

Roswell L. Gilpatric Oral History Interview – JFK#4, 8/12/1970
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Biographical Note

Roswell L. Gilpatric (1906-1996) was the Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1964. This interview focuses on changes Robert S. McNamara made to the Defense Department during the Kennedy administration and the relationship between the Defense Department and the White House, among other topics.

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Roswell L. Gilpatric
Roswell L. Gilpatric

July 5, 1972
Date

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Roswell L. Gilpatric– JFK #4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

ROSWELL L. GILPATRIC

August 12, 1970
New York, New York

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: I thought we might lead off today by perhaps getting some of your reflections on the question of what Kennedy's intentions were in regard to Vietnam. Kenny O'Donnell, of course, raised this the other day with the publication of his serialized article in Life. I think the basic question here is: Was the announced withdrawal of the thousand men on October 2, 1963, was this, from your view, a move in the direction of the eventual withdrawal or planned withdrawal on the part of the president of the United States forces in Vietnam by 1965?

GILPATRIC: I couldn't put it in quite as specific terms as that. As I've said before, all along in my own recommendations and in the recommendations of General Taylor and Rostow, resistance was encountered from the president at every stage as this total amount of U.S. personnel deployment increased. And I do recall that the president became particularly restive in the summer and fall of '63 about where we were going to come out, what was the exit point. And while I wasn't personally privy to the discussions between him and McNamara which led to McNamara's statement about the first withdrawal, McNamara indicated to me that this was part of a plan the president asked him to develop to unwind the whole thing. But I can't say whether the year '65 was the key point in that plan.

O'BRIEN: Was there ever any thinking in the Defense Department at that time, and particularly on the part of Secretary McNamara or General Taylor, about the withdrawal of troops as perhaps a lever against Diem, at that point, to bring Diem around to. . . Well, of course, the primary thing the United States was interested in then is

getting rid of the Nhus and bringing about more social reform and change in Vietnam.

GILPATRIC: I don't think that that specific statement by McNamara--and I'm not sure whether it took place before or after the overthrow of Diem--I don't think that was part of a pressure play. Most of the discussion took place on the subject of withholding or cutting back on or foregoing increases in military, economic, and other kinds of assistance. And since the president turned down Rostow and Taylor on combat elements and was just limiting it to these unit groups that were going in, I don't think that Diem was really expecting very much more at that stage in terms of U.S.--he didn't want more U.S. personnel involved; he wanted more of the sinews of war than the people to conduct it.

O'BRIEN: One thing about General Taylor here. General Taylor's role is a rather ambiguous one throughout these years in regard to his attitudes towards, particularly, the kind of war that's going on in South Vietnam. There are some that feel that he really is a very traditional kind of soldier, that he was one who conceived of warfare in really more of an organized, military way of a World War II variety. How about your own reflections on Taylor?

GILPATRIC: Well, first of all, I think it's clear from what happened before the Kennedy administration began that Taylor always was a great believer in the role of ground forces and tactical operations contrasted with air operations and strategic operations. And one of the points where he saw eye-to-eye with Kennedy and McNamara and myself was that we agreed we ought to build up the effectiveness of our army units. My impression of his feeling about Vietnam was that if we were going to be there at all, we better be there primarily on the ground. It wasn't enough just to have navy and Air Force tactical bombers flying around and naval units offshore and so forth. He believed that in this kind of a situation, where you were countering guerrilla tactics, where you were trying to assist a developing nation to protect itself, the army was the best equipped. And he made that point very forcibly within the Joint Chiefs and outside in the councils of the White House.

O'BRIEN: Well, was there much--particularly in the Counter-insurgency Group--was there much of a resistance to Taylor on that point or an argument, let's say, towards a more clandestine kind of warfare and more of a political kind of warfare of a nature of the VC [Viet Cong] insurgency as counterinsurgency?

GILPATRIC: Well, there was opposition from certain quarters in the early part of the Vietnam experience, let's say '61-'62. The CIA station chief felt that he could do a lot if you just gave him the bullets and the money, and he could get the Montagnards and others. And secondly, the marines and also the Air Force felt that they could conduct, without large army units, the kind of interdiction and close support of South Vietnamese operations by themselves. They were afraid that the show would come to be dominated by the army once you had a big command set up out there. But those resistances or oppositions tended to dwindle as time went on and as it became apparent that you had to have a lot of people from the village level right up to the province level to the headquarters level with their Vietnamese counterparts. And the Air Force and the marines and the CIA were specialists and not generalists.

O'BRIEN: Well, at that time, not later, but at that time, how did, let's say, a guy like Hilsman get along with Taylor? Were they antagonists at that point?

GILPATRIC: Taylor was very disdainful of Hilsman's pretensions to being a specialist in counterinsurgency and particularly at meetings of the CI Group. Whenever Hilsman got into what he thought were tactical operations and the like, Taylor was pretty sharp with him. He felt that, first of all, it was none of State's business; and secondly, he didn't think that Hilsman's experience during, I guess it was the Burma campaign or some World War II Pacific campaign, qualified him. And so he just didn't buy any of Hilsman's ideas, particularly as time drew on and Hilsman was among those, of course, who was out to, in effect, get Diem.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about Lansdale? Does Taylor have the same kind of reaction to Lansdale?

GILPATRIC: Well, Lansdale had ceased to have by '62 a very prominent part in the whole operation. His influence really went down after Taylor got in, and Taylor set up his own unit in the Joint Chiefs. In effect, my office and McNamara's office were taken out of operational planning because that void, which had existed under Lemnitzer, was filled by Taylor. Taylor right away moved in on this vacuum and filled it with his own people.

