

**Roswell L. Gilpatric Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 6/30/1970**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Roswell L. Gilpatric (1906-1996) was the Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1964. This interview focuses on the Skybolt Crisis and the inner workers of the Defense Department and related agencies during the Kennedy administration.

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Roswell L. Gilpatric

*July 5, 1972*  
Date

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Roswell L. Gilpatric– JFK #3

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Third Oral History Interview

with

ROSWELL L. GILPATRIC

June 30, 1970  
New York, New York

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: Well, I thought today that we'd perhaps begin talking about Secretary McNamara for a bit and then get into some of the other problems of the department. I don't believe we've yet talked about the selection of McNamara. Did you get any insights into that in your. . . .

GILPATRIC: No. I know what is now common knowledge, that he was suggested by [Robert A.] Bob Lovett after Lovett had turned down any Cabinet post. Sarge Shriver went to see him with the offer of secretary of the treasury, and he didn't want that, so the secretary of defense position was offered him. He was interested, but wanted time to think it over. And he came to see Lovett, and he went to see [Thomas S., Jr.] Gates. I don't know who else he talked to because I didn't know him in those days. But he did come down to see the president, ready to accept, with an unusual letter of which he wanted a copy initialed by the president. I've never seen that letter; I don't know what happened to it. I gather from what the president told me--McNamara never discussed it--that the president was sort of taken aback. But he said, "Oh, sure, those conditions are all right." He didn't sign anything, but as far as I know, he lived up to the conditions that I'm aware of.

O'BRIEN: What were his initial efforts to get the feel of the office? Did he have a rather systematic approach to it?

GILPATRIC: Yes, very. He got a hold of me within the same week of the announcement of his appointment. I met with him on a Saturday in Baltimore, and we

started the following Wednesday. My appointment was announced on that next Tuesday, and this brought us up to about the second or third week in December. The plan was that we would spend every day from then until the 20th of January in Washington, when we could, barring the holidays, in specific missions which we undertook to get other people.

But he had a very clear concept of how to go about the job. The first thing he did was to staff his office. The first time I saw him after the initial meeting, in the pocket of his shirt he must have had sixty or eighty filing cards on which he had data about people. Some of this he had picked up from Sarge Shriver; some he had picked up from Adam Yarmolinsky, who worked with Sarge; some, I guess, he got from other sources. But that was the first thing we did, determine how the rest of the team would be picked. We sort of divided up the offices to be filled. Such as the assistant secretary of defense for Manpower, the assistant for Legislative Liaison, the assistant for Logistics, and the General Counsel were up to me--and the secretary of the army. And then he undertook. . . . He already had in mind Charlie Hitch for the assistant secretary of defense (Comptroller), who I interviewed here in New York. And we then proceeded on that basis for the next week or ten days until he had pretty much fleshed out his team.

Meantime, he was holding off some self-announced appointments like Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., who held a press conference and said he was going to be secretary of the navy; Joseph Keenan, who--he was a labor lawyer--announced he was going to be assistant secretary of defense for Manpower, which he didn't do. The only appointment that was really forced on McNamara was the Red Fay appointment, and that was not by the president; that was by his brother, Bob Kennedy.

O'BRIEN: Did you use any outside consultative services in those first days?

GILPATRIC: No, no, we didn't. We had the benefit of a study prepared at the direction of Gates and Douglas by McKinsey and Company. And that didn't have to do with names; that had to do with analysis of the different jobs and what that study felt the specifications of those jobs were. But McNamara didn't actually pay too much attention to that.

O'BRIEN: Did you realize that you were going to have White House staff people, at that point, that were going to be involved in--at least in some of the problems of Defense?

GILPATRIC: Well, I just assumed that, having been there during the Truman administration and the Roosevelt administration, but McNamara felt that he was going to have a pretty free hand. And he didn't consult, as far as I know, and we were together constantly pretty much. He didn't consult with anybody until he got right down to the short strokes when he'd get hold of Sorensen or Shriver or Bob Kennedy and say what he had in mind.

I don't know how the selection of John Connally came about. Obviously, McNamara got some lead from somebody. Both of us independently concluded, as turned out to be the fact, that Connally was a first-rate administrator. And even though he didn't stay long enough to make a big impact, there were no regrets about his selection, even though it might have had a political connotation.

O'BRIEN: What were, well, both yours and his initial reactions, well, let's say, first of all, to the president and his grasp of Defense matters, the directions that he was going?

GILPATRIC: Well, very early on--I would say, certainly, shortly after the turn of the year, early January of '61-- we got a letter from the president, the drafter of which was probably Sorensen, but it was signed by the president-elect. And he listed about fourteen or fifteen objectives, goals, projects, programs that he wanted us to react on right away. And in addition to that, McNamara, I think, saw the president.

I did not see the president personally at that juncture. We saw a good deal of Mac Bundy, whom we both knew, and I was getting acquainted with people like [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien. But we had previously worked on--I had worked on a study on the Defense Department for then-Senator Kennedy. This was during the summer of 1960. While I had not talked to the president about that, he called me on the phone a couple of times, and obviously he had that very much in his mind. It turned out, he did not adopt it, and I didn't pursue it. In fact, when I was questioned on my hearing on qualification, I, in effect, said that it was not in my hands as to whether that recommended reorganization be carried out. But I had the feeling that, in the beginning, McNamara kept pretty well clued in with the president, either by talking to Bob Kennedy, Sorensen, or in touch with the president himself.

O'BRIEN: That's a rather interesting relationship between Bob Kennedy and McNamara. Just carrying that on through into later years, did you get any insight

into that, and then also the relationship with Lyndon Johnson when Lyndon Johnson became president, how they were able to sort of balance off?

GILPATRIC: Well, taking the earlier time period first, I think there was mutual recognition by McNamara and Bob Kennedy of each other's special talents.

McNamara knew that Bob Kennedy had a highly developed political instinct and also was very close to the president and, having worked on committee staffs, knew the Hill better than he did. I think Kennedy, on the other hand, realized that McNamara was a tyro at the game, as far as handling congressional relations. While he straight away made an effort to get in communication with people like [Richard B.] Russell and [Carl] Vinson, he didn't carry it very much further. So I think Kennedy wanted to be sure that McNamara didn't overlook that important facet of his job. And by the same token, McNamara sensed that, next to the president himself, Bob Kennedy was going to be the most important person. But he couldn't have realized then how much involved Bob Kennedy was going to get in national security affairs.

Now, later on--of course, I was only in office about three months after the assassination, when Johnson became president, and it was really too early to see the sharpness of the dichotomy that developed there. As far as I could observe during those early months, and even after I left but when I came down a good deal, President Johnson respected McNamara's ties with the Kennedy family and tried to sort of set those apart from his own sense of political insecurity, perhaps, with the Kennedy group. But as far as I know--of course, Kennedy was out of there by spring of '64 and was up here in New York, and from that time on, McNamara's relations with Kennedy were much more personal than governmental.

O'BRIEN: Well, do you in Defense ever have any real problems with White House staff people? I imagine the two people you'd probably be most involved in would be [Jerome B.] Wiesner and Kaysen, on occasion.

