

Douglas V. Johnson Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 07/13/70
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Johnson was Director, Plans and Policy Office, Joint Chiefs of Staff (1958-1960) and Director, Policy Review, Department of Defense (1960-1964). In this interview, Johnson discusses his role with the International Security Affairs and Agency for International Development under John F. Kennedy's administration, among other issues.

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DOUGLAS V. JOHNSON

April 5, 1973
DATE



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Douglas V. Johnson – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

DOUGLAS V. JOHNSON

July 13, 1970
Alexandria, Virginia

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: General Johnson, let me begin by reviewing very roughly what you have told me, and then you tell me if what I have repeated back is correct. In the early days of the National Security Council, after it was created in '47, you were assigned as the army representative to the staff, and one of your jobs--and one of the jobs of the staff at that time--was creating policy papers for each foreign country, reviewing the United States policy towards each of those countries, including the options that the United States had for implementing this policy. Then, when the Kennedy Administration came in, a decision was made to throw out these specific pieces of paper, these booklets of policy papers for each country. State Department, particularly, liked to play things on a moment to moment basis or a situation to situation basis rather than being tied down, I presume, to a specific policy. And it was decided to do something to replace these in a more specific way. You said that Walt Rostow wrote part of the first one, and you think, perhaps, it was on Bolivia. All right, and others were written. Now I think that's approximately where we left off. Let me ask you one question at this point, and that is, do you know how the decision was made to throw out these other papers?

JOHNSON: No.

MOSS: You don't know where it originated?

JOHNSON: No.

MOSS: Okay, fine. Now let's go on from that point.

JOHNSON: The documents that these various individuals prepared were generally pretty good except the experts usually got so carried away with their subjects that they wrote so much that you could not get a concurrence from the various departments concerned, not that there's anything basically wrong, but you can't get anybody to agree that anything that's got two hundred pages in it is entirely correct. It was very, very difficult to get general concurrence on these few that were prepared. It took so long that to the best of my knowledge, when I left the Department of Defense in '64, there were very few existing documents that set forth this policy, the U.S. policy, toward any country.

MOSS: Right. Let me ask you this, you were already on the policy review staff in ISA (International Security Affairs) when the Kennedy Administration came in, were you?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MOSS: Right, fine. I just wanted to make sure of that. And what was your role, vis-a-vis the making of these policy papers?

JOHNSON: Very little, very little by that time, but I did review them when they came over to Department of Defense and point out what seemed to me to be holes in it. The point, though, of interest to you, I think, is to see how, if ever, since that time these national policies have been set forth and set up in a usable shape. An ambassador going into a country, or an officer being assigned an area has got to have something he can get quickly and refer to.

MOSS: This is as distinct from the State Department's background notes?

JOHNSON: Yes, yes.

MOSS: Fine.

JOHNSON: And whether they ever restored that series of policy statements in some sort of a usable shape, I don't know, but I doubt it. Certainly it wasn't done up to the end of 1964. Now I realize. . . . Cut that off.

MOSS: Yeah, surely. (Interruption) Now as to your own part in ISA and in the policy review staff. . . .

JOHNSON: I retired from the army as director of plans and policy of the joint staff, which serves the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And (John N., II) Jack Irwin, who was then assistant secretary of defense (ISA), came to see me and pointed out that the Congress, in 1959, had, in the bill setting up the military assistance that year, established two posts: one with the director of military assistance which General Williston Palmer took over. And one was a sort of an inspector of that thing who was to be, not under the director of military assistance, but to keep an eye on it to see that it was working as Congress intended. Jack asked me to take the job at least until a new administration came in--dig out what it ought to do and get it to do it. He wanted me to go a little bit beyond the military assistance angle, at least to be available for things beyond that. So we hit on this title of director of policy review. In the preceding year, or early in '59, Congress had also established a post, inspector general of foreign assistance in State Department. And the first man in the job was Johnny Murphy. When I took over that job in Defense, it looked to me like the thing was fairly parallel, so I went to see Johnny and suggested that we form a team on these inspection line-ups. One man from State who would chair the thing, one from Defense, and one from AID (Agency for International Development) and conduct these reviews of the policy in the various countries as a joint proposition, make a joint report on it, and in effect, it would be a review of all U.S. policy in that area since it covered the state, military, and economic assistance. Johnny agreed. We each rounded up people who were not directly concerned in anything that was going on there at that time, usually retired people or people who were on leave from other jobs as far as State was concerned. I got a group of retired generals and admirals, and we would form these teams and send them out and have them make these reports. I went on one or two myself to see how it worked, and it made some very interesting reports. Our efforts were to make reports that could be helpful rather than these skinning things such as GFA puts out looking for headlines. We particularly did not want headlines.