O'BRIEN: And in that sense strengthens the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

GILPATRIC: Yes. And since Lansdale was sort of a man without a country--sure, he had an Air Force brigadier

generalship, but he'd been outside the uniformed area so long that he really sort of went into gradual retirement as time went on. Anyway, his period of activity preceded the time when Taylor took over as Chairman and after Lemnitzer had gone to Europe.

O'BRIEN: Well, Lansdale, as I understand it, has the responsibility for working out at least a proposed operational plan in regard to Cuba. Were you privy to this? It was, I imagine, under Krulak, wasn't it?

GILPATRIC: Well, he may have been given some assignment after Krulak got in. I'm not aware of a specific planning assignment he had. Ed was, you know, a freewheeler, entrepreneur type of operator, and he would go around with an idea and sell it to somebody in the hopes that they would take him on as sort of project director. And after he had left the secretary of defense's office and was moving around, he may well have, you know, had a temporary berth down there with Krulak's operation. But it wasn't an official assignment; he didn't stay there for an indefinite period. And his connection with Cuba, as far as I know, was sporadic, because after the Bay of Pigs, all of the special operations--this is in regard to Cuba, short of an invasion that might have occurred at the time of the missile crisis--the CIA had the responsibility and various people under McCone were in charge of that. And I don't recall that Lansdale even sat in on many of the presentations that were made to me. Occasionally, he did when I wanted him to check out some phase of it.

O'BRIEN: How is McCone to deal with from your standpoint and McNamara's standpoint and Taylor's standpoint?

GILPATRIC: Well, it differs among the three of us. He and McNamara tended to clash because McNamara felt he ought to stick to reporting on intelligence assessments and estimates and not get into a major role in international security policy determination matters. Taylor's position with McCone was that he wanted to observe a very correct delineation of their respective functions. But there was no personal problem; they liked each other, knew each other, and respected each other. I, because I'd worked under McCone in the Korean War and had seen a great deal of him in the intervening years, from '53 to '60, I knew the best way to work with McCone was the way a lawyer would work with a client: You've just got to persuade him and lead him rather than get into confrontations with him. And so I did a lot of negotiating and parleying with McCone, particularly over the U-2 mission and the whole question of development of satellites or overhead reconnaissance. And in the end, McNamara and McCone never had much to do with each

other except in meetings with the president or at the National Security Council.

O'BRIEN: Does McCone have a pretty good hand on the agency in its operations, as well as its intelligence functions?

GILPATRIC: I think he did. He's a very strong-minded, strong willed individual. He's got a capacity for managing and administering organizations. He knew a good deal about the job, having been down there in the Air Force during the Korean War. And the agency welcomed, I think, at that juncture a strong leadership because of the decline it had suffered during the latter days of Allen Dulles and the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs. So he really took charge. There may have been some people down the line in the agency that were unhappy with his sort of strong-arm methods, but it seemed to me that he got hold of the situation over there, so far as you can view from the outside, pretty quickly. He moved people around. While his deputy, Pat Carter, was a problem to many of us, as long as McCone was around, that wasn't a more serious problem. It was only when McCone was absent that we got into the kind of nit-picking arguments that Carter was inclined to indulge in.

O'BRIEN: Well, one last thing before we get onto McNamara and the Department. Bobby Kennedy seems to have very good rapport with all these people, with Hilsman, with Taylor, McNamara . . .

GILPATRIC: Who'd you say? Excuse me.

O'BRIEN: With Hilsman.

GILPATRIC: Who was the first man you mentioned?

O'BRIEN: McNamara.

GILPATRIC: McNamara.

O'BRIEN: McNamara, Taylor, and Hilsman. And even though there are some, you know, some personality rubs there. . . . And I think the thing I'd like to get at is the pipelines that go to Bobby Kennedy from various places in the bureaucracy. Is there a concerted effort on the part of these people, let's say Taylor and McNamara, to keep Bobby Kennedy informed as to what's going on?

GILPATRIC: No, I think it was the other way around. I think that, while all of them liked Bobby and saw a good

deal of him personally and socially, that he just had an instinct when something was brewing and would call up one of these principals and come over and have a visit or talk about it over the phone or otherwise inform himself. And you see, once a week when this Counterinsurgency Group met, there was Max Taylor, Averell Harriman, John McCone, and myself, plus Dave Bell or whoever was the head of AID, and that really gave Bob Kennedy a pretty broad forum for pursuing any interest or inquiry he had. And then he had people--I don't know who in the Defense Department talked to him besides McNamara and myself, but I always had a feeling that he had some pipelines at the top offices, that people's word got back to him through some of his own people. Not that he had any espionage system, but he seemed to have a damn good intelligence collection apparatus that kept him very well informed of what was brewing.

O'BRIEN: Well, passing on to some of the changes that take place in the department. When did you yourself first realize that McNamara had some ideas about changing and strengthening the office of secretary of defense and changing the department in the directions that he did?

GILPATRIC: At our very first meeting at Miller's Restaurant in Baltimore in mid-December of 1960, first time I'd ever talked to him, and when he approached me about taking on the job of deputy, we spent a couple of hours sort of exchanging ideas about the job, and it was evident to me then, first, that he didn't put great store in changing structures, in modifying, trying to get legislation through, or reorganizing in the classic sense.

But he did feel that through his selection of people and his own capacity for leadership and the way he would operate, he could make a great many changes and that he intended to. But he right away dismissed some of the suggestions of the so-called Symington Committee Report on the Defense Department, which had been prepared for the president in the fall of '60, and which I'd had quite a hand in; they were not McNamara's idea of the way to approach it. In fact, he told me that it'd have to be understood that I could not, you know, use the office of Deputy to advance those particular ideas because that wasn't the way he proposed to go about it. He was essentially a project minded person who believed if you assigned the right people and gave them the right terms of reference and set, you know, time goals and so forth, that's the way you got things done.

And he also made it plain that he intended to operate with a very small, top group. He didn't want a large span of control; nor did he want sort of an undisciplined delegation

of authority, where he would just sort of turn over without any further connection a particular segment of the job, which is part of this Gilbert Fitzhugh Plan that's recently been announced, the blue ribbon defense panel. And he had always expressed a strong belief that a very few people at the top of a great pyramid like the Pentagon could make the critical decisions, based on adequate information, and then delegate down to the lowest levels possible in the pyramid the authority and responsibility for carrying out various phases of the decisions.

O'BRIEN: Well, at that stage was he thinking of using the budgeting system, a sort of PPBS planning-programing-budgeting system system, as well as systems analysis?

GILPATRIC: Yes. He brought up at that very first meeting his desire to get Charlie Hitch, who had written a book on this subject. It hadn't fully spelled out this programing, planning, and budgeting cycle the way it fully evolved, but that appealed to McNamara. He wanted to get Hitch down, and he asked me to talk to Hitch and see if he would take the job. He brought that up specifically. And then he brought up the question of how the Secretary of Defense could get the kind of information, from both in the Department and outside, that was needed for him to reach decisions on these matters.

O'BRIEN: Did he see this as a system of control, at that point, as well as a system of planning and--well, basically planning?

GILPATRIC: Yes, yes. He never separated much between the two. His idea was if a plan was worth anything, it had to be lived up to; it wasn't just something you filed away as a blueprint or a contingency plan such as the military used to. You stuck to it until it was changed, and you only could change it under certain specified ground rules. Now, he hadn't thought out all of the--or didn't enunciate--all of the ramifications of that system, and actually he left a great deal to people like Novak, who came in from Rand, and of course, Hitch and Enthoven and the others that worked up the detailed concept, which didn't really evolve until about a year later.

O'BRIEN: Now, over the years you've been a proponent of unification and also strengthening, you know, the lines between the Secretary's office and the services. How did you react to this? Did you have any reservations about what McNamara was suggesting at that point?

GILPATRIC: No, because his thinking wasn't too different from what had evolved from my own experience, primarily working under Robert Lovett in the Korean War, and also all the thought I'd given to it during the Rockefeller Brothers' study group and other discussions and studies I'd been involved in between '53 and '60. And the only basic point of difference between us was that I would have gotten rid of-- not the separate services; I would have had the four services-- but I would have gotten rid of the interdepartmental structure, wheels within wheels. In other words, I would not have secretaries of the services; I would have had them, in effect, as under-secretaries of Defense. I think McNamara felt that would take too much sturm und drang on the Hill, and after all, he could make these secretaries do their jobs, and that's what he did. No, we never had any basic difference on that score nor on any other question of how the department should be run.

O'BRIEN: When do the services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, begin to realize what McNamara has in mind, the PPBS system and systems analysis?

GILPATRIC: Well, they began to realize very quickly that he wasn't going to follow established procedures and methodologies. I mean, Tom Gates, as the outgoing Secretary, and the Joint Chiefs under Lemnitzer had set up the usual treatment for new civilian officials, all kinds of flip chart presentations and other briefings, and McNamara would have none of them. And when he began to ask them questions of a penetrating character that they'd never gotten--not never gotten, perhaps, but rarely gotten--they realized that they were dealing with a different kind of an animal in the office of secretary of defense and particularly when it began to appear that he was going to make himself the major program and budget decisions. He was not going to simply allot blocks of funds or resources to particular services and then let them come back and say how they wanted it carved up; he was going to do the carving up. And that took place, that realization process on the part of the chiefs and the departments, took place, I'd say, during the first six months he was in office.

O'BRIEN: In the time that you were there, did you see any problems emerge on that. For example, does the whole process of planning and budgeting--planning over a five year period--does it contribute to any narrowness on the part of the people who are making the decisions?

GILPATRIC: The principal problem grew out of these facts: the Chiefs had never been set up to draw anything up except on a requirements basis, and they were never brought into the real economics of military planning

and budgeting. That was done on a service by service basis under the secretary of the service and to a certain degree under the chief of staff of the service, but under his service chief hat or under his JCS hat. So here McNamara took away from the service departments their major role, which had been considerable under his predecessors. He looked to the chiefs for military input, and they weren't equipped to give it to him, so there was sort of a vacuum there for a while when I don't think we were getting--we, being those of the OSD level--sufficient military judgments and opinions and experience and so forth.

O'BRIEN: Well, do they suspect this new system of planning and everything as some means of integrating the services, as a sort of a step towards unification?

GILPATRIC: Not so much that because he made it pretty plain that he wasn't going to do much about integration except for certain common services like the Defense Supply Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency. He indicated there were going to be certain areas that were going to be taken away from the services and handled. . . . That had already started under Gates because you had the Defense Atomic Support Agency and the Defense Communications Agency, which started prior to McNamara. What I think the Chiefs were concerned about was that they were not going to be in on major decisions that affected their own operations: The decision was going to be made up in McNamara's office, and he wouldn't know enough about what they thought was their area to make the right decision.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about this whole business of the argument over basic national security policy, whether there should be one or shouldn't be one? How do you stand on this question?

GILPATRIC: I'm not one who believes you should have a great NSC paper which spells out what all the aspects of our national security policy are going to be. I'd rather have a few statements by the president and the secretary of defense, just the way McNamara made, you know, his Ann Arbor speech and his Montreal speech and his San Francisco speech and ultimately his posture statements. To me, those were much more valuable as working guides than some kind of a paper that under the Truman administration used to get worked on over at the NSC level and was so far behind the march of events that it had no practical value in day-to-day planning. What McNamara tried to do was to lead the Chiefs into the act by preparing these posture statements or memoranda to the president recommending certain basic programs and then submitting them to the Chiefs.

O'BRIEN: Now, these are the DPMs? Are these what become known as the Draft Presidential Memorandas?

GILPATRIC: Yes. And also the annual posture statement, which pulled everything together. It was a comprehensive statement of even foreign policy as well as defense policy, so much so that when the Nixon administration came in, as you know, the State Department insisted that [Melvin R.] Laird drop out the section on foreign policy.

O'BRIEN: Well, in the centralization that takes place in Defense like. . . . Well, let's take the Defense Supply Agency as an example. Is there any resistance in the uniformed services to this?

GILPATRIC: Yes, but this was not a new idea. Eisenhower, for example, when he was Chief of Staff of the Army, had complained about the duplication and lack of standardization and other things wrong with having separate supply services. And other secretaries before McNamara had moved in this direction. Now, when it got right down to the crunch, there was considerable feet dragging on certain specific items such as, we'll say, aircraft supplies, which was very important both to the Air Force and the navy, and they couldn't see turning this over to a new agency right off the bat, so they asked for time. So most of the resistance took the form of getting some dispensation or postponement of the impact of the Defense Supply Agency. But that was not a major controversy between the Chiefs and McNamara any more than the formation of the strike command was.

O'BRIEN: Is there any thinking at all at this point of changing the structure of the service academies at all? Some of the proponents of unification sometimes look at those as the stronghold of. . . .

GILPATRIC: That really didn't interest McNamara. He never went around to the service academies; I did. And I went around to the air industrial colleges and the war colleges, command and staff schools, simply to get some notion of the kind of leadership they had, whether they were getting top leadership or whether they were getting sort of cast-offs from commands. And the only thing we insisted on, which wasn't new, was there be free exchanges, so a fellow that graduated from Annapolis could opt to go into the Air Force rather than the navy, if he chose, and that we give each academy equal treatment as far as resources and funds were concerned and make them work together as much as they could. And I don't think that presented any major problems. Certainly the idea of obliterating distinctions between them based on service

traditions was not a subject that either McNamara or I felt was really very important relative to other things that we were doing.

O'BRIEN: So basically, then, McNamara and you both are concentrating more on men to institute policy changes in management rather than structure?

GILPATRIC: That's right.

O'BRIEN: Do you change your mind at any time over the three years of the Kennedy administration?

GILPATRIC: No, I really came around more strongly to the view that it wasn't necessary to legislate the departments out of existence or change the title of people or even to reshuffle much functions. And I think the principal requirement is the kind of people who are given the prime responsibility and their ability to work together and the support they get from the White House and their capacity for dealing with the Congress. This is all personal equation attributes rather than organizational.

O'BRIEN: Well, in addition to some of these centralized functions like the Defense Supply Agency, things like the ISA [International Security Affairs] part of the Defense Department grow considerably during those years. Why does that take place? Is that a result of just empire building or . . .

GILPATRIC: It was partly the result of the fact that you had ambitious, enterprising people in ISA who tended to want to multiply and expand. Maybe you can call it empire building, but it was just more or less a question of being equipped to do a job that was there, and secondly, the feeling that the State Department agency was just too slow in responding to a given situation. When McNamara wanted to present something to the president or to his colleagues in the government, he didn't want to have to, you know, rely on farming out one section to State or anybody else. He wanted to do a complete job, and he wanted the people there to do that. So he made demands on them, and they took the opportunity and met the challenge by beefing up that personnel.

O'BRIEN: You have, as I understand it, a practice of weekly breakfasts in the Department. Is this a means of coordinating effort and people?

GILPATRIC: McNamara objected to committee-type proceedings of any sort. For example, the Armed Forces Policy

Council, which is enshrined in statute and had been a fixture of all predecessor Defense administrations, didn't appeal to him at all. I don't think we had a half a dozen meetings of the Armed Forces Policy Council as such in the three years I was there. What he did like to do is to meet with certain individuals and have a definite program of points to be discussed. And so he picked about five people: We had the three service secretaries; we had. . . . Following that, we would have meetings with the assistant secretaries for Installations and Logistics.

It soon became evident that there were certain aspects of the administration of the Defense Department that didn't really interest McNamara and/or that he felt I could handle, and he could concentrate on others. Personnel. And in that respect, neither he nor I did as much as we should have done. We didn't have the best people. We didn't pick the right people for the jobs. I picked the two people that were made assistant secretaries, and they were not good choices. It's true on the Reserve program, Reserve reorganization, McNamara got Vance into that, and he took great interest in that phase of personnel. But he followed very closely, personally, Research and Development with Harold Brown and everything having to do with the financial controls, planning the budget, and installations and logistics, which is primarily procurement, property, and purchasing.

And those meetings would last anywhere from half an hour to maybe an hour and a quarter because the day was so planned that McNamara would just have to finish up a particular session by a particular time. But I think they did serve a very good purpose, and I think to accomplish the same thing in group meetings would have used up a tremendous amount of sort of idle time of people--made idle time for people.

O'BRIEN: Well, you know, you talked a little while a little bit earlier here about this business of briefing, McNamara's reservations on this. I understand that at the time the Kennedy administration starts that there is a separate service representative in the White House for each of the services to brief the president. Does that tradition die hard?

GILPATRIC: Not really because none of these men was really of top caliber. They were picked by the services mostly to watch out and see that the president was aware of the interests of that particular service. I mean you take--the Air Force insisted on Godfrey McHugh. Well, Godfrey McHugh was kind of a backroom wheeler and dealer, and he really wasn't very bright. Sure, his ears twitched to anything

[that affected the Air Force, and he was a very good reporter-back. But those men representing the services didn't have a very important role even before McNamara came in. And also, President Kennedy wasn't about to use these men as his confidants. He had nothing to do with picking them. I mean, Tazewell Shepard was picked because, you know, his wife was the daughter of Senator [John J.] Sparkman. They all had some particular reason for being there. That was not a major issue because McNamara let the services go ahead and put their people in and then never paid any attention to them. Neither did the president except on purely protocol, ceremonial matters.

O'BRIEN: [Chester V.] Clifton assumes their briefing role at a later time, doesn't he?

GILPATRIC: Simply because he was the smartest and most senior of the officers. Compared to Shepard and McHugh, he was just several notches above. But even Clifton didn't get too involved in substantive matters because the president just didn't deal with him. He'd take his briefings, and he'd give him certain jobs to do, but I don't recall any case where Clifton played a major role. Now, I'm sure I'll read some memoirs sometime that tell me differently.]

O'BRIEN: Oh, perhaps not. Well, how do you keep your lines of communication open with the president? I mean, do you do your briefing with Taylor while Taylor's there in the White House? Is that your major channel of communication when you're not physically present yourself and McNamara as well?

GILPATRIC: Well, first of all, except for Cabinet meetings where you couldn't bring along alternates or deputies, McNamara always had me present at every meeting with the president unless there was some special reason why it shouldn't be. So I was practically at all the meetings with the president. Then, before we had a meeting with the president, we'd usually caucus in McNamara's room, that is to say, Max Taylor and myself and anybody else who was going to appear, like Paul Nitze or Bill Bundy or Cy Vance or whoever was going to be in on this particular meeting beside the three of us. And we would all speak up on our particular points of view. And then by sort of tacit agreement, by course of conduct, it grew up that McNamara would state the position for the department, unless it was on a purely military matter in which case Taylor would speak up. Otherwise, it was up to the president to ask you, Roz, what you think, or Paul, what you think, or get into a general discussion. That was in contrast to the way the State Department operated, which was to come in with everybody on his own, so to speak, with Rusk perhaps leading

off, but there being no necessary correlation between what he said and Harriman said or Ball said or Hilsman or whoever else was there, whatever assistant secretary was there along with the State group.

And we had lunch with Taylor at least once a week, usually before the JCS meeting, and we'd go over the whole agenda. And Taylor would tell us, you know, the feeling of the Chiefs on particular points. And there were never really any problems of abrasion or friction with Taylor. He made it a point to be just as well prepared as McNamara, even though he had to get up earlier in the morning to do it. Very few people could be as quick as McNamara is in assimilating a document. But Taylor did it himself, didn't rely on aides, and also he wrote most of his own papers, unlike most of the general officers. And they were articulate, well-expressed documents. So he and McNamara had, you know, really a very basic rapport from the beginning.

O'BRIEN: You mentioned one problem, one area in which there was friction between McNamara and the White House--and yourself and the White House staff--and that was in regard to appointments and base closings on O'Brien and O'Donnell. Do you have any difficulties with that side of the White House staff, in a sense the old senatorial staff people like Sorensen, O'Brien, and O'Donnell?

GILPATRIC: Not with Larry O'Brien because if one went over there and sat down with him and told him what the facts were, he could find a way to live with it. The difficulty came up when Kenny O'Donnell or Larry or one of those people insisted on placing somebody in our organization. As long as they ran not upstream in our organization but to the White House, we'd get a lot of backlash out of that. But the problems were largely just personality problems of certain people in the Defense Department who would get the backs up of people in the White House. And that's where I--I guess because of my background--I did a lot of the negotiating and mediating and moderating, at least while I was there. And then I think Cy Vance did a good deal of that afterwards.

O'BRIEN: Well, now, how about the national security side of the White House, Bundy, Komer, people like this?

GILPATRIC: Spurgeon Keeney. Well, it soon became evident that, in contrast to the situation that existed certainly in the Korean War period, the NSC staff under Bundy was, you know, first-rate. And while we had some arguments occasionally--particularly with Carl Kaysen, who wanted to

really get into the very basic stages of military planning; he was attracted by the whole field. But for the most part, Bundy would get a group of people together--he was always very crisp and sharp as to what he wanted--and usually it was something that you couldn't deny him, and it was just a question of avoiding friction between some of his staff and some of the permanent civilians or uniformed people, not with the appointed officials in the OSD.

O'BRIEN: In his thinking and style is he a little like McNamara?

GILPATRIC: Yes. He could be very terse, very rough, very quick, and he's very impatient of slowness on the part of others. He and McNamara took each other's measure very early in the day, and I wasn't aware that they, you know, got in each other's way as far as dealing with the president was concerned.

O'BRIEN: Well, I wonder if we might get on to some issues that might be called political issues. And I think one that comes up very soon is the question of General Edwin A. Walker. When do you first hear of General Walker?

GILPATRIC: I think I first read about him in the paper when he began making speeches. I don't think I got the first calls on it. I don't remember who was given--whether it was Cy Vance or who was given the project of dealing with him. At that stage, as I recall it, Elvis Stahr was the Secretary of the Army, and that was not a good appointment from the standpoint of McNamara or the president. And there was just trouble all along between the Office of the Secretary of the Army and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. And it got to be very. . . . So a lot of things went wrong in terms of the handling of army personnel and people. And the secretary of the army just wasn't on top of the whole situation the way McNamara wanted him to be. And he was inclined to blame something like the General Walker incident on the fact that the army didn't have real civilian control, they just had the honorific, ceremonial job there, and all the secretary was doing was, you know, reviewing honor guards and going to parades.

O'BRIEN: Well, where is the pressure coming to do something about Walker? Is it coming from the White House, Congress?

GILPATRIC: Well, as I recall it, it was outside the Pentagon. I think it was the White House because everybody was so sensitive to things like Walker's statements

over there that. . . . I just don't know who first got on the backs of people at the Pentagon about Walker.

O'BRIEN: You don't recall any calls being made to you directly?

GILPATRIC: No. No, I wasn't in the line of fire on that one.

O'BRIEN: Was there real concern about right-wing political organizations at the White House?

GILPATRIC: Yes, and the question of, in effect, censoring the statements of the Chiefs. One of the earliest contretemps we had was over some statement made on television by McNamara as to what he thought the limitations on the roles of the Chiefs were. For example, were we going to edit Arleigh Burke's speeches. And that caught fire on the Hill and in the press, and it was blown up to greater proportions than the facts warranted, because most of the speeches didn't have all that much clout. But there was a General [Arthur G.] Trudeau who, finally, we had to really ease out of the army. He was a real Goldwater type. And he was very free in criticizing what was going on in OSD. And nothing, it seemed, could restrain him; he was just uninhibited. But there weren't too many like that. Of course, LeMay was unreconstructable, and it was just, you know, a policy decision that it would be rougher with him out than with him in. So he was given an extension of one year. And Admiral Anderson, of course, was let out. Wasn't much question of the. . . . Decker was never a very outspoken military Chief, but he was replaced by Wheeler as soon as you could do so decently when his first tour ran out.

O'BRIEN: And Shoup was rather sympathetic, wasn't he?

GILPATRIC: Yes, although for a while nobody in OSD could figure out just where Shoup stood. He could be very cryptic and sort of Delphic in his utterances. But he proved himself pretty well along the line in McNamara's and my view at least. We relied on him a good deal, particularly as we got into the whole question of arms control.

O'BRIEN: Well, in terms of pressure from the Hill, did you ever determine whether there was any direct contact between some of the military people who got involved in this whole thing, whole question of muzzling, with people on the Hill, particularly people like Thurmond?

GILPATRIC: Well, there was never any doubt in our minds then or since that all the services had very close relations with a number of people on the Hill.

They went off shooting and fishing and hunting with them; they supplied airplanes to take them places; they always were showing up at celebrations, you know, for Mendel Rivers or for Thurmond or for Stennis. And that was just. . . . We knew from the number of people that the services had in their military liaison units on the Hill--they ran into the hundreds when you add them all together--and from the number of Reserve unit memberships by congressional staffs that there was a constant interflow of information and ideas and everything going on. But we never attempted to fight that; we just wanted to sort of join it in the sense of being given equal time. The problem was how to do it effectively.

O'BRIEN: How does Arthur Sylvester work out for you?

GILPATRIC: Well, McNamara was very loyal to Arthur and tended, I think, to overlook his faults. Very early on, there was an effort made by Adam Yarmolinsky and Cy Vance and myself to get somebody much more sophisticated in the business into OSD. And we had a candidate. We brought him down, and we devised a slot for him. He wasn't going to be an assistant secretary, but he would be very close to McNamara and to the rest of us. But the personalities didn't click and McNamara finally got to the point, you know, where he was being his own assistant secretary for Public Affairs. I mean he would just tell Arthur Sylvester what to do, but left him with the panoply of office and also left him free to make some of the gaffes he did. But while he would bail out Arthur privately or in house, he never criticized him publicly, except in the most grudging fashion.

O'BRIEN: Did you originally want Elie Abel for that job?

GILPATRIC: Yes, he was offered it, and he turned it down, which was a great pity in my mind. I don't know who else McNamara talked to. I don't know how he found Sylvester. That was one of the slots he undertook to fill while I was filling the general counselship and the assistant secretaries.

O'BRIEN: Well, did Abel make the recommendation for Sylvester since they had, at that point, some sort of connection with the Detroit News or, I think, with the Newark paper?

GILPATRIC: I don't know, I never heard. I felt that was one of the weaker sectors of the upper echelon of the Defense Department.

O'BRIEN: Well, during '61-'62 particularly, do you feel much pressure from the White House to undertake things

which might fall into the area of civil rights matters, in desegregation of military facilities, applying pressure on certain geographic areas of the country, namely the South?

GILPATRIC: Not so much from the White House, but the Department of Justice under Burke Marshall, as well as the attorney general himself, Bob Kennedy, and Katzenbach were not satisfied, as we weren't, that the services and the uniformed people were really putting their hearts and souls into really carrying out all these directives and policies. But there was no lack of zeal and determination in the upper reaches of OSD. It was just a question of how do you get it down through the organization. Particularly, when you get into off base problems, how do you get the local base commander to deal with the elements in his community? You really had to do it on a base by base situation. You couldn't just put directions out from the Pentagon. But other than the impatience and, at times, criticism from the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and an occasional, you know, call from somebody in the White House about a particular situation, it wasn't the cause of a running dispute or series of differences with the White House.

O'BRIEN: Do you get any resistance out of the uniformed services?

GILPATRIC: Yes, but it was more a question of pace. I mean they wanted to do it in their own way, and they didn't want to appear to be, you know, acting for some other agency of the government. But it never assumed crisis proportions.

O'BRIEN: You had a couple meetings in New York in the period--well, in the post-Cuban missile crisis period in November 1962. What do you recall--first of all, as I understand it, you had a meeting with U Thant. Was it you and George Ball and U Thant?

GILPATRIC: And [John J.] Jack McCloy.

O'BRIEN: And Jack McCloy.

GILPATRIC: Well, first, you see, Kennedy, rightly or wrongly, didn't have any confidence in Adlai Stevenson as a negotiator. And he saw that we were going to have a tough time with Kuznetsov getting the IL-28s . . .

O'BRIEN: May I interrupt you here? Do you know that by something that the president said to you directly about Stevenson or is this. . . .

GILPATRIC: Well, McNamara told me that was the reason for the--because I was present when the president came in with a piece of paper and Stevenson with a long face, and he simply said, "I'm sending you, Roz, and George Ball and Jack McCloy up to New York. And you're going to stay there until we get this negotiation worked out." And I asked McNamara what it all meant, and he simply said he thinks that he wants the three tough negotiators. Actually, he was mistaken about that because my observation of Stevenson, when you gave him a particular job to do, was a very good negotiator. And actually, we didn't do more than observe--well, except for certain off the record conversations between McCloy and Kuznetsov, who knew each other personally. But we did come up to New York and were there off and on for several weeks until. . . . And we did see U Thant, and we did have these sessions with [Valerian A.] Zorin, who is very impossible to deal with, and Kuznetsov, who is a very able, capable diplomat, and ultimately tractable.

O'BRIEN: How about, first of all, your contacts with U Thant? Does U Thant really understand the issues at hand?

GILPATRIC: I didn't have enough to do with him to form a definite impression. Our contacts with him on this particular mission--Ball, McCloy, and myself--were largely ceremonial. I mean he would deal primarily with Stevenson. We'd come along. So at that stage, I didn't have any strong views one way or the other about U Thant's effectiveness.

O'BRIEN: Well, in your meetings with Kuznetsov, as I understand it, one of the questions that was in your mind--and I don't know whether it's ever been settled--was were there warheads in Cuba, actually nuclear warheads in Cuba.

GILPATRIC: That's right. We never had any positive evidence, and we never got any positive admission that I can recall, and we had to sort of rely on circumstantial evidence. If you ask my own belief, I don't think that there were. I think there were plans for flying them in, but I don't think they were actually matched up with the vehicles, with the launchers. And I don't recall any discovery of storage areas that looked as though they'd actually been used for the purpose of storing nuclear elements.

O'BRIEN: What impression did you get in regard to Kuznetsov and Zorin and their attitudes towards the Cubans, their relative ability to talk to the Cubans and influence the Cubans? Did they have an ability to do this?

GILPATRIC: Well, bear in mind that at this stage there'd been

the agreement by Khrushchev to take out the missiles. What we were talking about, primarily, were just the IL-28s. We weren't worrying about the Frog tactical missiles and all the other hardware that was pretty formidable in terms of short range conflict in Cuba. But the IL-28s were very visible and had a high political content at that point. It was evident, particularly from Kuznetsov, who really carried the laboring oar for the Soviet Union in these talks, that it was not easy to deal with Castro. Here these things were all set up, sitting on runways ready to fly, and they had to be disassembled, crated, and shipped out. And it wasn't just Soviet intransigence, stubbornness; it was the problem of making Castro do it. And that took quite a little time. They had to go back to Moscow, then back through to Havana, and I don't know what happened, how it was done, before we finally got the agreement. We saw them, of course, through the U-2 photographs being actually taken up to the piers and put on board the Soviet vessels, and they disappeared from the scene.

O'BRIEN: Well, just one other sort of unrelated question. A little later in U.S.-Soviet relations a rather interesting question comes up, the question of pipe. I don't know whether you remember this at all. It was a question of the sale of pipe on the part of allies of the United States of more than nineteen inches in diameter.

GILPATRIC: Yeah, I remember it. I don't have any first hand involvement in it.

O'BRIEN: Do you know what the background of all that was? We got a few moments left here on this side. Do you have any recollections of the LeMay-Kennedy relationship, how the president reacted to LeMay and how LeMay reacted to the president.

GILPATRIC: Well, I recall the president's reactions because every time he had to see LeMay he ended up in sort of a fit. I mean he just would be frantic at the end of a session with LeMay because, you know, LeMay couldn't listen or wouldn't take in, and he would make what Kennedy considered, and we all considered perfectly, you know, outrageous proposals that bore no relation to the state of affairs in the 1960's. And the president never saw him unless at some ceremonial affair, or where he felt he had to make a record of having listened to LeMay, as he did on the whole question of an air strike against Cuba. And he had to sit there. I saw the president right afterwards. He was just choleric. He was just beside himself, as close as he ever got . . .

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

O'BRIEN: We were starting on LeMay.

GILPATRIC: The subject of LeMay's continued tenure came up frequently when McNamara, the president, and I were talking about military personnel. And it was no surprise or secret about the problems that LeMay presented, but the alternatives were so much worse, as I said before, that we just resigned ourselves to living with him, and the president avoided, wherever he could, having to deal with the individual Chiefs rather than with General Taylor.

O'BRIEN: Well, one last question. On these once a year briefings--and I can't recall the name of it, but it's the doomsday briefings.

GILPATRIC: Yes. It's the Net Evaluation.

O'BRIEN: Net Evaluation, right.

GILPATRIC: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Those are cancelled out, aren't they, during the Kennedy years?

GILPATRIC: No, we had one, and that was enough. We had Lieutenant General [Samuel E.] Anderson of the Air Force, who wasn't one of the brightest generals, and he was utterly unsuited for this kind of a role. He had been head of the Air Defense Command, Continental Air Defense Command, and when he got to the point where there were no more spots for him, he was given this job. And with General Lemnitzer sitting there, he put on this, you know, this horrendous portrayal of what would happen in the event of a nuclear strike. And it was just done, you know, as though it were for a kindergarten class. And it was done, literally, for very low level intellects. And he wouldn't speed it up; he wouldn't accept questions; he just stuck to his script. And finally, Kennedy got up and walked right out in the middle of it, and that was the end of it. And we never had another one. That was sometime in the spring of '61. Then we washed them right out. I never saw the purpose of them, anyway. But that was certainly a muzzle burst.

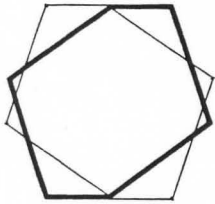
O'BRIEN: Well, is the whole question of counterforce and counter-city, in terms of strategy, a major point of review in 1961?

GILPATRIC: Not at the highest levels of the government. It was something that evolved in McNamara's mind, and he, without too much clearance or exchange of views, either within or without the department, he began to incorporate that into his speeches and into his statements before the Congress. I think it sort of dawned on people, all of a sudden, that this doctrine had been grafted on to our whole strategic body of doctrine, and it wasn't really, I don't think, fully understood, certainly not fully accepted within the military. I think many in the military regarded it as sort of a rationalization for the weapons program. They didn't think that McNamara, philosophically, meant what he said, except some of the theorists and the war gamers who felt a little sense of injured pride in not even being consulted.

O'BRIEN: Well, Mr. Gilpatric, you've been very game to hang on with your failing voice, and I think that we've perhaps taken up enough of that today.

SD'

10/28/93



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28 October 1993

Mr. Charles Daly
John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library
Columbia Point
Boston
Massachusetts 02125

Dear Chuck:

You might want to add the attached paper by Roswell
Gilpatric to his oral history file. Ros prepared
it in connection with an evening at the Century on
"JFK Remembered."

Best regards,

Arthur Schlesinger, jr.

(9/28/93)

JFK and Nelson Rockefeller

John Kennedy was fascinated by Nelson Rockefeller, not only because he viewed Rockefeller as his likely Republican opponent in the '64 Presidential election but also in view of the parallelisms in their careers. Both of them came from wealthy families; each of them had chosen public careers and--despite their differing political affiliations--their outlooks were not far apart. Rockefeller was a liberal Republican while Kennedy was a right-wing Democrat. Each of them was attractive to, and attracted by, the other sex.

Early on I became aware of Kennedy's fixation with Rockefeller when he learned of my Rockefeller connections. These included my service on the 1956-58 Rockefeller Brothers Special Studies Panel and my chairmanship of the Democrats for Rockefeller in the 1958 New York Gubernatorial race for which, incidentally, Averill Harriman never forgave me. I was also appointed by Rockefeller as a member of his New York Defense Council in 1960.

Besides, we had a long family friendship growing out of summering near each other on the island of Mount Desert, Maine.

Early on Rockefeller became obsessed with the idea of a government-sponsored program for fall-out shelters as a

protection for U.S. citizens in the event of a Soviet nuclear strike. I always believed that the Kennedy Administration's \$700 million civilian defense program was inspired by Rockefeller's advocacy of such a move. Certainly it was not a McNamara idea, being wholly inconsistent with his "deterrent" strategy. In consequence, I was put in charge of the Kennedy civil defense program, reporting to Ted Sorensen in the White House rather than Mac Bundy. When this assignment became known, Rockefeller made it a practice of calling on me when he came to Washington to check on the program's progress. I in turn was instructed by the White House to be sure that Rockefeller showed up there when he was in town.

Often when I was with Kennedy, either alone or with Vice President Johnson, the subject of Rockefeller would come up. Kennedy questioned me endlessly about Rockefeller's personal traits, particularly how he got along so well with the business community, a relationship which Kennedy was slow to develop. I remember particularly a long discussion on this subject when I was with Kennedy and Johnson on the fantail of the "Honey Fitz" during a Presidential session with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Palm Beach early in January '62. The other subject discussed on this occasion was what made the average businessman "tick",

Kennedy having had little contact with the business and financial community of which his father was certainly not a typical member.

I often reflect on what the 1964 Presidential election would have been like had Kennedy survived to run with Rockefeller as his opponent. The two politicians' attraction to each other would have added a new feature to a Presidential election.

ROSWELL GILPATRICK