GILPATRIC: Well, Wiesner, Kaysen, and Bundy all took an early interest, as well they should, in what kind of recommendations we were coming up with in Defense as far as force goals, weapons programs, and the translation of those into spending levels. . . . And we had a number of sessions which became institutionalized as time went on. Necessarily, when we were going through the budgetary process, those individuals sat in.

But in addition, and this was the only real friction that

developed, some of Larry O'Brien's and Kenny O'Donnell's people, frankly, wanted to use Defense procurement--closing or non-closing of bases and other Defense Department acts--with an eye to their political impact. And I had several run-ins with Kenny O'Donnell, one of which was quoted in the Wall Street Journal at the time. I had said that we were going to close down the Springfield arsenal. When Kenny O'Donnell heard about it, he said, "Is that guy kidding? When Edward Kennedy is running for senator, we're going to close down a major defense installation?" Well, we did close it down. We didn't close it down overnight; we closed it down over, you know, a six months or eight months period.

But we developed a system, and I was the principal factor in it from the Defense standpoint, whereby we did keep Kenny O'Donnell and Larry and their assistants informed as to what we were doing when it was going to have an impact. And we had an understanding that if we didn't agree, why, we'd go to our respective chiefs and that would bring the president and McNamara into the act. But that very rarely happened. And as time went on, McNamara came to sense the times when he ought to inform the president in advance of things that--this is particularly after his press conference in which he, off the record, we thought it was, or not for attribution, in which he said there wasn't any missile gap; that he found out after he got in that that was phony intelligence.

But we knew that Red Fay was the constant companion of the president. He was always--you know what I mean--at social or sporting events with the president, as well as with Bob Kennedy. But he never took advantage of that to in any way impair the relationship he had with the top of the Defense Department or between them and the president. He kept it on a social level, and in effect, was sort of carved out of the action; he wasn't really the number two man in the navy. But we'd give him certain assignments which he did fairly well.

The president also began early on to have informal sessions with McNamara and myself. I mean he'd have small dinners. We'd fly up to Hyannis Port or down to Palm Beach, or we'd stay over after a formal session of the NSC or a Cabinet meeting and have some general conversation.

And then, very early in the year, the year '61, Robert Kennedy started these Hickory Hill sessions, which brought together, you see, fifteen or twenty of the key people. And while the president didn't go to many of them--as I recall it, about three of them were held in the White House, so he went to those. But the rest of them, Mrs. [Jacqueline B.] Kennedy



usually attended. And of course, Bob Kennedy was always there. And they helped to bring us together on a basis of trust and confidence, intimacy and familiarity, that was lacking, of course, at the outset when we were all relative strangers to each other.

O'BRIEN: Early in the administration, what's your impressions of the, well, let's say the State Department and some of the changes that are taking place there? I guess the question is this: In the Defense Department you were able to retain a great deal of autonomy in internal matters and on defense matters. Now, the State Department doesn't. Why?

GILPATRIC: Well, I think in part it's traceable, that condition to which you refer, to the basic makeup of the two key figures. Dean Rusk, on the one hand, was not inclined to reach out and assert jurisdiction. As I said before, he never took advantage of his being the first among equals in the Cabinet in guiding or presiding over or otherwise directing meetings of principals. McNamara, on the other hand, both by nature and by what he saw as the responsibilities of his office, tended to reach out toward State, toward AEC [Atomic Energy Commission], toward CIA. And he also had some fairly strong-minded people around him, such as Paul Nitze, who was an old hand, having been in the State Department. And the combination of these factors, coupled with, in the early days, the fact that Chester Bowles didn't seem to enjoy the president's full confidence--and he certainly wasn't buddy-buddy with Rusk. In fact, I think he'd been picked before Rusk was picked, as I recall it. So the State Department was not the kind of a solid phalanx that the Defense Department was, and therefore this organization, with considerable unity of action and with strong leadership, tended to move into any area where there was a vacuum and which State hadn't occupied. In those days State just didn't take the initiative.

O'BRIEN: Well, getting back to the matter of the selection of a secretary of state, as well as other key figures in government. Now, you've been active, of course, in the New York Democratic community, as well as the New York law community for a good many years. Was there an Establishment choice, in a sense, for secretary of state in the 1950's, in 1960, prior to the election?

GILPATRIC: I've heard different people, well-known members of the so-called Establishment, the Lovetts, the [John J.] McCloy's, the Arthur Deans, the Dean Achesons, and the like talk, but there wasn't any, you know, concentrated area of agreement on the thing. My impression was that Kennedy

was consulting lots of people. He asked Scoop Jackson; he asked Stu Symington. He had the whole Boston area, [Richard E.] Dick Neustadt, Mac Bundy, Arthur Schlesinger. He asked Sarge Shriver. In the case of my own selection, I think it came from two sources which were--well, only one of which could be called part of the Establishment, Bob Lovett. And the other was simply the fact that we'd met before; he knew something about me. And I think Symington had urged the president to consider me. But I don't think that the president was very much influenced by the Establishment taken as an entirety; if you can call it such a thing. I think just certain members appealed to him. He wasn't comfortable with a number of them.

O'BRIEN: Well, what is your reaction, as well as Secretary McNamara's reaction, to the leadership of the uniform services when you come in and vice versa? What do you sense their response is to you when you assume office?

GILPATRIC: Well, we recognized that we had an outgoing navy CNO who was obviously the strongest character on the Joint Chiefs and also the most hard working, but with a limited tenure because his retirement was pretty much set in advance for the spring of '61. We didn't count on him carrying over. Lemnitzer never appealed to the president or McNamara or myself as the person who was going to take the lead in bringing the military along to a new doctrine such as flexible response. Tommy White, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, was scheduled for retirement quite soon. The Chief of Staff of the army, General Decker, was not a strong person. So our first reaction was: "We're going to have to have a new team in here, and who are they going to be? Some choices were pretty obvious. LeMay was obviously destined to be the successor to White. And in light of hindsight, it probably was a mistake, but I don't know what we could have done about it. I mean we would have had a major revolt on our hands if we hadn't promoted LeMay.

The military, for their part, was always somewhat on guard and skeptical, perhaps apprehensive, because of the way in which McNamara operated, and the fact that he wouldn't listen to briefings. None of the elaborate presentations which had been racked up for the secretary and the deputy secretary and the other new people at the beginning were ever listened to by McNamara. He didn't like flip charts, didn't like men in uniform with pointers reading off things. He wanted to ask his own questions, and he wanted unstereotyped answers, and that threw them off. And also, he was not very much on tact and diplomacy in the way he handled them.

But once Taylor came aboard as the Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs, he sensed McNamara's greatness and his qualities, and in many senses he emulated those or had them in his own right. He prepared all his own papers, and he never read from staff positions. He was very articulate, a real intellectual, as I say. And he began quite early on, having been a Chief before, to have a very large impact. Then you had a new Chief of Staff of the army, General Wheeler, who from the beginning was very compliant or complacent. And Admiral Anderson started off making a very good impression on everybody and up until the time of the Cuban missile crisis seemed, to some, destined to ultimately be chairman himself.

O'BRIEN: Well, going back to one of the campaign issues, the missile gap, how long does it take you to get intelligence on the actual state of missiles to cause you to have some doubts and eventually. . . .