MOSS: What was your rationale on this?

JOHNSON: I've watched a lot of these GFA inspections made through my years of service, and it was my observation that they would take what the chief, or something they picked up in the club bar, or something somebody told them, and write it up as an action . . . (Interruption)

MOSS: . . . something that they had discovered.

JOHNSON: . . . as something that they had discovered when actually that wasn't the case at all. It'd been told to them as something in the past, trouble, usually a trouble that'd been overcome, or trouble which everybody was acting on. It wasn't anything new. I didn't want to get people afraid of us. What I really wanted to do was help the program, which the people that were there wanted to do. However, Murphy left and another fellow came in there--I forget his name--Kenneth something. He's still there.

MOSS: Well, I can check it out in the Government Organization Manual.

JOHNSON: He didn't like this joint operation. He preferred running his own, and so that took State out of it. And eventually AID also wanted to drop out of it. The programs were so intermingled that the effectiveness of the inspections was greatly reduced when they fell out. For example, the interior security thing involved police which were under AID and the military under Defense and the intelligence collecting under both of them, and if you just looked at half of the picture, you didn't get much. So we eventually let it all die. I think some years since then it's been restored in Defense, but whether they are working with the other people or not, I don't know.

MOSS: Well, what did you do to try and keep this thing going? Did you? Or, was it simply a question of them not being willing to argue about it or discuss it? Was it a cop-out?

JOHNSON: Of course, when a report came in bringing out some weakness, something that was going wrong, why, the department concerned would try to straighten it out. The military doesn't resent that very much as you well know. They're used to being criticized, but some of the State people, the AID people, felt that they were getting pointed out too much if there was a wrong mess and so they didn't care for it very much. I made no effort to persuade them that they ought to go ahead with it. It was their own business.

MOSS: I was wondering, for instance, did you take this problem on up to (Paul H.) Nitze and see if you couldn't get some concurrence on continuing the thing at a higher level?

JOHNSON: It went on through all the time that Nitze was there. It seems to me (John T.) McNaughton was

the ISA fellow when it ended. I'm sure I must've talked to him and explained to him that the effectiveness of it was dying out, though I don't particularly recall the specific conversation now. Now, when the Kennedy administration came along, they made no effort to stop this business. Mr. Kennedy announced that he wanted specific commissions to visit all of the countries where there were major problems and go into it on a grand scale. The first one that went out was to look into Brazil. It was headed by (William H., Jr.) Bill Draper, a reserve general from California, but who was there not in his capacity as a military type, but as a financier.

MOSS: Do you know from whom in the Kennedy administration this idea came?

JOHNSON: No, I don't.

MOSS: Any idea who was pushing it and how was it implemented to you?

JOHNSON: I was the DOD (Department of Defense) member on the first mission that went out. I'll give you Draper's name here a little more clearly, William H. Draper, Jr., 89 Selby Lane, Atherton, A-T-H-E-R-T-O-N, California. He's a well-known man.

MOSS: Yes.

JOHNSON: I don't know whether you know him or not.

MOSS: I know of the name.

JOHNSON: Yeah. Well, he headed the commission, as I say; it was not mainly military in character. We had a number from State.

MOSS: Well, let me ask you this in the mechanics of the thing. Who came to you and said, "General, we'd like you on the commission."

JOHNSON: I think there was a letter sent over from State asking for a representative and the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) nominated me, which DOD bought. We had a representative from labor. Now, I don't mean the Labor Department.

MOSS: Organized labor.

JOHNSON: Organized labor.

MOSS: Do you recall who that was?

JOHNSON: No, I don't.

MOSS: Well, it doesn't matter. I'm sure it's in the records somewhere and someone will be able to find it eventually.

JOHNSON: We went down there. We stayed a couple of months and made a very thorough study and reported to Secretary (Dean) Rusk when we got back. It didn't vary very much from those sort of inspections that we had been making before except it was bigger and more detailed. One interesting thing I recall about it. . . . At the time we went down, (João Belchoir Marques) Goulart, G-O-U-L-A-R-T, I think the spelling is, was the president of Brazil. He had a leftist government there, at least in part. And there were a good many of those fellows who wouldn't receive the members of this commission and talk to them. As a part of our investigation, we went up to a town in the northern part of Brazil which name escapes me at the moment.

MOSS: São Paulo? Recife?

JOHNSON: Recife.

MOSS: Yes.

