Joseph V. Charyk Oral History Interview—10/1/1968
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Biographical Note
Charyk, Under Secretary of the Air Force (1961-1963) and Director, of the National Reconnaissance Office of the U.S. Air Force (1961-1963), discusses the Air Force programs that continued from the Eisenhower Administration to the Kennedy Administration, members of the U.S. military command, and the B-70 and RS-70 aircraft programs, among other issues.

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Joseph V. Charyk

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Oral History Interview

with

Joseph V. Charyk

October 1, 1968
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Well, why don't we just start out with you talking about what you know about the decision that you would remain as Under Secretary of the Air Force when the administrations changed?

CHARYK: Well, that happened in about December of 1960. I was called by Robert McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], who had recently been announced as the Secretary of Defense designate. He said he had been talking with Roswell Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] who was going to be his number two man, and they both hoped that I would agree to stay in the new administration. We left it that we would talk

subsequently about the matter. I believe this contact was in early December or mid December, 1960. I had, of course, had an association with the Ford Motor Company before that, before coming to Washington. I had been with the Aeronutronics Systems subsidiary of the Ford Motor Company out in California and, as such, had at least indirect contact with McNamara although no direct contact. I had known Gilpatric for a number of years and, as a matter of fact, had worked closely with him on some Air Force problems during 1959 and 1960. So I had frequent occasion to be in contact with him.

HACKMAN: I had wondered if their decision to keep you on was primarily because of this type of relationship, or was it because of your involvement in specific systems or specific things you were working on at that point?

CHARYK: I suspect that it was primarily related to the fact that we had certain important programs under way, and it was desired to have continuity in these

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programs, at least to the point where the new administration would have an opportunity to assess the directions that they wanted to follow and either retain or amend the direction that these programs were taking.

HACKMAN: Was this more or less an across-the-board thing on Air Force programs or were there specifics that you could…

CHARYK: No, these were programs primarily aimed in the direction of reconnaissance and the importance of reconnaissance to our entire intelligence system.

HACKMAN: Can you remember your first discussions with Secretary McNamara on this subject?

CHARYK: The first discussion explicitly on the matter had to do, I believe, with a satellite shot which, if my memory serves correct, was going to go up either the day of the Inauguration or the day after Inauguration. And the question as to how that should be handled from a publicity point of view was the first real discussion with McNamara in this subject area.

HACKMAN: What was the decision made?

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CHARYK: It was my recommendation that we move away from the practice up to that time of announcing beforehand explicitly the purpose of every shot; that we had to move in a direction where the explicit purpose of every satellite launch was not spelled out in the papers; that the shot in question was very explicitly known to be a reconnaissance shot; and that although there was a limited number of things that we could do with that particular one other than saying that this was part of an experimental program, it was essential that the policy in this matter be reviewed as it moved into the operational phase.

HACKMAN: Was anyone else in on this discussion other than yourself and Secretary McNamara?

CHARYK: No, my recollection is just the two of us. He was very quick to react. He agreed completely that we should move away from the pattern of explicit designation, and he asked that I develop some detailed recommendations in this respect which I worked on subsequently, and which then became a basic policy of handling Department of Defense satellite

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shots which is actually still in effect.

HACKMAN: Who had been particularly important in formulating the position on this during the Eisenhower administration [Dwight D. Eisenhower]? Had this been Mr. Gates' [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.] decision or…

CHARYK: This was a matter which we had worked on both with Mr. Gates and with Mr. Douglas [James Henderson Douglas]. I would say that perhaps Mr. Douglas was more directly active.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any initial conversations with Secretary Zuckert [Eugene M. Zuckert] on this subject?

CHARYK: Yes, I met Secretary Zuckert after my original discussions that I have referred to recently here with McNamara and with Gilpatric. When he was named Secretary, he called me up and indicated that McNamara and Gilpatric had talked to him about their conversation with me and renewed his invitation to me to stay as Under Secretary.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any discussion at that point as to

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exactly what his concept of your role as Under Secretary would be? Did it differ any, as it worked out, from what this relationship between you and Mr. Douglas had been?

CHARYK: Actually, it didn't change all that much. He, of course, wanted me to continue to assume prime responsibility for some of these special programs that I had been carrying on. And he wanted to get my views on some of the outstanding questions before the Air Force, to hear the arguments which had been presented pro and con on various key issues. We agreed that in the special areas of responsibility I would keep him informed of essential items that were coming up for decision, but that he would rely on my judgment to bring him in when he ought to be brought in and otherwise, to carry on, which was very much the kind of relationship that had been established with Secretary Sharpe [Dudley C. Sharpe], and Secretary Douglas.