GILPATRIC: Well, first of all, McNamara set out to broaden and redirect the flow of intelligence between the Pentagon and the CIA. He was not satisfied simply with the standard type of NIE, and he made it a point to go over, as we did on several occasions, and sit down with Allen Dulles and try to find out how things really happened: Who did what to what in the CIA. It was rather a nameless, faceless organization. Sure, there was Allen Dulles, there was Sherman Kent, there was Dick Bissell; a few people stood out from the mass. But we didn't know anything about their methodology. And at that time, the input for the Defense Department came in a number of different streams. We didn't have DIA then, and we had the army, navy, and Air Force all writing their pet hobbies as far as particular estimates. And then the agency insisted at that stage on never going very much beyond the sort of short time limits of prediction. It took McNamara quite a while to get them to conform and time phase their estimates with his five-year planning cycle. Five years, they didn't want to give that kind of estimate. So he spent a lot of time on that. He began, in his characteristic fashion, to ask small questions.

I don't remember the exact date, whether it was February or March, but certainly it was within a month or two that he sensed that the rhetoric of the campaign about the missile gap was based on admissions made by Neil H. McElroy and others in congressional hearings, confusing Soviet intent with Soviet capabilities, that led us off the track. And again in his characteristic way, he didn't hesitate to say so, and that led to his first rift with the White House as far as public relations are concerned.

O'BRIEN: Well, what goes into the decision to bury the missile



gap? Of course, you give a speech later on in the year which was. . . .

GILPATRIC: That was in October down in Hot Springs.

O'BRIEN: Was that a calculated speech?

GILPATRIC: Yes. The feeling became quite pervasive during the summer and early fall, particularly after Kennedy got back from Vienna and after it looked as though we were heading into another Berlin crisis and we had the call-up, that we'd underestimated our own strength. I mean we'd accentuated too much the fact that we really had. . . . Instead of being a missile gap against us, we had a very definite margin of superiority, particularly from a qualitative standpoint rather than a quantitative standpoint.

So when McNamara decided not to go to Hot Springs and I was asked to go, it was decided in State and Defense and the White House that my speech should follow the lines it did. And parts of it were prepared outside the Defense Department, and then it was read all the way up to and including the president. And I remember going over and sitting down with Dean Rusk in which he made some changes in it himself. But that was sort of a counter-reaction to what had flowed from this denial of the missile gap.

And also, at that time we were coming to grips with some very fantastically large military requirements. The Air Force talked about an ultimate force of sixteen to eighteen--two thousand Minutemen as against the one thousand they ended up with. And of course, we were still in the throes of the B-70. Congress was insisting on that right down to the walk in the Rose Garden with Vinson. And the navy, having had a successful development program for Polaris, was pushing that. So we began to formulate in the fall of 1961 some pretty definite ideas as to how far we should go. In the light of hindsight, I think we went too far, certainly in terms of the number of Minutemen III. But that limit of one thousand was almost a major cleavage with the Chiefs, particularly with the Air Force. And the Chiefs backed the Air Force on this right up to the final sessions in Palm Beach--I think it was January 3 of '62, whenever we put the budget to bed. So looked at in that context, to set a limit of a thousand as against these much higher figures, it seemed as though we'd done a good day's work. Now it looks as though we went too far.

O'BRIEN: Was there any resistance to the burial of the missile gap, particularly by the Air Force?

GILPATRIC: No. I think they didn't like the way it came out; they would like to have had a more gradual evolution of it. But it was one of those ploys for which the military were partly responsible, just to, you know, make everybody's flesh creep and maybe get more weapons programs. But it was a sort of a three-day wonder, and it didn't have any permanent impact, either on the relations between the White House and the Defense Department or the civilians and the military in the Pentagon.

O'BRIEN: Just a moment ago you were using the phrase "going too far." You were implying by that that you went too far in cutting back the Minutemen requirements?

GILPATRIC: No, no, we didn't go far enough.

O'BRIEN: You didn't go far enough, I see.

GILPATRIC: I think we went too far in allowing an objective of a thousand Minutemen because I don't think we foresaw that the land-based ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles] would have such a relatively short life in a strategically significant sense and that so much in the end would depend on the Polaris and other mobile systems. Of course, we had a mobile Minuteman concept, which was knocked out somewhere along the way because it was just not feasible to have Minutemen on railroad cars touring around. The expense was too great for what we were getting in value.

O'BRIEN: Well, going on to flexible response, what is the genesis of this in the department? Is this something that is initiated by the president.

GILPATRIC: Well, the president was obviously taken with what he'd read, principally I guess, in the writings of Max Taylor. I think Max Taylor may not have been the originator or creator, but he certainly was a major influence. And I think probably, also, General [James M.] Gavin. I don't know what other military people the president talked to. This did not come up in either of the two studies that I worked on. But by the time the Kennedy administration was inaugurated, it was more or less taken for granted that this was going to be the theme of our strategy, at least in Western Europe, and there wasn't any dissent about it. I think that any reservation any of the Chiefs may have had, they recognized that once Max Taylor had been brought down as the president's advisor, that that was it. Maybe they felt a conversion on the basis of the merits of the proposition. But anyway, there wasn't any debate or dispute over it.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any insight into the Russians and their thinking at that time? As I understand, there

were several rather high-level meetings and several reviews and estimates which were made of the Russians at that point.

GILPATRIC: I don't. . . . They're not clear in my recollection. I may not have been in on them.

O'BRIEN: Well, there's a number of questions that come up in regard to deterrents and the feasibility of deterrents. Do any of your early studies focus in on . . . .

GILPATRIC: Well, I would say that the main inspiration for McNamara's initial thinking and ultimately his basic white papers, position papers, came from the Rand group, that is to say, Hitch, [Alain C.] Enthoven, [Henry S.] Harry Rowen, Allen Novak, and all the rest of them. We had a whole group on board there, early on, including some who didn't stay. And they formulated these various concepts which more and more became the rationale of McNamara's decisions--certainly by the end of 1961, when he began his practice of preparing draft memoranda to the president, which never were finalized but which served as a vehicle for decision-making at all levels in the security structure.

O'BRIEN: Was there a rather evident rift between the Air Force and Rand at that point?

GILPATRIC: It could have been, although what Rand was doing for the Air Force was not nearly as significant as what they were doing for the secretary of defense's office. I think with so many of their alumni in the OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense], the Air Force mission of Rand took a sort of a secondary role. They got more into tactical concepts. And they saw where the action was and more or less concentrated on OSD.

O'BRIEN: Well, as you reflect back on some of the changes that were made initially--I was thinking in terms of the additions to Polaris and Minuteman, as well as the alerts, the SAC [Strategic Air Command] alerts--were they justified? Did you feel they were necessary at that point? Did you later?

GILPATRIC: Yes. The only reservations I now express are those of quantity, and that only applies to Minutemen, not to Polaris. I don't think the forty-six submarine program for Polaris was. . . . Well, it wasn't particularly scientific. We had a lot of numbers, and I don't remember just how we happened to hit on forty-six. But I've

never had any doubts about the wisdom of that course of action nor of getting on, you know, from Minuteman I, II, III. It's just with the number of installations, in the light of hindsight it seems to me, we overshot the mark.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any reservations about some of the things that were cancelled, like the mobile Minuteman program or the B-70--not cancellations, but at least the slowing down of the B-70?

GILPATRIC: Well, there was the atomic powered nuclear plane that was cancelled. There was the big navy air-to-air missile.

O'BRIEN: Snark?

GILPATRIC: No, that was an Air Force cruise-type missile. But there was another one in the navy--Skybolt, of course. No, I've never had any second thoughts on those subjects. It was just unfortunate we didn't get onto them fast enough before all that momentum which had built up had put funds in the pipeline and had contracted to pressures and had spent itself.

O'BRIEN: There was a saying that went around the Defense Department, as I understand, at least initially, that the Skybolt was used to shoot down the B-70. I was wondering, have you heard that?

GILPATRIC: No, no, I don't remember that. Both McNamara and I came to the Pentagon absolutely convinced that the B-70 was a turkey. In fact, I'd gone down myself and talked to [Maurice H.] Stans--he was director of the budget--trying to fight the B-70. At that time I felt that the B-58, the Hustler, made much more sense from the standpoint of a new generation of strategic weapons carriers. McNamara was convinced. It was just a question of how we could, you know, bring it off and deflect this tremendous head of steam that developed with this huge industrial base. I forget how many states. Thirty or forty states with subcontractors and the Congress and the Air Force and North American [Aviation, Inc.] and all. . . . Gates hadn't been able to kill it; he'd slowed it up. Eisenhower had never stopped it. So it had a sort of life of its own, but it was doomed. It was just a question of when we would be able to pull that off.

The others, we didn't have any preconceived notions about, other than the atomic powered plane. That was more a question of not ruffling the pinfeathers of the joint committee in the Congress and the AEC, because they felt, just as they did in

the case of nuclear powered rockets, that you had to do everything nuclear, whether it's in the air or on the ground. And that was sort of a religion. And that had to be dealt with with more preparation and more deftness.

The Skybolt, we felt up until the summer of '62 that--you know, we'd gotten very favorable reports; the concepts seemed to make sense; and it provided a way of, as you say, of heading off more bomber programs because it extended the range and so forth, penetrative ability, of the B-52s. But we were genuinely shocked when we found how far off the beam that program was and how much it was going to cost and the technical difficulties that hadn't been overcome. I think this was in September--all of which, as you remember, is '62--when that light came.

O'BRIEN: Well, how long does it take for you to develop the outlines of the build-up of conventional forces, the flexible response?

GILPATRIC: That was the hardest one, and I don't think that it was ever accomplished to McNamara's or my satisfaction. We had numerous goes at it. We attempted to show that with perhaps one extra division and a couple of brigades, we could man these various contingency plans that--the two-and-a-half war concept. But they never had the conviction or the clarity that some of the other McNamara projects did. And to this day I don't know how you get at this question of how many divisions on active duty versus how many in reserve, and the interrelationship between airlift and sea lift. The problem that we kept running into was that the State Department, backed by such potent outside people as Acheson and McCloy and also Finletter when he was in Paris, didn't want to rock the boat, as far as the NATO alliance was concerned, by cutting back in Europe. And if you couldn't cut there, you were pretty much limited to. . . . You have a floor put under what the army force structure had to be.

O'BRIEN: Well, at the time of the mobilization of the reserves and then also a little later in the build-up of the reserve, did you at that point expect to develop a ready reserve that would be very capable of backing up in emergency situations? In other words, were you disappointed when the reserves didn't . . .

GILPATRIC: Very much so. We knew that the whole reserve program was in trouble. That was one of the things that was raised in the president's letter before his inauguration that I spoke about. We were then spending, I think, two and a half billion dollars a year, and we weren't getting anything for it because we had something like--twenty-seven or thirty-two divisions; some of them were only on paper.



But they all had their commanding officers, and they all had plans for fleshing out the units. And we found that we couldn't count on our own people, far less the people on the Hill, to back any major reform. And McNamara spent a tremendous amount of blood, sweat and tears, backed up by Cy Vance and later by Paul Ignatius. And some progress was made, but I don't think today we have an optimum reserve program by any means.

O'BRIEN: Were you surprised by the congressional resistance that you ran into?

GILPATRIC: We didn't realize how deeply dug in the National Guard Association [of the United States] and the Reserve Association [Reserve Officers Association of the United States] and all the state adjutant generals and the governors--and the fact that two-thirds of the congressional staffs on the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees belonged to the reserves. . . . Dozens of congressmen and senators were members of the reserve forces. That we learned by bitter experience rather than by any preliminary education.

O'BRIEN: I have a few questions on, actually, views within the Defense Department of a number of things concerning the Soviet Union. First of all, do you and Secretary McNamara have a view towards disarmament formulated, let's say, prior to the Vienna meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev?

GILPATRIC: Well, I think we both started out--I know I did and I think he had the same instinct--thinking that we ought to do something about the nuclear arms race, first by agreement or by parallel action in the form of a test ban, partial or complete, and later by sort of self-discipline and self-denial, hoping thereby to induce reciprocal or mutual response from the Soviet Union.

And one of the things we had to cope with from the beginning was that every approach toward arms control--even before ACDA [Arms Control and Disarmament Agency] was created by act of Congress and set up, and you just had units in the White House and the State Department and elsewhere--on the military's part, they just felt this was as much of a foe or a threat as the Soviet Union or Red China. They had just a built-in, negative, you know, knee jerk reaction to anything like this. So we had to get Taylor to change the personnel in the Office of the Joint Chiefs and on the Joint Staff to people who were more open-minded, who would listen to the other point of view. And then we--much sturm und drang--we got the military to agree to send a first-rate military officer over to ACDA, not just some cast-off, some near-retirement type, but somebody who really

had something on the ball, hoping that this would be a two-way process of education.

But I don't think it was until after the first budget go around, first year of assessment, of review of existing programs on sort of an ad hoc, individual basis rather than with any overall scheme or plan, that we came to realize this basic fact of the limits to which military power can be put. We begin to formulate that. And we did get into some dispute, at a fairly early stage, with the Air Force on the application of space technology to military uses. Then we got that accepted by our own people. And then, of course, I guess it was by the summer of '62--maybe it was later; maybe it was '63--that we had this informal understanding, ultimately codified, in the U.N. resolution, that weapons of mass destruction would not be employed in outer space. But first we had to get our own thinking and our own people in line before we tried to make that a subject of discussion and ultimately formal agreement with the Soviet Union.

O'BRIEN: Can you see any effect on the Soviet Union in their attitudes, not only towards Europe, towards the United States, towards disarmament, that result from the rhetoric of the campaign, the missile gap, or many of the changes that take place in Defense policy in that first year? Do you ever get any hard evidence of any impact on the Soviet Union?

GILPATRIC: I don't know how you'd characterize the evidence. We began to see responsive action to things like our emphasis on command and control and on PAL, Permissive Action Links, the nuclear locks on weapons, and the stress on safety and positive reaction. We became increasingly horrified over how little positive control the president really had over the use of this great arsenal of nuclear weapons. And of course, we didn't get around to dismantling the Jupiters until too late. They should have been phased out before the fall of '62, and then we couldn't do it right away without making it appear we were knuckling under to one of the demands that Khrushchev made during that time.

But in the talks that I had in the late fall of '62 with Vasily V. Kuznetsov up here in New York, when George Ball and Stevenson and I were in negotiation with Kuznetsov for the removal of the IL-28s, we had quite a few off-the-record discussions, particularly because McCloy was on such a close relationship with Kuznetsov. And I was struck by the fact that he knew very well what we were doing in these areas and why we were doing these unilateral, self-denial acts, making sure that something didn't misfire or miscarry, or that some sergeant or squadron leader or somebody else didn't do something which would upset the train and cause a nuclear holocaust. But

on the negative side, all our rhetoric about how effective Polaris was and how the hardened Minuteman sites and these solid-fueled rockets to launch them were so superior to the Russian counterparts, their earlier, big, crude missiles, this of course, set in train what we had seen in the latter part of the sixties, namely, a major Russian effort to catch up and ultimately pass us in these programs.

O'BRIEN: At the time of those talks with Kuznetsov, did you get any feel for the original motives on the part of the Russians for putting the missiles in Cuba?

GILPATRIC: Not any clear reading. And I'm not sure, although I got this reaction from Kuznetsov and from talking with people like Bohlen or Tommy Thompson and [George F.] Kennan and others we met with from time to time, but it seemed to me to be something that seemed to Khrushchev to be a target of opportunity, coupled with what was probably Soviet apprehension that we would do a real good Bay of Pigs job, and we would wipe out a Soviet-based power in our neighborhood. Kuznetsov, even in his outgiving moments, was never very revealing about states of mind or motivation; physical facts, yes, but not thinking.

O'BRIEN: Did State ever get involved in any of the Defense programs, missile systems or things of this nature, that you recall?

GILPATRIC: Not until fairly well along. I don't think before the impact of Skybolt was felt that the State Department would ever get very excited. You see, the people over there weren't interested. I mean, Ball and Rusk weren't concerned with this element. Alexis Johnson was closer to the professional military than some of the other political appointees, yes, but he never was a real protagonist. It came more from Kaysen, Bundy, and Wiesner.

O'BRIEN: On the other hand, does Defense get involved in any of the questions of--I'm thinking mainly of things like the release of the RB-47 fliers that were in the Soviet Union. That was one of the initial things. Did that ever come into . . .

GILPATRIC: It never was a major preoccupation as high up as McNamara. Of course, with Bill Bundy and Paul Nitze and the others they had around then, Henry Rowen, we had some very good people who were constantly in touch with their opposite numbers in State. It was tremendous. I don't know to what extent at those levels, working levels, the ISA people were much involved. But McNamara--that wasn't the kind



of thing which attracted his interest and concern.

O'BRIEN: How about the summit meeting with Khrushchev and then the possibility of a second summit meeting with Khrushchev at a later time, did the president ever ask for his . . .

GILPATRIC: Well, I think McNamara sat in on some meetings of principals to decide on, you know, what briefing papers, what positions should be offered the president, but he couldn't spend a great deal of time on it, and certainly the Defense Department didn't take the lead in that. That kind of an effort was, you know, for a Foy Kohler or a [William R.] Tyler or a [Martin J.] Hillenbrand or some of the other career State people.

O'BRIEN: Well, in that first year in the trip that the president made and the meetings with [Charles] de Gaulle, Khrushchev, and then later [Harold] Macmillan, does anything stand out to mind in the Defense Department in any of these? Were there any positions the department took?

GILPATRIC: No, as I recall it, we just went on about our business. We were at that time trying to float the space program and the tanker program and adapting the Boeing 707's for troop transports, and my recollection is that we in the Defense Department regarded this as sort of a diplomatic tour by the president to get acquainted and to take the measure of his opposite numbers. And I don't remember that any very high level Defense official went along. I don't know who went. Certainly McNamara wasn't there, and I wasn't there. And we weren't in the mainstream of action with the president on that.

O'BRIEN: Well, when do you start to realize that the movement in the direction of the build-up of conventional forces, or the flexible response, begins to bring some adverse reactions among some of the European allies in NATO?

GILPATRIC: Well, I don't think that began to really manifest itself until after Skybolt, because the British tended to side with us up to that time in NATO councils, and since they thought they were involved in this phase of the strategic nuclear deterrent, they didn't want to see NATO develop its own capability. But after Skybolt, then-- and I think egged on by some of our own people, Finletter, and of course, [Dirk U.] Stikker was a great protagonist of having some kind of a nuclear capability in NATO other than just resting under the U.S. umbrella. But that couldn't have been until we were into the second year. It developed after Norstad left, because Norstad wasn't particularly opposed to the flexible

response while he remained at SACEUR. And he so dominated the military side; he never consulted with Finletter or anybody else. It wasn't till Lemnitzer came over that the civilian side got into the act as much as they did in '62 and '63.

O'BRIEN: Why don't we turn this.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

O'BRIEN: Well, initially, you're operating under the assumption that the Russians have, as I understand it, available a hundred and fifty divisions, some 2.2 million men. As I understand, it subsequently becomes quite an inflated estimate.

GILPATRIC: Yes, there was a good deal of shrinking down done on the Russian order of battle; I mean what these divisions really represented, because they certainly weren't comparable to U.S. type divisions in fire-power, manpower, mobility, or any other factor.

O'BRIEN: Well, why does this inflated intelligence estimate exist? Isn't the CIA better than that, in a sense?

GILPATRIC: Well, the CIA isn't the one that is responsible for that data. That's the product of the military advisors to NATO, and that information is pieced together from a lot of sources throughout Western Europe. And it wasn't so much that there was a misrepresentation by anybody of what the troop strength of the Soviet ground forces were--or of the Air Force--but rather a glib acceptance that these numbers of squadrons and divisions, you know, were comparable. There wasn't enough analysis done. And that was just one of those things that didn't get attended to the first time around.

I think the emphasis on that was accentuated by a series of really unrelated events. First of all, the president wanted to leave in Europe the dependents. Eisenhower had decided just before the end of his term, because of the balance of payment crisis, that all dependents would be brought home. And one of the first things that Kennedy felt he ought to do for morale purposes was to reverse that. Well, that led us into a lot of studies as to how much the overseas deployments, principally in Europe, Germany, Italy, France, and England, and later in Japan and the Far East, the Philippines, contributed to the balance of payments, unfavorable balance of payments. And that gave us some real incentive to dig into these force levels

and these comparisons between the NATO forces. And we constantly kept whittling away. We'd get, you know, a twenty-nine division ready force down to a twenty-four and a half. Despite the objections from State and so forth, we did get some brigades back. Of course, they moved back and forth depending on the temperature at Berlin.

But there's no question that Doug Dillon and the Treasury people became very greatly exercised--Dillon as he had been in the government before. And I'm not saying he isn't right, although we seem to have been able to survive with this unfavorable balance for some time. But there was a major effort made, and I was pretty much the Defense Department action agent on that, too, to save overseas dollar expenditures. And that certainly contributed to the urgency with which we scrutinized these intelligence figures on Soviet strengths.

O'BRIEN: Well, when do you begin to realize that. . . .  
Can you remember a time when you begin to realize that those are rather inflated and that the Russians really can't produce that many divisions?

GILPATRIC: I think that came during the contingency planning for Berlin that went on, with Nitze the principal Defense Department participant. I guess that had early beginnings in the fall of '61 and ran right through. It took a long time to get those plans agreed to. Because of the quality of the people and because of the freshness of the approach, that necessarily called for a reexamination of a lot of what had been just commonly accepted statistics about relative strengths and the like.

O'BRIEN: Well, Acheson is somewhat of a problem for you early in the administration, isn't he? I'm thinking particularly with Berlin.

GILPATRIC: Yes, because he, first of all, had this tremendous accumulation of experience. A very articulate person, very forceful and redoubtable adversary. And he had a couple of people like Henry Owen, Policy Planning, who worked for him and [J. Robert] Bob Schaetzel. There were a group of people on the European desk and Policy Planning who had carried over from Acheson's day and who just derived from him all their inspiration and strength. and--to them, he was God. And when Acheson did appear before the president, he was a very forceful and powerful figure. He was absolutely against anything that would make the Germans unhappy, and obviously, even the talk of our cutting back on our six divisions--five and a half plus divisions in Germany--was over his dead body.

And also, he was a very strong proponent, if I recall it, of the MLF [multilateral force], when that got going. I think he regarded NATO as his own creation. He was present at it, anyway. And I don't know whether he was wrong or not. I was always skeptical of the MLF from the beginning, but I saw that it might serve a political purpose to talk about it and plan for it and get the Europeans engaged in a form of exercise that seemed to be moving towards something. I was sure in my own mind that it would never materialize. Of course, it wasn't until Johnson that it was shot down, I guess largely based on the analysis that Dick Neustadt made.

O'BRIEN: Well, how do you get around Acheson, or do you ever get around Acheson on particularly . . .

GILPATRIC: Well, sometimes you would just bore him. For example, during the sessions of ExComm in the course of the Cuban missile crisis, he just got fed up with all this brainstorming of things and everybody thinking out loud. He liked to, you know, make a pronouncement and knock down any opposing ideas, which he did, as I say, very masterfully, and then depart the scene. He didn't want to spend a lot of time. So he sort of came and went. I mean he would be brought in and sent to Europe to help educate de Gaulle. I guess he went to France, primarily. But if he was there in full force and wanted to make an issue of it, no frontal attack would overcome him.

He and McNamara did not particularly hit it off. And of course, I had not been his candidate for the deputy; Paul Nitze was Acheson's man. He didn't think my qualifications were as good as Paul's. So I had a few run-ins with him, although I have a great respect and affection for him.

O'BRIEN: Well, are you in agreement, essential agreement, then, in early 1961, on this idea that he proposes that there should be some kind of an instant military response in regard to some kind of a cut-off in Berlin?

GILPATRIC: Yes. I think he was basically against the flexible response, but he recognized that the president was hung-up on that, and he had to deal with it in other ways. He wrote a number of brilliant analyses. I mean he would prepare these papers, and they became sort of gospel. And I don't know whether the president necessarily bought them, but no one was brash enough to redo the work. As long as Acheson was pressing them, they were the current doctrine. I remember once I drew a letter of instructions to Norstad, who was acting sort of like a proconsul in Outer Gaul. The president didn't know how to deal with him, to bring him under control.

After all, he had a U.S. hat on, as well as a NATO hat on. So I was delegated to write a letter, since I was supposed to know him very well, which I did. And Acheson came in just before the president joined us for this meeting to go over this thing, and he looked over this thing. He held it up as though it were some kind of an obscene object and said, "Who is the author of this execrable document?" When I said I was--he thought it was some underling. And I asked him if he would like to rewrite it and change it. He didn't do very much. But that's the way he would do things: He would hold up something to obloquy and scorn and, you know, kill it in that way if no other.

O'BRIEN: What are the principal differences between NATO-- we've covered some--but how would you sum up the principal differences between NATO and Defense in the Kennedy administration?

GILPATRIC: Well, I think there was a growing belief on the part of all concerned--and not only in the top echelons of our government, but in the chancelleries of Europe--that the threat was changing; that after the threat of Berlin during the summer of '61 was stood down or sort of evaporated, and then particularly after the Khrushchev setback in the missile crisis, people began to question all these shibboleths that had been standard articles of faith about NATO for the previous ten years, I mean from '53 to '63, and in terms not only of end strengths, but of strategy. I mean they began to think about the flanks, the weakness of the flanks; they began to think about the testing for mobile forces; they began to think about having, you know, forward positions. Here, most of the main placements of strength were nearer the Rhine than they were the Iron Curtain. This was coupled with the feeling that I had very strongly and McNamara did that, with the new air and sea lift coming in, we didn't have to have these great garrisons stationed over there indefinitely.

And I feel. . . . I know because the president--the last time we discussed this was in October of '63 when I was chastised for a speech I made to the UPI [United Press International] in Chicago about that time, in which I came forward with this doctrine of how we could leave our heavy division equipment over there and rotate the divisions back. We had an exercise that summer in which we airlifted, oh, several brigades and battalions over and had them in the field within seventy-two hours of the time that the alert was started. But Kennedy then said that--even though he agreed we couldn't come home, it would upset Adenauer. I should have mentioned earlier that it wasn't just Acheson, McCloy, et al who wanted us in Germany; it was the tremendous influence that Adenauer had on our whole government, particularly State and the White House. And when that idea was put aside, Kennedy said privately to McNamara



and me, "Now, I want a plan by next year for bringing back at least two divisions." This was just a month before his death. But that got lost in the shuffle when Johnson's eyes turned to the Far East and very little, of course, happened in regard to NATO after the MLF was finished off.

O'BRIEN: What were your impressions of Adenauer and the German defense community? Did you get much of a chance to . . .

GILPATRIC: Oh, yes, because I made a number of trips there, and I got to know Franz-Josef Strauss very well. And twice I went over to see Adenauer as the president's own representative, not just as the number two man in Defense. Having negotiated with Franz-Josef Strauss this offset agreement in the fall of '61, that was sort of my mission from that point on. So the Germans just felt they had to pay some attention. And I saw a lot of the Germans when they came over. And I must say I think that they had some very capable people: Karl Carstens [Gerhard] Schroeder, who was then foreign minister, and my opposite number--I can't think of his name. He was Franz-Josef Strauss' deputy. I had a very good opinion of the official German government we came to deal with. And we thought we could really work out some major savings--you know, a joint tank program and a joint program for development of tactical air--which unfortunately have not worked out. I guess those international teams work better on paper, in theory, than they do in practice.

O'BRIEN: Well, in terms of some of the contingency planning for Berlin, I understand this is the most highly planned contingency operation. You have the most developed kind of. . .

GILPATRIC: Yes. They practically had talks or script for everybody in the act. I was not a central figure in that, as I said before. Paul Nitze headed a group from Defense, including both military and civilians, and they worked very steadily and, I guess, very effectively first within themselves and then with the other NATO powers.

McNamara's principal preoccupation at that time was nuclear education. He was trying to educate the Europeans on why they shouldn't want themselves to get into the nuclear business. That's when he had his famous breakfast meetings and took each defense minister and Stikker out to Omaha and spent a great deal of time in sort of personal missionary work with his opposite numbers.

O'BRIEN: Well, I understand that he becomes less enthralled

with the idea of contingency planning after the missile crisis. Does he have a fear that contingency planning is a beginning of a kind of Guns of August?

GILPATRIC: I never heard him express himself other than in, you know, exasperation at the fact that most contingency plans had to be scrapped as soon as the contingency occurred. And I'm afraid it's the common feeling of civilians. Look what's happening in Cambodia. This Washington Special Action Group apparently did all the planning for that; it wasn't done on the basis of plans taken out of the files of the JCS. I think McNamara felt that he and his people in systems analysis and the key people he had in ISA, plus his own efforts working with Max Taylor and the few people in whom he had confidence in the military, could just whip up something pretty damn fast. And he thought this was a classic kind of military exercise that really didn't prove anything.

O'BRIEN: Well, does he oppose the development of a basic national security plan on the same idea or on the same basis?

GILPATRIC: Well, to my knowledge, he never was interested in one. As I say, he never allowed himself to be briefed on all these plans that were all there waiting for him to look at. We had one session with President Kennedy, the Net Evaluation Group. This was the nearest thing to an overall national emergency plan, all out. And General Leon Williams, I guess, was the head of it. They always had some lieutenant general who worked on this thing. And the president listened to it once, and that was enough. You know, it was just something that Carlisle Barracks or Command and Staff School, one of the service academies, would get up as a textbook exercise. But that's not the way he went about things, by having a plan in the drawer which you bring out. And of course, among other things, the Cuban missile crisis soured him on that because, God knows, there were enough different contingency plans around the premises at that stage.

O'BRIEN: Well, in 1963 does the question of blockading the Panama Canal to Soviet ships ever come up as a response to Berlin?

GILPATRIC: I think it was one of the things. It doesn't stand out in my mind as any great, white light, but I do recall various responses of that character, and I think that was one of them, having heard it.

O'BRIEN: Right. Well, in 1961 when Kennedy makes the Ottawa

speech, is there any resistance to the idea at that point of offers of Polaris submarines to NATO?

GILPATRIC: Well, there certainly was on the part of the navy and on the part of the Joint Committee. I don't know how it would have been brought off. We'd have to have had a law passed; we couldn't do it without congressional action.

On a somewhat related matter, we finally convinced the president we ought to do something to neutralize de Gaulle's activity. We tried him out on not a Polaris submarine but a nuclear attack submarine, which would save several years of development time and a great deal of expense. And that was still in the works when the assassination took place. But I remember how I had to do the selling on the Hill, Mac Bundy and I did. And I remember we had a terrible time with the [Chet] Holifields and the [John O.] Pastores and the [Clinton P.] Andersons and others.

O'BRIEN: Is there any great difference of opinion on the alternatives during the Berlin crisis of 1961, between the Pentagon, between State and the White House? And I should include NATO in that. Do you recall?

GILPATRIC: Well, if there were, they must have been resolved fairly readily because they never became the subject of, you know, high level presidential review. I think there was a great deal of back and forth before the operation kind of got on the road. It was not something--in reviewing those lists of meetings of the NSC and other groups--in which the president got that much involved.

O'BRIEN: Are there any real proponents of MLF in Defense?

GILPATRIC: There were sections of the navy that became very enthusiastic. In fact, they were the best salesmen because they foresaw it as another mission for the navy, and it was dealing in their element. As long as it wasn't going to come out of their budget, they were all for it. And I think the ISA was pretty strong for it. I never sensed whether McNamara believed in it as an article of faith or whether he felt, as I did, that it was never going to get off the ground. But it was something that was very dear to the hearts of certain NATO statesmen, and Finletter was pushing very hard, and State, also. Anyway, we in Defense didn't make that a major issue with our brethren elsewhere in the government.

O'BRIEN: Well, we talked a little bit earlier about Skybolt, and at that point you were saying it was really



about 1962 before you really began to realize that Skybolt had serious problems.

GILPATRIC: Yes.

O'BRIEN: And it was no earlier than that?

GILPATRIC: No. We had several reviews of the program, but we never went out and sat down, as we did in late summer or early fall of '62, with the contractors' staff, going to Douglas [Aircraft Company, Inc.] and to Northrop [Corporation]. When we got at the people who were really running the program, not just advocates in Washington, budget officers and staff officers, we found that not even the people whose livelihood it was to pursue to this really felt they'd licked the problems. Just in the matter of a few hours in one day we concluded--McNamara primarily, of course--that this was just another case of "pushing" the state of the art weapons developments. It was ill-conceived and couldn't be executed. And having reached that conclusion, McNamara moved awfully quickly. He went to London in the end of September. And that's when-- I wasn't with him, but he told me (and I have no reason to doubt him, other people were there)--he told the British. . . . I forget what--[Peter] Thorneycroft, I guess. Yes.

O'BRIEN: Thorneycroft, right.

GILPATRIC: And that was, of course, the subject of their great falling-out, because Thorneycroft denied he'd been told. I think he just plain lied because there are too many witnesses to the fact, and McNamara's too explicit, anyway; he doesn't speak in ambiguous terms. But that, culminating in the publicly announced cancellation of the Skybolt and the Nassau conference in December of '62, did bring about a very great cleavage between the U.S. and the U.K., at least in the defense area. And we hadn't gotten along too well with Harold Watkinson either. Until [Denis W.] Healey came along, which was after, we didn't have as much rapport as we had with [Giulio] Andreotti, I think it was, in Italy and Strauss and his successor in Germany.

O'BRIEN: Is there any indication that the contractor or people in the uniformed services had talked to the British informally and given them any kind of assurances on the workability of the. . . .

GILPATRIC: Oh, I'm sure they had because that was the current gospel. We were getting it. I'm sure if we were, the British were. They had people out there. It came as a terrible shock to the military, as well as to the

contractors, when this happened. I mean they believed they'd be allowed to go on, tinker with this thing, work it over, revamp it, et cetera, et cetera, indefinitely. They thought that was just one of the cardinal features of our whole strategic weapons systems program.

O'BRIEN: Well, in the development of alternatives which then are subsequently offered in December to the British, the British could either pay for the development of the thing jointly or they could take the Hound Dog, and then the third one, of course, is the Polaris.

GILPATRIC: Yeah.

O'BRIEN: Are these pretty much worked out?

GILPATRIC: Well, these were sort of wrapped up, you know, in a very impromptu, extemporaneous fashion down at Nassau in which Dean Rusk wasn't present and I wasn't present. Just a lot of, you know, very quick inspirations came up, and the paper that was agreed upon by the Macmillan team and our team left an awful lot of loopholes in the technical sense--took a long time to flesh out, but then we get into the Minuteman and the MLF, which was the result of that.

One of the reasons I think that--just as the British overreacted to the cancellation of Skybolt, we overreacted to their overreaction--was that Macmillan had such an extraordinary power of influencing an audience. I'm told that the speech he made on how, you know, the destiny of England depended on a nuclear role and his government and everything else apparently almost spellbound everybody from the president on down. And I guess the reaction was, "We've got to do something for Harold." And so this thing was racked up. It was not, you know, the kind of a well thought-out, staffed, analyzed program that we liked to think characterized most of the planning . . .

O'BRIEN: Well, what's the State . . . Pardon me. Go ahead.

GILPATRIC: . . . that we liked to think that the Kennedy administration, once it got under way, was capable of doing.

O'BRIEN: What is the State Department telling you about this? Are they telling you, for example, that de Gaulle is going to look at this, at Polaris, as an indefinite thing rather than a temporary thing, as apparently you looked at Hound Dog--or Skybolt?

GILPATRIC: It's my recollection that they were just as surprised as the British were when they heard of McNamara's decision and as we were at the de Gaulle and Macmillan's reaction. I mean the whole. . . . No one foresaw, that I was ever aware of, the chain of events that followed.

O'BRIEN: How did you all react when you had a successful firing?

GILPATRIC: Well, it wasn't a successful firing. I was on the hot seat there because I was the one that authorized the Air Force to go ahead and fire the damn thing. Then they blew it up out of all proportion, put it on television-- they had it on the "Today" show. The president saw it. Godfrey McHugh saw to that. And I spent the day on the phone to pull it out. Well, we had to water it down. Very sore subject.

O'BRIEN: What do you recall from your discussions with, well, either the president or the British during this whole thing? Is there anything that stands out?

GILPATRIC: I just remember sitting--it was either the day before or the day after Christmas--I was sitting down in my farm in Maryland. I never left my desk there for about eight hours. I had meals brought to me and other forms of sustenance. I was just on the phone the whole time with the president, with David Harlech [William David Ormsby-Gore], with people in R and D in the military. McNamara was away skiing, although I think they even got him out they were so whipped up. But it was another one of those things that--by the time I got down there to the White House a week later, I thought the president would still be furious, but he just passed it off as though it were a minor incident. It was typical of his quick to anger and equally quick to forgive.

O'BRIEN: Did you expect the French to take the offer of Polaris that was made to them at all?

GILPATRIC: Well, not in the context of the Nassau agreement or the president's Ottawa speech because. . . . We got a complete negative response, and that's when we, you know, went at it a different way, low keyed and low profile. I went over with this proposal on the nuclear attack submarine and talked with [Pierre] Messmer, and he was quite favorable. I don't know that he ever would have sold the idea to his boss, but he could see that it would make his life a lot easier. He was prepared to recommend it, although he was very cautious, short of getting higher authorities' approval. As I recall, the French reaction to the Polaris

offer, on the terms in which it was made, was just, you know, complete rejection. And I don't think we were too surprised by that. We'd been pretty well conditioned; after what happened at Rambouillet to Macmillan, we, you know, prepared for the worst as far as de Gaulle was concerned.

O'BRIEN: In 1963, to my understanding, there's a concern about what the French are doing, particularly at-- was it Pierrelatte?--you know, where they have their nuclear capacity.

GILPATRIC: Yes.

O'BRIEN: And then later, about two years later, there's an overflight there, which has been since characterized as an accident. Was it an accident in '65?

GILPATRIC: I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if it was a planned event, although. . . . You see, McCone, having been head of the AEC, then going into CIA, was tremendously curious, interested, in any nuclear development. And he went himself to Pierrelatte, whatever it was, and took a great personal interest in this whole area. And he also was quite capable. It was quite in character for him to do things fairly directly and without too much regard for the niceties and diplomatic reactions.

O'BRIEN: Well, as I understand, there was a National Security Action Memo to get information about that place in '63, and that seems strange.

Do you all see Europe at that point in a--well, simply the United States and the Soviet Union and Europe, the NATO nations, at some kind of a detente at that point?

GILPATRIC: Well, I don't think it was a universal view, but if you started out with this dumbbell theory, these two pillars, and we got some of this nuclear education program going, during and after, anyway, we had to do some planning, this certainly was a. . . . I think that the Europeans I knew changed from not understanding and even distrusting McNamara to really being pretty much with him. This was certainly true of people like the Belgians and the Danes and the Italians and, as I say, later, with the British after Thorneycroft had gone. But I would be hard put to characterize just when--I don't think it was until '64 that. . . . It was partly Johnson's preoccupation and partly his own sense that things were at a standstill in Europe for the moment.

O'BRIEN: McNamara made quite an impression on the NATO foreign

ministers and defense ministers at Athens, didn't he, as I understand, in 1962?

GILPATRIC: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Just another point here. Just passing over to some things--when we originally started, you made out a list of things.

GILPATRIC: Yes.

O'BRIEN: And you have a rather interesting heading here titled, "Reservations about McNamara's political sense." The first one with [James E.] Webb over the space program. I wonder if you'd care to elaborate on that.

GILPATRIC: Well, after we agreed with NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] on how we would sort out the different roles and missions in space, the Gemini program and the Apollo program, McNamara, I think, regretted that he'd been so forthcoming, and he took a dislike to Webb because Webb talked too much and took so long in getting to the point. And so I think he, you know, mishandled Webb. He sort of goaded him into taking extreme positions. The result would be that Webb would go up to the Hill and see his good friends like [Robert S.] Bob Kerr and Clint Anderson and didn't do McNamara any good. And I think McNamara should have handled him the way he did other people he didn't get along with, just let somebody else handle it. For example, he didn't like to deal with McCone unless he had to, because McCone was another very strong-minded person who wasn't going to easily be overridden by the Secretary of Defense. But with McCone, McNamara just left it up to me. I'd worked for McCone, knew him very well, and we'd just, you know, sit down and negotiate it as we did in the satellite reconnaissance program, a modus vivendi. But McNamara didn't sense, you see, that Webb had a lot of support on the Hill, as well as in the White House, and he was making this program go. It was just an unnecessary bit of exacerbation to take him on in such a militant fashion.

O'BRIEN: Well, at times he's had difficulty with people on the Hill as well. Why? Is it just a . . . Is it an arrogance?

GILPATRIC: Well, I'd say there are two reasons: First of all, he didn't suffer fools gladly, and he was so clear in his own thinking and his own exposition that he tended to show his disdain for pettifogging questions and tactics by some of the less intellectually oriented solons. Secondly, he didn't know how the political process operated;



primarily, that you had to get the staff with you. It was one thing to go up and see Senator Stennis and explain the whole thing to him or to Senator Russell or Margaret Chase Smith, but if you or somebody in your behalf hadn't done the spade work with their staff, you were just wasting your time. I mean, there are pleasant relations, but you weren't going to get anything done. And McNamara didn't think that was an efficient way of operating. He would, forthrightly, tell them what the Defense wants and the reasons for it, and that ought to be it. That's the way it happened in the corporate world, business world. And it took him a long time to realize that someone, like myself or later Cy Vance or others, had to go up and do a lot of missionary work and go to tedious luncheons with the staff and do a lot of just plain ass kissing with certain key people on the Hill.

O'BRIEN: Well, didn't he get a sense of this after, particularly dealing with a complex like the B-70. It had all different supporters on the Hill, as well as strength in so many different areas.

GILPATRIC: Well, it didn't sink into the point of, you know, acknowledging the condition and dealing with it in a rational way. He just went, you know, full speed ahead, damn the torpedoes approach. I'm sure that in the later years, toward the end of the time I was there and thereafter, when he got into something like the reserve program we were talking about, he found that that was a real mare's nest. And Cy Vance and others spent, you know, innumerable hours going up and twisting arms to try to sell that concept.

O'BRIEN: I notice you also mention selling Congress on nuclear submarines for the French. