A draft had been prepared which I thought was hopeless. I flew back to New York because I had a television appearance there on "Face the Nation," or "Meet the Press," or one of those damned things. We wrote it en route and took it back out. In the meantime there had been some other rewriting, and we put all of these things together in what was the Salt Lake City speech. It finally came down to how strong the language

would be, and Larry O'Brien put it up to me, and I made the final decision on just what the critical language was.

Then Humphrey said that he would call the President and would I call him right after he had called him. I said, “Yes.” Then I got a word from the television station that “the Vice President has not been able to speak to the President, because he has had to do a retake of his television because he didn't like the first take,” and would I call President Johnson and tell him.

So I telephoned the President. The operators—of course, I knew the White House operators very well—said, “Mr. Secretary,” or Mr. Ambassador, whatever they called me, “the President is talking to Mr. Nixon and as soon as he's off, I'll put you through. And it was half an hour later. (Laughter)

Q: How strong was the President's presence in the Humphrey campaign, as far as holding the line on the policy?

BALL: He did his best; that was made known down the line when he changed it all. As a matter of fact, the President's reaction to what I said on the passage I read him was, “Now, can't we make it clear that that's no change in policy?” Which was, of course, exactly the opposite of what we were trying to achieve.

Q: That's right. Did that seriously hinder? After all, Humphrey did come fairly close.

BALL: Look, from then on that broke the thing. I mean the combination. I don't know how much my quitting did, although I think it had something to do with it. It was a dramatic event on a forty-eight hour basis, plus this Salt Lake City speech immediately thereafter. From then on the curve was up. We were down seventeen points on the Harris Poll.

Q: Did the President hinder the campaign in any way, or help it in any way?

BALL: What hindered it was the pulling and hauling over getting to Paris. With a little more flexibility two weeks before the election, then we could have gotten the negotiating talks started.

Q: What delayed that?

BALL: Rigidity at the top of the government, plus a terrible resistance on the part of the Embassy in Saigon.

Q: Not a conscious effort on the part of the President to keep it out of the campaign.

BALL: No, I must say I think that the President's attitude was, one, a great reluctance to appear to have been manipulating the thing so that it broke just before the election, because he wanted to make clear for history that he was not using Vietnam for political reasons.

Q: Any subsequent relations during the balance of his term, from the election on to January?

BALL: I saw him, yes, sure. We went down for a dinner for Dean Rusk, and he delivered a eulogy of me—the President did—and so on.

Q: No disruption in your friendship?

BALL: Never has been. I was down there in Austin the other day and the President couldn't have been nicer. He just wrote me a terribly warm note. I'm very fond of the President. I have great respect for him. I think he is a man of great, great qualities, and it was tragic that the Vietnamese war is the thing that his administration is likely to be known by, because he did magnificent things, and he had a great vision of the United States.

Q: Are there any major topics that you'd like to recite on that we haven't managed to at least touch?

BALL: I think we've covered most of it.

Q: The general administration and organization of the State Department we haven't mentioned, but I know you're engaged here in a few minutes. Suppose we do it this way: if at some time when I'm back in town and you're in the country, we might want to continue for one additional tape session and get things like organization and such out of the way.

BALL: Be glad to.

Q: Okay. That way you can get to your appointment on time.

BALL: Right.

End of interview