JOHNSON: We spent a couple of days up there looking things over. And when we got back, unbeknownst to us, this Cuban crisis had come up and Mr. Kennedy's administration had strongly faced up to the Russians. To our great surprise, when we landed at the airport coming back from Recife there were all these ministers out there to meet us, men that we'd been trying to see and a good many other people who'd been very difficult, out there to welcome us. "Here, General. Sit down here. What can I do for you?" The entire attitude of the Brazilian hierarchy changed when Mr. Kennedy shoved his face up into the face of the Russians. From then on it was a lot easier to deal with them. I remember that up at Recife the army commander was General (Humberto) Castelo Branco, who later became president. He was not, at that time, thinking of being president, but he was very helpful to us. So we, as individuals, were happy to see him take over later on when the Goulart regime was replaced. That's about all in that foreign assistance thing and in that presidential commission that I think of that's worth mentioning unless you want to ask a question.

MOSS: Yes, let me ask you a few questions. You mentioned

a few minutes ago the question of internal security, and this gets a little tricky and a little delicate under the terms of our AID authorizations and the law and so on, the question of whether or not we are legitimately under international law supporting a regime, or whether we are supporting the internal security of the country. This sometimes gets us in diplomatic trouble. I was wondering how sensitive you all were to this particular thing in the course of the commission. Where does internal security stop and suddenly finding yourself supporting an unpopular regime begin?

JOHNSON: We, in the military, always sought to build up in the military of any country we inspected or dealt with a type of professionalism such as governs our own military. You become an efficient organization and you support the government of your country. It was a little difficult sometimes, for example, particularly in the intelligence field, to persuade these people that our idea of intelligence was information about the enemy or enemy type people, communist people, whereas sometimes we would find a country in which intelligence people were more concerned with who the secretary of the Treasury was sleeping with, and such information as that, than they were about communist agents. The development of a professional point of view in the military certainly did not encourage them to take over the government, but I will confess that as we talked to them of the threats to their country from communism, they might well include in their idea of communism a leftist acting president. Perhaps their own idea of the way to fight it was to take it over by a coup. Now the police were similarly concerned, that is the AID people instructing police, were similarly concerned in developing this approach and trying to make them more effective in keeping criminal records and communications between the various police elements in the states and improving the caliber of the people that they had in their police forces.

MOSS: All right. You mentioned the communist question. Of course, at this time people were very concerned with the exporting of the Castro revolution from Cuba to various Latin American countries. And I know that the northeast area of Brazil, around Recife and so on, had a good deal of this sort of activity. Could you describe what was going on to counter this, how much the United States got into it, and what the Brazilians were doing?

JOHNSON: You remember that at the time that we were doing . . . this Goulart was the president, and I forget the names of the fellows who were running that government up there in that province, but there was a good deal of U.S. money or resources and supplies available to them

to help their people, which they were not using. There was an engineer brigade up there, Brazilian army, and we went to see them. At that time we were pushing this business called civic action where the troops, when they were not busy training, would do things to help the civil communities, sometimes even as a training exercise. This engineer brigade was a very, very good one. I forget the commander's name, but I was much impressed with them. They had a lot of equipment. There were a lot of things that they could do, well drilling, road building, so on, particularly opening up these little marketing roads that would have been a great help to that community there. But they were not doing it. They were not free to do it in these civil communities unless the local government would approve it. So we went to see the local governor, Bill Draper and several members of this commission including myself, to try to persuade him to let these engineers get into action and pointing out that there was available from U.S. sources, funds to buy things, for example, like water pumps. This fellow wouldn't go along at all. He kept pointing out that civilians were their own masters and that they would take care of these things. They weren't going to be servants of the United States and they were going to get that fellow some water in due time. And he appreciated our helping, maybe you'd say, our offer to help, but that they had to reserve their independence. That was their general attitude toward the thing. In the meantime the fellow didn't have any water and the engineers who could give it to him so easily were digging holes and filling them up, training, you know, period.

MOSS: Okay, what effect did this kind of report of the intransigence of the local people to accept aid and so on, what kind of effect did this have on State, AID, DOD planning on military and other assistance?

JOHNSON: Well, it wasn't really new knowledge. We knew that that regime down there stopped being helpful, as I said. They wouldn't even talk to us, many of them. And all they did was sort of point up this reluctance to deal with us, but we had kept on for years trying to help the people of the country in spite of the administration, whether the administration, as it was in that particular country, was leftist or whether the administration, as it was in many countries, was just weak or corrupt or ineffective. And we've been talking a good deal about South America, but this was a worldwide operation we were involved in, you understand . . .

MOSS: Right.

JOHNSON: . . . so that not having the complete support of the government was no novelty to U.S. operators.

MOSS: Okay, one or two more questions on Brazil. One is on the AID operation in support of training the police and so on. There's been some evidence since that time that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was heavily involved in this end of things. Were they so in Brazil, operating under an AID cover?

JOHNSON: I couldn't say. There were some of them there, but they have a different mission, of course, and while CIA people sometimes work under cover with these various outfits, with AID and so on, they're doing their own job. They only do enough of the other stuff such as using the offices and so on to . . .

MOSS: Well, what I'm looking for, I think, is that somebody somewhere along the line in doing research in the Kennedy Library, or doing research elsewhere, is going to hit upon the idea that the CIA engineered the coup that came later, and one of the ways they did it was operating under an AID cover training the police and this kind of thing. To your knowledge, was any of this going on?

JOHNSON: No.

MOSS: Okay.

JOHNSON: I think it's ridiculous.

MOSS: Okay, fine. Well, this is the kind of thing that is very prevalent nowadays, and somebody is going to grab hold of it and try to make a case for it. And I'd like to have some evidence somewhere one way or the other, you know.

JOHNSON: Even the Arabs are charging the CIA with most of this stuff in Israel. I suppose they're in a difficult position because they would have to deny it anyway, but I'm quite sure that CIA and no other American, for that matter, had anything to do with Castelo Branco taking the leadership of that drive, you might call it a general's movement, to oust Goulart.

MOSS: Okay, what about another aspect of the thing, and that is countering Castro communist infiltrators into the northeast.

JOHNSON: You say how did they?

MOSS: Yeah, right.

JOHNSON: Well, I didn't know where these communists that were running that thing came from. There could've been some Cuban influence, Castro influence in there, but again it would not have been the main dynamo of the thing. It would have been an assistance thing. And I don't think Castro had enough money to provide it. I don't know the source of communist funds in the Western Hemisphere, but I feel confident it isn't Cuban.

MOSS: Okay, one more question on this and that is, I have heard one person say that he had from an undisclosed source the idea that there were actually U.S. special forces people operating in the northeast.

JOHNSON: A ridiculous idea.

MOSS: Okay, fine.

JOHNSON: I probably know more about the U.S. special forces from their beginning than nearly anybody around here because I accepted the paper that started them and two or three times kept them alive when budget limitations were pressing to knock out somebody.

MOSS: This is interesting. Would you tell me the story?

JOHNSON: It was devised. . . . The idea was devised by a general named (Robert A.) McClure, in the army, whose original purpose was to establish cells in Russia and in the countries of eastern Europe, about which people who were dissidents to the Soviet regime could assemble in time of war. It was well recognized at the time McClure came up with this thing which was in, oh, I'd say, '49 or '50, that if the Soviets moved in Europe, they could go a right long way--American-Allied military strategy at that time only hoped to hold them at the Rhine River--but although they would've conquered a great deal of territory, there would be a great many people behind them that were opposed to them. We could establish these cells around which these people could rally and arm them by air, somewhat in the manner the French resistance was built up during World War II. They could create a great deal of difficulty for the Russians, particularly over those very long lines of communications that would then exist, and they might have a very helpful effect on enabling us to hold the Russians at the Rhine.

The nuclear business came into it all right. We had more nuclear forces than the Russians did, but there was nothing to keep their army from moving and coming into what you might

call a sanctuary as far as our nuclear attacks were concerned. We would not like to wipe out the city of Frankfurt, for example, just as a means of stopping the Russian army. So this scheme of McClure's seemed to me to be a helpful sort of thing. It kicked around for a year or two, but eventually these special forces were established, and they became very elite troops. We built a school for them. They had language speakers of the various countries in Europe, Asia too. We sent a force that was about a regimental size--a couple of battalions, I suppose--over to Europe. And I remember for awhile they were stationed at Baden-Baden. No, that's wrong. Bad Tolz down in Bavaria. I think that was the only unit we had overseas in the beginning. But we had them in the states and made some of them in some reserve units. Well, then the hard times came along with (Louis A.) Johnson, that West Virginia fellow who had been head of the American Legion, whacking away at the army. He was secretary of the Army or Defense . . .

MOSS: Louis Johnson?

JOHNSON: Louis Johnson. So naturally when times of budget stringency come along, anything that's a little off the main parade ground comes under very heavy fire. I had to put on a hell of a battle in the Army general staff--I was the army planner at the time--to save them. And when I got over to Europe a few years later--that was '54 or '55--I found they were again in another budget stringency and were getting ready to eliminate these forces, and I was able to keep them on the batting order there because I knew the plans for their use somewhat better than some of the other people. But the idea that they have been--would be operating in Brazil, trying to stir up trouble, is as ridiculous as the idea that the CIA would be going out to do that same sort of thing.

MOSS: Okay, let me ask you something else about the special forces and that is, that with Kennedy coming in, and with Maxwell Taylor coming in, following his book, The Uncertain Trumpet, and so on, the whole idea of the special forces underwent something of a change, I think, developing the counter-guerilla warfare, counter insurgency business as opposed to this earlier idea. I do recall seeing in one place that President Kennedy couldn't understand quite why special forces should be in Germany. Why weren't they out in the jungles of Vietnam or New Guinea or whatnot? He seemed to think this was the appropriate place for them rather than in Germany. Do you recall the situation at that time?

JOHNSON: Yes, of course. To give you an answer, maybe, to Mr. Kennedy's question, they were in Germany because they were not going to retire when the rest of the forces withdrew to the Rhine. They were going up in these areas to which they were assigned. But this counter-guerrilla thing became a popular thing all along and it leads to something. . . . Do you want to ask any more questions about that special forces before I go on?

MOSS: No, this was my last question.

JOHNSON: All right. You will recall that under the administration of General (Dwight D.) Eisenhower the army took quite a beating compared to the other services. Why, I couldn't say. I always sort of imagined that Mr. Eisenhower was leaning over backwards leaving it to the secretary to bring in these recommendations, sort them out from the Joint Chiefs and so on. Now, when Max Taylor became allied with President Kennedy, the view on the use of the army broadened. I'll come back to that in a minute. But Mr. (Robert S.) McNamara's first move when he took over as secretary of Defense was to call for some studies about how much army was needed. And I was directed to get a study prepared on--I was then in the DOD staff as the director of policy review--to head a group that would make up a study of what the size of the army ought to be. I assembled a staff and we started working up this thing. He wanted this army to be able to fight two wars at one time. It's perhaps possible for the United States to fight two major wars at one time, but when you start drawing up the forces required for two major wars, you commence to get into frightening figures. We made one a major war and one a smaller one of some kind. I was very intent on coordinating this thing with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I didn't want us to prepare a study to which they, who were the military advisors of the president, wouldn't agree. So we made such a study and put it in there to him. In the meantime he'd gotten some others started and the administration, perhaps with Max Taylor's spurring, or at least his advice, got moving very quickly on building up the army. And it was fortunate that they did. This counter-guerrilla thing was a development of a scheme which I think Max originated to have forces that would allow the president to move where anything was required, from an MP (Military Policeman) to a nuclear weapon, so that in between there he had freedom to do something and countering guerrillas was one of the things in there. If you remember Max made a much quoted statement to the effect that if a sniper got up in a church steeple we had to have some way to get him out other than destroying the church, the bishop, and the diocese. So he was pushing this scheme of his. And I forget what he

called it. He might have called it variable force or something like that. The reason I mention it to you is to make very clear the difference between what I will call variable force, though that was not his language, and the so called . . .

MOSS: Flexible response.

JOHNSON: Huh?

MOSS: Flexible response.

JOHNSON: It's not the same. That's the point I'm making.

MOSS: No. All right. Fine.

JOHNSON: Yeah. It's two different things.

MOSS: Okay.

JOHNSON: Now, the difference has gotten lost. This business of the flexible response first appeared while I was in Sec Def's (secretary of Defense's) office as a study from Rand Corporation. Rand Corporation was under contract to the Department of the Air Force to make studies, but their contract permitted them to originate some things now and then, and they originated this one. The object of the thing was to avoid provoking the enemy into nuclear attack by keeping these wars on a small scale. You kick me in the shins, I'll kick you in the shins. You hit me in the nose, I'll hit you in the nose. Well, it was a manner of making war which no military type has ever believed in. We had always thought from (Karl von) Clausewitz on, that the way to fight a war was to get in and win it, end it, not this drawn out thing. I saw the thing when it came into DOD, but it seemed so ridiculous to me I didn't say anything about it, let it go along. By that time Nitze was gone and (William P.) Bundy was out of there, but McNaughton and some of those fellows in ISA, they loved this thing. And I suppose Mr. McNamara loved it although he never talked to me about it. But as you know, the present war has been conducted under that theory.

MOSS: How is this different from what you were talking about, the variable force thing?

JOHNSON: We were talking about developing a capability of meeting threats without having, on our part, to use the nuclear weapon. And every military man would support this, that you should have that capability, but no military man would propose that theory as a means of

conducting a war which somebody else brought on you to keep them from using nuclear weapons. Do I make myself clear?

MOSS: I believe so.

JOHNSON: It's a fine point in there, you see . . .

MOSS: It's a rather fine distinction.

JOHNSON: . . . which is why I brought it up in the first place.

MOSS: You're saying that your response is not the mirror image of the enemy's action, but you have options short of nuclear war that would do the job.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. Very well stated. And it's a very different thing. Now, I had nothing to do with the developing this latter thing at all, except for cheering on and helping with these studies toward developing the establishment of the options. I had nothing to do with the other, but it is a thing that's frequently lost sight of, and it's a fine point which is why I wanted to make it.

MOSS: Let's get back a minute to the--unless you had something else.

JOHNSON: No, no. Go on.

MOSS: Let me get back to Brazil just for one more question and that is, how did your team work with Ambassador (Lincoln) Gordon? How was that relationship?

JOHNSON: Very well. We worked out of the embassy and Mr. Gordon's staff would make the appointments for us. His girls would write up our dope, and when it was appropriate, the ambassador would go, for example, with General Draper to call on Mr. Goulart. Oh, it was fine. There was no conflict at all.

MOSS: There were some repercussions in the Brazilian press after Ambassador Gordon talked to the people in Congress about the Brazilian situation in which he was outlining, in very explicit terms, the communist danger. I was wondering how this affected your being there and the whole relationship with the Brazilians?

JOHNSON: Well, it's unfortunate, of course, that sometimes our officials have to criticize foreign governments

and it gets into the press. And if it's kept secret, that's why, of course, but it can open a fight for years as it did about the secret report that (Albert Coady) Al Wedeneyer made on the Chiang Kai-shek government. He was criticizing it and we didn't want to publish a criticism of an allied government. And so it was kept secret. It was no deep or devious thing. I may be naive, but I worked with the high government circles for a long time--not the highest--and I never witnessed this devious stuff that is often attributed towards the CIA, plotting the overthrow of this guy or the other, and the special forces trying to organize revolts. Now, that may have happened in connection with Cuban invasion of the Bay of Pigs, and I think perhaps it did, but that's the only experience I've ever had with any of that stuff. And I didn't have any experience with that except . . .

MOSS: I was going to say were you involved at all in the review of that situation?

JOHNSON: No, no.

MOSS: You were not. Okay. Now, you mentioned over the phone that there were other similar commissions that were going on. Did you serve on others?

JOHNSON: No.

MOSS: You did not.

JOHNSON: No, there was one that went down through the Central American republics, I believe. I had earlier gone down on one of those--my teams--to do a review of Honduras. But the thing died, the thing died.

MOSS: Because of the State/AID people or why?

JOHNSON: I don't know why. I don't know why. Mr. Rusk seemed very interested when we talked to him, and I don't think he would've been the one to kill it. But it was a big operation. It was something like this group that's just gone out to Vietnam. And to organize big operations, to go to all of the countries in which we had AID programs would have been a big task, a major national task--certainly not something that we could not perform, but you just visualize setting up something like this thing they went out there to do the other day, in all of the countries of Asia, for example. And you can see all the political, international-political ramifications that would come into it, as well as the trouble of finding the people, the administrative business. I thought it was worth doing, and I was sorry to

see it end.

MOSS: Did you ever get the feeling that you were being treated as visiting firemen and that the people on the scene felt they really knew the situation better and were making their reports properly and that it all ought to be handled through regular channels?

JOHNSON: Well, there's always some of that. And you're always a nuisance, particularly when you're coming with a big group, to the local people. But on the other hand, I always made a point when I was a commander of finding something that I could do that would be helpful to the guy that I went to look at, giving him some information he didn't have. And the further you get away from Washington, the easier that is to do because there are more things that they don't know about and don't know how to get, and whether they can get them or not. So that I never felt that the military, local military, resented my presence. Now, how the representatives of the other outfits felt, I don't know.

MOSS: Let me ask you one more question, a general question this time, and that is, if you can think back and think of what you felt at the time was the impact of the new team at Defense on the Defense Department and the military establishment. What was it that McNamara and Nitze and Bundy and all the rest of them coming in, and President Kennedy as president, did to the military establishment? How did they change it? What was the impact?

JOHNSON: Initially, I thought it was helpful. In the first place they had very high calibre people in Nitze and Bundy, but the trouble traced back to Eisenhower when he called for reorganization of the Defense Department and put in these six assistant secretaries. When he did that he put in a level that separated the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Military Departments from the secretary of Defense, which became a roadblock. I have criticized General Eisenhower a couple of times. I have a great respect for him. He was a great soldier. I served under him. And I was the one who did the reorganization of the joint staff when he ordered it there in '58. I was the planner who had just been assigned to that job. But when you put an extra level in there, you make it very difficult. In the time that I was the J-5 (Director of Plans and Policy), every week the director of the joint staff and myself and maybe some other fellow who was concerned would meet with (Gerald C.) Jerry Smith, now running this SALT thing, and the State Department planners and mesh our own thinking and planning. As these ISA and these other assistant secretary types moved in there, that fell out--that

kind of thing fell out--and the relations of the military with State decreased considerably. The military individuals, Department of Defense still had many, but it, the talks with State, was being handled on the assistant secretary level. Now, when the first appointments of the Kennedy Administration came in there, Nitze, and Bundy, and so on, they were very high calibre people. And they were easy to work with and easy to do things. Later on that calibre slipped terribly, and they introduced the business of deputies to the assistants, who spread through there in great volume. And when they raised the pay of these assistant secretaries and all those deputies in Defense to a point where it made the jobs politically or financially desirable to political types, we had some pretty sad sacks in there filling a lot of slots, who generally felt, "We know what the Joint Chiefs of Staff would say about this, so why ask them?" And it wasn't too long after that that I came out. It was getting too hard to. . . . I was a civilian type myself at the time, but I couldn't get any meeting of mind with these fellows.

MOSS: Excuse me, let me reverse the tape just a second.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

MOSS: Okay, let me ask you, the ISA setup in Defense having sometimes been called the second State Department, or the little State Department, how much friction was there between ISA and State, how much fighting for prerogatives, how did you draw the lines of division of effort, how jealously were these guarded, and this kind of thing?

JOHNSON: Once while I was J-5, there was a commission of some kind investigating DOD, and they came down to talk to me and they suggested that ISA ought to be thrown out of the Department of Defense. To my great remorse, I did not agree with them. I thought that the function of ISA was to apply political considerations to the recommendations of the military, but that these were to be primarily domestic political considerations. The military might, for example-- this is just a possible case--recommend abandonment of some military post, and ISA being acquainted with political fellows might say, "My God, you can't send that thing forward. You would alienate Senator So-and-so in whose district that station is." And they would watch out for things like that so that the president didn't get misled into doing something from a consideration that the military might have that ignored these other things. Now, the reason I said domestic, I thought it was a domestic thing in spite of its name, was because the State Department is statutory adviser of the president on

foreign affairs, just as Defense is on military affairs. So that I could not see why the Defense Department should presume to carry out a function that belonged to the State Department. I think, perhaps, there was a great deal of controversy between State and ISA on that sort of thing, though I never had any part in it other than these small matters as I ran into them in connection with these inspections of foreign assistance policy that were being put on by the teams that were sent around. For example, I remember that there was an AID program in Morocco, but the local people didn't know whether it was a grant program or whether Morocco should have paid for it, whether it was a loan program. And this report made the point that they didn't know. Well, it was tied up some way with something the president had personally arranged with their local king, but they didn't like us going into that at all and didn't take the action to straighten it out as far as I could ever find. But I didn't consider that was any conflict as far as I was concerned. All I was trying to do was tell him, the secretary, what these things were and presume that he would do whatever was necessary or desirable to do in the interest of the United States.

MOSS: Aside from Murphy and then his successor, Kenneth whatever his name is, who were the people in State you had the most contact with? Who were your opposite numbers?

JOHNSON: When a team was going to any area, it would get several days of briefing of the objective from the area people. So we would be dealing with this group until this country was cleared up. And these things were going on simultaneously in several areas.

MOSS: Did Dick Goodwin get into the business of your briefing and so on after he came in on the Latin American end?

JOHNSON: Did who?

MOSS: Richard Goodwin.

JOHNSON: No. I never knew Goodwin. And one thing I should have made very clear and meant to make at the beginning, I never met Mr. Kennedy. I don't know Mr. Kennedy. No, Goodwin wasn't in any of that stuff.

MOSS: Did you have any contact with (Adolf A., Jr.) Berle or with Arthur Schlesinger on it?

JOHNSON: No.

MOSS: Okay. Okay, fine. I think that fairly well exhausts what I had to ask you. Have you anything else that you think . . .

JOHNSON: No, it about exhausts all I can recall that would be of any interest at all to you, however slight that I know most of this is.

MOSS: Well, we also like to look for little anecdotes about people and personalities and so on if you've got any good stories that indicate the kind of person, say, that McNamara or Nitze or Bundy was, we'd like to collect those as well.

JOHNSON: Mr. McNamara got very distant as he stayed there so that, for example, the director of military assistance, General (Robert J.) Wood told me at one time that he hadn't seen him for six or eight months, never got a chance to talk to him. As far as he could go was to some of these individuals inbetween. I'll make another comment a little later. But one name I thought I would give you if you want to talk to him, a man who was on a good many of these teams that I sent around, General John J. O'Hara. He was an Air Force general that I had never known before, but he was the best operator I had. He made a lot of these visits. His address is 218 West Wyoming Avenue, Newport Richey, R-I-C-H-E-Y, Florida. His telephone number there is 849-1676. You might or might not like to talk to him. I think he could give you a lot of little anecdotes on these things. For example, one of the missions I went on was down to Honduras, as I said. And the fellow who I think is still the president of Honduras was a (Col. Osvaldo) Lopez (Arellano). He had been president once before in a take-over, turned it back, allowed an election to go on. They picked a president who left after awhile. Eventually Lopez took it back over again, but he was a very patriotic man. He wasn't a man who was taking over this presidency for personal reasons, even as was the case with Castelo Branco, this one I spoke of in Brazil. And throughout Latin America the military, which in some cases has been there since the twenties, has always developed a great regard in the local military for the U.S. military. And that has stood us in good stead in many years. And I used to try to persuade that if the school teachers, for example, could develop a feeling for the United States amongst their opposite numbers, or the labor leaders amongst their opposite numbers, well these other kind of people that we sent down could've had the same influence in their fields that the military had in ours, we would've established in every country a great overwhelming strength of U.S. supporters amongst the leaders in many fields. The fact that we had them

in the military field wasn't enough. But I remember old Lopez coming up to see me personally to sit around and have a few drinks, to talk in a very friendly manner. Far from resenting anything at all that we were doing, Castelo Branco took me out to his home one Sunday morning for breakfast, just he and his wife and I. We got on well with all those people. But going back to Defense, as Mr. McNamara got more distant from his military advisers, he came up with many actions with which most of us didn't agree, got to relying more and more on some of the so-called "whiz kids" and their studies.

MOSS: What was it that you objected to particularly about the "whiz kids?" What was the guts of the problem?

JOHNSON: I would say the fact that it isn't possible to feed into a computer calculations on the influences that move individuals to fight. I don't know whether your experience in the military service has taken you into combat or not, but I will give you something that might be an example. People fight best when they are with people that they have known and been with for some time and developed a bond or feeling of the organization to which they all belong. It is not so much a great feeling of national patriotism but more the business of this, their division that would drive them in all they do down there. Now, the next division feels the same way. If you break up the two and throw them together, half of one and half of the other, you lose all of that. You can possibly make a pretty good case mathematically for combining these people in certain cases, but the computer can't translate or handle this feeling that I spoke to you about. And it's the same way with all of the personal considerations that go into making people fight. No good sane man without some compelling reason will stick his head up from behind a bunker when there is a lot of loose lead flying around. And it takes a whole lot to make him willing to do that. We have learned how to make him willing to do that, but it's a characteristic that doesn't respond to mathematical formulae. I think that was the basic objection to the young fellows there, to keep pushing this cost-effectiveness thing which could well be established in many cases if it disregarded some of these personal things. You still see it mentioned. For example, the papers describing Admiral (Thomas H.) Moorer, who's just been named chairman of the Joint Chiefs, has made quite a point of his interest in people as an oblique way of saying the same thing. Not oblique, but a reduced way of saying. . . .

MOSS: Did you get at all into the question of evaluating military assistance to South Vietnam?

JOHNSON: No.

MOSS: You didn't.

JOHNSON: No, I was. . . . When I was a J-5, I attended SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) conferences and had many papers of directions for our people that went out there, and may I say General (David M.) Shoup, S-H-O-U-P, who was then commandant of the Marine Corps . . .

MOSS: S-H-O-U-P.

JOHNSON: S-H-O-U-P.

MOSS: Right.

JOHNSON: . . . attended many of those meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff where these things were brought up, and I'm sure there must have been twenty-five actions on SEATO, its commitments, its assumption of responsibility for the defense of those areas which were not members of SEATO themselves, but which were adjacent to it there. And he never objected or raised any of these things that have since come up.

MOSS: All his thoughts had come later, had they?

JOHNSON: Yeah, sure. In fact he contributed to many of them.

MOSS: Who would've been ramrodding the military assistance for South Vietnam? Was Admiral (Luther C.) Heinz involved in this, or who?

JOHNSON: Well, Heinz became the director of military assistance after General Wood left, but I wouldn't say anybody was ramrodding it. I kind of forget what our actions were to help these South Vietnamese. I wasn't in on the establishment of that program. That came later after the French withdrew.

MOSS: I was thinking particularly of the change from the military assistance group to MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam).

JOHNSON: To what?

MOSS: To military--MACV--what's the. . . .

JOHNSON: MACV, oh, yeah, that's it.

MOSS: What's the breakdown? Military Advisory Group.

JOHNSON: Well, there was always a military advisory group wherever you sent military assistance. If you sent in a gun, you had to send along somebody to show how to work it.

MOSS: Who were the people who were involved in these decisions? Do you know as to changes . . .

JOHNSON: It was a routine sort of a thing. I mean it would've been the same thing that established the policy of military assistance in the various countries.

MOSS: Okay, fine. Well, I think that's about all I have. Have you got anything. . . .

JOHNSON: That's about all I have too.

MOSS: Okay, fine.

JOHNSON: A lot of it's just rambling.

MOSS: I thank you very much indeed.