HACKMAN: In many cases, the Under Secretary is sort of an administrative generalist. Did Zuckert compensate

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for your concentration in these specific areas by assigning other responsibilities to other people?

CHARYK: Yes. I think that as a result of the fact that I was concentrating in certain areas, some of the sort of general duties which an Under Secretary might perform were either performed directly by him or assigned to some of the assistant secretaries. And this relationship worked out, I think, in a rather favorable framework.

HACKMAN: What were, other than the reconnaissance satellite thing, the areas he looked particularly to you for advice?

CHARYK: Well, the whole reconnaissance area, which included both aircraft and satellites. The big programs of the Air Force were also ones in which I took a direct interest, such as the manned aircraft programs. And the feeling in the new administration was that there should be great emphasis placed on air transport and on tactical operations, definitely a sort of a change of emphasis from the strategic game to the tactical end conventional warfare

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concept. And this, I think, is the chief characteristic that I can recall from that time frame, the McNamara idea that we must develop a better capability than we had at that time to fight a variety of conflicts, and the fact that this could be only an idea until the tactical air and the air transport could be developed beyond the stage that existed in 1960, and that these Air Force development plans had be integrated with the corresponding programs in the Army and the Navy, and that these should be looked upon as areas of development to the Department of Defense and not individual programs of the three services.

HACKMAN: Right. What was your initial reaction to these ideas of his in this area?

CHARYK: Well, I was completely sympathetic to the idea that programming in the Department of Defense should be developed on a mission basis rather than on the basis of whether it's Army, Navy, or Air Force. I think that I had certain reservations about whether it was really practical to develop the capability

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to fight at all levels of limited war. In particular, the major questions related to whether it was practical or sensible to think in terms of gearing up, for example, to fight a major conventional land war in Europe. In the Eisenhower administration, the general consensus was that this was a nonrealistic goal and that, although you had to have a capability to fight a conventional war, there were limits on the kinds of conventional wars that you would even plan upon engaging in. And certainly a land war with conventional weapons in Europe was one that was ruled out as an item for consideration. This was not ruled out for consideration in the new administration. As a matter of fact, it became one of the big initial arguments between the new leaders of the Department of Defense and the military.

HACKMAN: What had your relationship been with General White [Thomas D. White], who was at that point Chief of Staff, and LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay], at that point, was his vice chief, I believe?

CHARYK: Well, the relationship with General White was

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extremely close. I had originally worked with him as chief scientist for the Air Force, worked with him personally, and so we had a very close relationship. I think that he went out of his way to keep me informed of attitudes of the military personnel, problems that he saw, to keep me alerted to changes in trends, in thinking. And in the case of LeMay, the relationship was somewhat more distant because we didn't agree fundamentally on the emphasis on strategy exclusively as compared to emphasis in tactical and other areas. It was my feeling, and he knew it, that I thought the Air Force had suffered from this overemphasis on the strategic matter.

HACKMAN: A lot has been written and been said about General LeMay's relationship with McNamara and his civilian aides, but not so much about General White. Can you remember what his relationship was to McNamara in the early period, Mr. Brown [Harold Brown], Mr. Hitch [Charles J. Hitch], and some of the people who were under him?

CHARYK: Well, my impression was that General White was an

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extremely reasonable individual. I think he fundamentally agreed that the Air Force emphasis had been somewhat out of balance. I think that there was no question about him giving his support to the ideas of a better balance between the various missions of the Department of Defense. He had, of course, a difficult problem because he had very strong pressures from his own people which were in some cases rather opposed to some of the things that the Defense people were trying to do. And I think he served a very important role as a very delicate balance wheel between these two forces which helped make the transition a smooth transition. I think had the Air Force at that time had a

Chief of Staff who was dug in, it could have been unpleasant. So I feel that he served as a very important element in really beginning to turn the Air Force around. And with another man in that post that might have been a very difficult job without a lot of chaos and confusion and so on.

HACKMAN: How did Secretary Zuckert, then, fit into this

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relationship?

CHARYK: Well, I believe that his relationship with White was a very good relationship. I think he understood White and White understood him. They knew what the new philosophy was, and the problem was to produce the transition without chaotic effect. Zuckert, of course, had to play again for his point of view. He had, on the one hand, to be the spokesman for the Air Force, to act as a spokesman for the Air Force in discussions with the Department of Defense, but, at the same time, try to bring an understanding of the new philosophy to the military people in the Air Force. And I think that the combination of White and Zuckert was a very excellent team for doing that.

HACKMAN: I had heard that in the very early days that Secretary Zuckert and many of the Air Force military people were very suspicious of Hitch, and Gilpatric, and Brown. Is this so, and did this change as time passed, do you think?

CHARYK: Oh, there's no question that there was a great

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suspicion, the feeling that the things the Air Force believed in were being undone, that the Air Force and possibly national security would suffer as a result. And there was definitely a resistance, more than a resistance, I think, almost a feeling of rebellion against some of the actions that they saw going on and a real determination to dig in and fight without give. It took a great deal of discussion, development of understanding, to really convince some of the dug-in people that there was a broader picture evolving here which was important to the total national defense. And that the way to proceed was to cooperate and work with these people and that these were, after all, reasonable people who were prepared to change their ideas if a persuasive case could be made, but that simply digging in was not the way to be effective. The way to be effective was to counter, if one felt one had a case, with the arguments, with the analyses, and so on, that were the tools of the new management. And I think over the years this had a very favorable

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effect because, whereas the great emphasis had been placed on more or less experience and intuition, in the years that I was there I could see definitely the trend to a more analytical and

a more sophisticated approach to problems, recognizing that although experience, intuition, and so on were very important and valuable, that they by themselves could not justify a course of action, but that they had to be supported and buttressed by an analytical approach. And I think that some of the analytical processes that were inculcated into the Air Force during those years will have long term favorable effect.

HACKMAN: Do you know if there was any resistance at all to your being kept on by Secretary Zuckert or by other people in the administration who would rather have appointed a Democrat? Did this ever come up at all?

CHARYK: Never explicitly, although I was sensitive to the idea that this was very likely the case, particularly in view of the fact that some of the main reasons

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for my retention relating to direct responsibility for certain special programs was not generally known and, therefore, particularly keeping a hangover from the old administration in a post of Under Secretary was rather unusual. So I had no doubt but that there were a lot of people who took a very dim view of this, but I was never confronted with it explicitly. And if it ever came up, I have no doubt that Zuckert and McNamara and Gilpatric handled it in their own inimitable fashion.

HACKMAN: Going back to the Eisenhower period, how had you as Under Secretary gotten involved in these programs, which apparently wasn't a normal thing that an Under Secretary would be involved to this extent in special programs?

CHARYK: Actually, that was a carry-over from my initial duties as Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Research and Development. Some of these programs I had had a hand in, in their early conceptual and development stage, and as they moved, then, over into the operational phase, I stayed with them. And,

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as a matter of fact, some of the operational problems, of course, became as complicated, if not more complicated, than the development problems because they now began to embrace the whole area of foreign policy and, as such, brought us into contact with all the other departments of the government that had a potential interest, such as the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Council, and so on.

HACKMAN: Was there any problem as the Kennedy administration developed in working out your relationship with the new Assistant Secretary for R and D on this, Brockway McMillan, in working out the responsibilities?

CHARYK: No, initially this was an area in which, because of my involvement, he did not concern himself with. He focused his energies on the other R and D problems. In particular, those associated with air transport, the better development of tactical capability, and, course, the famous B-70 question. So, he more or less excluded himself from these special areas. So that didn't produce any particular problems.

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I think that it may have produced problems in the case of some of his assistants, but it didn't produce any problem with him directly.

HACKMAN: At the time you left, then, and came over here, did this responsibility pass to him as the new Under Secretary, or did it go back down then?

CHARYK: No, it stayed with him as Under Secretary. And by that time, of course, having sort of gotten his feet on the ground in all of these other areas, I began to involve him in some of these special areas. And so it was logical for him to simply move in when I left.

HACKMAN: Did you get involved in bringing any of the people to the Department of the Air Force that were appointed, any of the new assistant secretaries?

CHARYK: Yes, I had a role in suggesting Brock McMillan as a candidate for Assistant Secretary for R and D. Zuckert also asked me to interview potential candidates for the other assistant secretary posts. And I discussed the various candidates with him. Of course the final decision was his, but he certainly gave me

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the full opportunity to be heard. And, as a matter of fact, I think we agreed on all the selections completely.

HACKMAN: Do you know, was there ever any problem in working out these appointments with Secretary McNamara or Yarmolinsky [Adam Yarmolinsky], I believe, got involved in some appointments in Defense? Can you remember this? Did it give you any problem at all?

CHARYK: I don't recall this as being an explicit problem in the Air Force. I think that there were one or two candidates for the assistant secretary posts where perhaps another individual would have been preferred, but in all cases, when Zuckert made his decision, although there may have been some negative input, that decision stuck.

HACKMAN: Do you ever get any feedback from the White House on any of the

appointments? Or the Democratic National Committee, Donahue [Richard K. Donahue] and the people who were working in this area, John Bailey [John Moran Bailey]?

CHARYK: I did not directly, although I did hear indirectly questions relative to the McMillan appointment

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as a Republican.

HACKMAN: Any significant problems on lower level referrals from the White House or the committee that you can recall?

CHARYK: Well, there were a whole series of referrals, and I must say that I think that these were handled in very good fashion. We would interview people that had been suggested strongly, and we would see whether their qualifications would permit them to be fed into the organization. And in some cases, people were taken in who appeared to be capable and qualified to do a job. I do not recall of an instance where we took a person we didn't think to be qualified. I think it's fair to say that in the event that we had suggestions, people who more or less had equivalent qualifications, we would give preference to a person who had been suggested, but we did not take a person we didn't think was qualified simply because he had been referred strongly by anybody.

HACKMAN: Other people have remarked that Secretary McNamara

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took a much greater interest in promotions and assignments within the military side of the Air Force. Can you recall this ever creating a problem with the military people?

CHARYK: Yes, I can recall this. I think, first of all, the statement is true that he was very personally interested in important assignments and that he personally wanted to know about the attitudes and qualifications of the individuals who were being proposed. This, I think, sort of naturally caused a resentment in the military system because it was a little unnatural for the Secretary of Defense to consider or to inject himself into transfers and new assignments that the military had always assumed to be primarily their prerogative. And so the idea of having the Secretary of Defense function on a whole series of assignments was a very difficult thing for the military to swallow.

HACKMAN: Can you recall any that became particularly controversial?

CHARYK: Well, I think the most prominent case was the rather

short term of office of the Vice Chief of Staff, Smith [Frederic H. Smith, Jr.], where, for a variety of reasons, McNamara felt that he was not the proper man to be the vice chief, and his term of office, thereby, was rather brief. And I think it was obvious, certainly, to all the key military people in the Air Force that this was a direct action by the Secretary of Defense. And in many quarters that was not very favorably accepted.

HACKMAN: Did this stem from any particular disagreement on one issue between the two, or was it a…

CHARYK: I think it was really a series of things which led McNamara to feel that this was not the proper man at this time to be in that spot.

HACKMAN: Because of a philosophical orientation toward a more traditional, strategic….

CHARYK: I think because of a basic incompatibility with the philosophy of the administration.

HACKMAN: Can you recall why, I believe for almost two years, there was no assignment to the position of special assistant for Manpower, Personnel and Reserve Forces?

Finally, a gentleman named Ben Fridge [Benjamin W. Fridge] was named, I believe. Anything at all significant as to why this was left vacant?

CHARYK: I think, and here my recollection isn't too good, but I believe it is that there

were some rather strong recommendations as to individuals to serve in that post, and, I believe, a strong resistance by Zuckert to some of the people that had been suggested and, therefore, a solution that left the post open rather than caving in and accepting one of the nominations or causing a big reaction by nominating someone who was not on the recommended list….

HACKMAN: Where were the suggestions coming from?

CHARYK: These were coming from the National Committee and from certain rather influential people in the Congress, either directly or through White House channels or through the National Committee. And so this was a kind of truce where no appointment was made. This, I believe, subsequently became criticized by quite a few people, that here was an important

post which was not being filled, and there was concern, certainly in the reserve forces, that the Air Force was not giving proper recognition to this important area. I think finally a decision was made to move someone into the spot who actually was well known to the reserve groups and who had actually served previously, and that was Fridge.

HACKMAN: The suggestions from Congress, was this someone on the Armed Services Committee or the preparedness committee, who presented any…

CHARYK: Yes, yes.

HACKMAN: Do you want to say who it was? Or do you recall specifically?

CHAYRK: Actually there were a number of people. There were, as a matter of fact, a number of people promoting Fridge, including Senator Long [Russell B. Long]. Finally, the decision was that he would be a perfectly acceptable person to fill the post and that it was important to bring someone in rather than have that an area open for continued criticism. I think the criticism went on, certainly throughout all the time

that I was there, that adequate attention or recognition of the personnel and manpower function, was not being accorded by the Air Force and a feeling that one of the assistant secretary posts should be for Manpower, Personnel, and Reserve forces.

You will recall that at the time of the new administration there were only three authorized assistant secretary posts. So each service had to make a decision as to which one of the four they would eliminate. The Air Force had selected the Manpower as being the one they would eliminate. This was not true in the other services. So that helped single out the Air Force for criticism, and that was compounded by not even appointing someone to the post of special assistant.

HACKMAN: Did this put additional responsibilities on you in this area? Or who tried to fill this gap?

CHARYK: In the Air Force the responsibility then moved to the Under Secretary in the

situation where an assistant secretary for Manpower, Personnel, and Reserve forces didn't exist. This was also an area

in which, of course, I had had no direct involvement up to that time. And I think that, perhaps, further compounded the problem because one could argue then that not only was the responsibility now with someone who had had no direct experience before, but we had, in addition, eliminated the assistant secretary post and hadn't even appointed a special assistant. So I think that Zuckert undoubtedly was exposed to a good bit of pressure from the Hill on this matter.

HACKMAN: Well, staying with this reserve thing then just a minute, can you remember getting involved in any discussions at the time of the Berlin crisis on the reserve call-up? Did you present the Air Force position on this?

CHARYK: This was an item of sufficient importance so that Zuckert handled this one personally, and all of the primary contacts in the matter were made directly by him.

HACKMAN: Did you frequently get involved in discussions on something like the Berlin crisis, or Laos, or the foreign policy side other than in the reconnaissance

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area? Or did Zuckert usually try to keep this to himself?

CHARYK: Well, actually there was a developing trend that these kinds of questions were primarily the province of the Department of Defense and not of the services, and that the services' role was really changing to one of developing the instruments and support necessary to carry out the policies rather than entering directly into policy formulation. And so, certainly from where I sat in the period of years that I was there, there was a definite trend in the direction of having the individual service secretaries become less and less involved with questions of this type. This was not so true in the Eisenhower administration where the service secretaries actually did participate with the Secretary of Defense.

HACKMAN: Right. Was there any way at all you could counter this and feed a viewpoint in when you or Secretary Zuckert felt this was necessary? Did this ever create any problems with McNamara?

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CHARYK: No, not at all. McNamara had a practice of having a weekly breakfast meeting with Zuckert, myself, Gilpatric, and of course, McNamara. Just the four of us for breakfast. And I believe he had a similar arrangement with the other services. This was really the opportunity to talk about anything. And, as a matter of fact, these breakfast sessions very frequently were on basic policy questions, and

this was, of course, the opportunity to inject any ideas into the picture. He was always, of course, fully prepared to discuss any or all aspects.

HACKMAN: The Chief of Staff, Air Force, never got involved in these breakfasts, Though. This was restricted to civilians.

CHARYK: No, that's right.

HACKMAN: Let me ask you, then, a few questions about the missile gap in the '60 campaign, particularly what your involvement or your feeling about this was as this issue developed in the '60 campaign. Were you involved in discussions within the Department of Defense on what public stance

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should be taken on this question?

CHARYK: Not on the latter question because, of course, that was up to people higher up in the administration. My particular role, of course, was one where I was in a position to know about as well as anyone what the actual situation was and what the status of our intelligence was on the total Soviet missile and space activity. So it was pretty obvious that some of the statements that were made about the missile gap were either not so, or rather misleading. But I did not get involved in what the counter strategy should be to the missile gap arguments. I did have, of course, the responsibility, after the new administration came in, of reviewing with Gilpatric and with McNamara and with Zuckert the status of our intelligence on the whole missile question. And it was, of course, a rather short project for McNamara to assess the total picture and determine the true status of the relative forces.

HACKMAN: Do you know if anyone was making any efforts during 1960 to get Secretary Gates to speak out and modify

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the position that had developed earlier?

CHARYK: I am sure that there were forces at work to do that. This was obviously a very difficult question because you were dealing with rather sensitive information, not so much perhaps information per se as the means of acquiring the information. One couldn't really talk about the information without possibly revealing the means by which the information had been acquired, which could have rather serious repercussions. So this was a real dilemma I think for the administration at that time.

HACKMAN: Do you recall having any conversations with people in Congress who then became involved in the Kennedy campaign? Solis Horwitz who had

worked for Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], I believe, on a committee, or Cyrus Vance [Cyrus R. Vance]? Would they have had any way to know that this issue was being overstated?

CHARYK: I don't think that they would have. The people who would have had all the information would be the key people in the House and Senate on the Armed Services Committees because they, of course, were fully

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briefed.

HACKMAN: There was never any problem at all in anything coming out during the campaign that upset you that you that recall?

CHARYK: No. No. I think that the problem of security on the acquisition of information was quite well preserved. And that was at that time a rather prime concern.

HACKMAN: Can you discuss what the things were that were coming to you and that you then passed on to Mr. McNamara and Mr. Gilpatric, in that early period, that led to this quick decision to speak out on this?

CHARYK: You mean on the missile gap?

HACKMAN: Yes.

CHARYK: Well, one of the first tasks, of course, was to review the total status of our intelligence effort and the various programs that were designed to improve our ability to get the crucial intelligence information. I think it became quickly apparent to McNamara that we had rather solid

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information on the status of the Soviet missile program, that the situation was not nearly as bad as might have been implied in the campaign, but that it was crucial to insure that our various efforts moved ahead with full vigor. There was never in my experience the slightest reservation on McNamara's part to recognize the real situation and to move ahead with full vigor to insure that we maintained our ability to be as well informed as we could possibly be.

HACKMAN: Had the information that you were giving him come to you through the reconnaissance satellite program or was this…

CHARYK: Through a variety of programs of which the primary ones were satellite and aircraft reconnaissance.

HACKMAN: I had wondered if Penkovsky [Oleg Vladimirovich Penkovsky], information from this source, was entering in this early.

CHARYK: That was another element, yes.

HACKMAN: How would something like that come to you, as…

CHARYK: Well, actually, in the particular role that I occupied, which was a focal point for these kinds of

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reconnaissance activities and intelligence activities in the Department of Defense, we dealt directly with the CIA and actually had a working relationship with them.

HACKMAN: On this whole question of intelligence, what was your reaction when the Defense Intelligence Agency was set up? I know a lot of people were upset with this.

CHARYK: Well, this was a rather controversial thing, as of course you know. The real triggering force for this was McNamara's concern with the rather different intelligence estimates from the three services. And he felt very strongly that it was going to be impossible to intelligently plan a defense program if there wasn't a common base which everybody agreed to and the feeling that the individual services were highlighting and perhaps overestimating those elements of the Soviet capacity that would help foster increased support for that service—in other words, the Army would emphasize the size of the Soviet army, and the Air Force

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would estimate the threat of the Soviet aircraft, and so on, and therefore he was not really seeing a true intelligence picture, or he was simply seeing the biases of the three elements of the intelligence services—and that there should be a mechanism whereby these differences could be thrashed out and a consensus reached; that this was impossible through a committee type structure which existed up to that point; and that the only way this could be done would be to create an agency within the Department of Defense that would bring into focus the various points of view and ultimately permit a consensus to be reached.

This was not a new idea, however, with McNamara. This was an idea that had been very much considered in the previous administration, and as a matter of fact, a lot of the spadework for this had already been accomplished. The same concern existed in the case of Gates and Douglas as then appeared in the case of McNamara and Gilpatric—real frustration with dealing with three different sets of intelligence estimates,

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presumably all of them with some bias in them.

HACKMAN: Were there problems in this changeover that you had to get involved in to get the Air Force to adequately go along with this?

CHARYK: I don't think any really serious problems. The Assistant Chief of Intelligence for the Air Force was removed and other personnel changes were effected, but no fundamental problems other than a lot of bruised feelings on the part of people who were moved out.

HACKMAN: Going back to the missile gap thing for just a second, can you recall any discussion in the early Kennedy period about how to go about publicly presenting this issue?

CHARYK: No, I was not involved in discussions of that type. I was, of course, involved, as I said earlier, in reviewing with McNamara the actual status of our intelligence. And somewhere along the line he made a statement about the missile gap which created quite a bit of a fuss at the time.

HACKMAN: Well, maybe we can switch to the B-70, them, for

a second, also controversial. Can you recall what your feelings were about this system in '60 as it developed? It was turned off or turned down, I believe, in early '60 where only four or six planes were going to be built.

CHARYK: The B-70 was one of my main problems with the Air Force because I had gotten involved in it really before I came to the Pentagon. I had been associated with the scientific advisory board of the Air Force and with the special study group that had been set up by the Air Force to look at long-range plans of the Air Force. It had been my position that the weapons systems as conceived was likely to be relatively ineffective and very expensive, and that particularly in an area where the missile developments had such a great potential that it was a mistake to put the emphasis that was being put on the B-70, and that we ought to look at this in light of the potential of the missile program, and certainly we ought not to let the missile program suffer in any way from diversion

of funds or emphasis that might occur if the B-70 program were to go at a high clip.
It was obvious that there were many technical deficiencies in the weapons systems concept, and I felt that it was my responsibility to try to point these out, to try to point out the kinds of arguments that would be made against the system, and that either the Air Force had to

improve their case for the 70 or it was going to have awfully difficult sledding. I think this was really resented by quite a few of the Air Force officers who felt that an Under Secretary really should support the plan vigorously for such a program and that they were sort of being sold down the river, you might say, by a rather negative attitude on the part of the under-secretary. I think this was primarily—well, this would be focused, I imagine, in the case of LeMay, who was heavily dug-in on the concept of the B-70.

This, of course, was something that started almost from my entry into the Air Force. The B-70 was a kind of on-again, off-again, all through the

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later stages of the Eisenhower administration, and then became one of the focal points in the McNamara consideration. And it was pretty clear to me that McNamara, approaching his way of analyzing projects, would make the B-70 a very difficult thing to sell. So my attempt, really, was to try to get the Air Force to rethink its case, to improve its arguments, to modify the concept of the weapons system, to improve the case that could be made for it because it was not my feeling that the case they could make at the beginning of the McNamara administration was a very good one. We—when I say we, I mean the Air Force—had received a partial go-ahead in the closing days of the Eisenhower administration to move ahead on a rather vigorous basis. This was immediately turned around by the new administration, to the great resentment of the Air Force.

HACKMAN: You talked about it being an on and off program. In early ‘60, I believe, it was off, and then it came back in late ‘60 in the campaign. Can you remember how this decision to turn it back on was made?

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CHARYK: Yes, I was directly involved in that one because this was one of the items in the final budget review in the Department of Defense. And I can recall General White and I going down to argue the Air Force’s case for not only keeping this in the budget, but augmenting the effort. We had made some progress in producing somewhat more sophisticated arguments for the weapons system, and we argued that the program should at least move ahead to the point where in the R and D phase we would learn more about some of these uncertainties that were being advertised, and that we could argue about them forever and probably not reach any conclusions, and that only if we moved ahead on a vigorous R and D program would we be able to provide the kinds of answers that would be necessary to satisfy the critics.

HACKMAN: When you say arguing this case, who were you arguing with?

CHARYK: We were arguing, really, with Gates and Douglas as to whether this item should be stricken from the

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budget, whether it should be put in as a token sum or whether it should be put in in a rather vigorous fashion. I think that the conclusion to pursue it in rather vigorous fashion was rather warmly received by the Air Force. Sometime later Tommy White gave me considerable credit for producing that result, and I think he used this to tell LeMay and some of these other people that the impression that they had of my role in the B-70 was a rather unjustified one, and that they wouldn't have the program had I not presented it in the best possible light. Nevertheless, that was an item, of course, that came under immediate review with the new administration who went into the matter now in considerable detail. And the major deficiencies in the arguments for the weapons system were the same ones that there always had been. And it was, of course, McNamara's decision to cut the thing back, to the great chagrin and dismay of the military people.

HACKMAN: Some people have accused the administration, the Eisenhower administration, of

turning it back on in the fall as an aid to Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], particularly in California where North American had this contract. I believe it's North American.

CHARYK: Yes, North American. There may have been some element to that. I never saw it at first hand. The sessions that I had with Gates and with Douglas on all of the programs of the Air Force were pursued in rather straightforward fashion. We produced the arguments, pro and con. We tried to put the things in balance, and the ultimate budget decisions were made in some cases favorably, and some cases unfavorably. If there was the kind of an element that you refer to, I was not directly exposed to it.

HACKMAN: Can you remember anything particularly about Herbert York's role? He stayed over awhile into the Kennedy administration, I believe.

CHARYK: Yes, he had a heart attack which he was still recovering from. He was becoming more and more active. I believe that he was asked by Gilpatric to stay on in the transition period. He asked, I

believe, or he passed on, I think, Gilpatric's request to the three assistant secretaries for R and D to stay on for a period of time. I think in two cases, I guess, they did agree to stay on, the third one couldn't do so. York, of course, had the responsibility to review for McNamara the strong points and the weak points of the various development programs. I think he did so fairly.

HACKMAN: What can you recall about the move from the B-70 to the RS-70 concept and how this came about?

CHARYK: Well, this is part of the thing that I mentioned earlier, that it was necessary to really improve the arguments for this weapons system because as a straight bomber there were so many arguments that could be presented as to its vulnerability at high altitude that it would be extremely difficult to justify the expenditure of that amount of money for the rather limited capability. There was, of course, I think a considerable feeling that if this thing could fly at low altitude, it might be a lot more attractive, but there you had the

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problem of range. If the thing flew at low altitude then you wouldn't accomplish the range, so that was a limitation.

The question of ability to deliver weapons with great accuracy was a very controversial one. Guidance systems were in a rapid state of development. The accuracy of ballistic missiles was improving at a tremendous rate, so that some of the original arguments for the B-70, which were related to high accuracy, were sort of going out of the window when it became clear that missiles could designed and built to produce also very accurate impacts. So basically one had to look for new missions for the B-70. I think that Zuckert had a great deal to do with convincing the top people in the Air Force that they had to come up with some new capabilities and some new arguments. This led to the concept of adding the reconnaissance capability, and the idea of being able to hit targets of opportunity which was something that the missile couldn't do. In other words, the argument having gone away about the accuracy of bombing, you

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then had to find missions that could not be handled by the missile. The obvious one, of course, was a target which you didn't know existed but which you would find when you arrived on the scene. In order to do that, you had to add the reconnaissance capability to the 70. And so I think that the sequence of events was that the major argument on accuracy gone away, you had to find something else. This raised the question of targets of opportunity which in turn required the addition of reconnaissance capability and hence, the RS-70.

HACKMAN: I've heard a couple of different viewpoints on where this push to development of alternatives or new capabilities came from: one, that it came from within the Air Force; and two, that it came from Harold Brown or someone under him to push this, and then that he became dissatisfied, or he was never satisfied with what the Air Force did develop.

CHARYK: Well, I'm pretty clear in my own mind that the original thinking, that you had to come up with a

new gimmick, came from the Air Force and that the target of opportunity became the key. It was clear that you couldn't sell it on the basis of just a straightforward bombing of known targets, so you had to add the unknown targets. That required the addition of reconnaissance. This, then, in turn, had appeal to Harold Brown, and the development of reconnaissance capability became a very exciting research and development program with use of high resolution radar techniques and things that were then in a rather formative stage.

So this became a very exciting R and D program, and it put a different character on the B-70 program, made it somewhat more exciting and more glamorous. So then a lot of people became involved in the act, people who had ideas about how you could, in fact, find targets of opportunity, the question of whether, in fact, a person flying in an airplane at this speed could find a target of opportunity, could he react in time, and so on. So that led to a whole series of programs on reactions of pilots and their ability

to read and interpret and react. And a whole series of new exciting areas of research and development stemmed from the basic idea. And a lot of people then made contributions.

But I think it really goes back to the military people in the Air Force, as stimulated and encouraged by myself and Zuckert, that you really had to come up with a new gimmick. This program wasn't going to go unless you really had a better case than you had for simply bombing targets whose locations were known which now the missiles could do better and cheaper.

HACKMAN: How adequately do you think the Air Force, then, presented its case? What did you think of Brown and McNamara's refusal, then, to go ahead and push this?

CHARYK: I think that the Air Force actually made an exceptionally good case in terms of really being able to bring together these new fields of technology, put them together and integrate them in the proper fashion. But it was, again, the problem of sort of

having the concept and then trying to justify it, rather than proceeding in the more logical fashion of developing the basic capabilities and then seeing what kind of a weapons system might emerge. And I think the B-70, even with the RS-70 clothes on it, always had two strikes against it because the people were looking at it were always suspicions of the basic motivations. And so you had a kind of negative attitude going in, and this made it very tough sledding. The bottom really began to drop out of the RS-70 concept when, as our regular reconnaissance capabilities began to improve and new concepts began to emerge, it was pretty clear that the number of so-called targets of opportunity would probably be relatively

few and relatively uninteresting. And so, again, the justification of a big expensive weapons system for a rather incremental job became the question. I think that's what finally killed it.

HACKMAN: Well, this must have been information that you were passing to Mr. Brown and then to Mr. McNamara.

Did this get you in trouble with the Air Force again?

CHARYK: I was never out of trouble with the Air Force on this program because I think I had two strikes against me going in. They were convinced, I think, that I was never in support of the program. So they never had the confidence that this thing was receiving the best promotion that it should enjoy.

HACKMAN: I know, initially, Secretary Zuckert was very affirmative toward this whole program. Did he ever back off at all on this that you can recall?

CHARYK: Yes, I think he became disenchanted with the weapons systems program as time went on.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Joseph V. Charyk Oral History Transcript
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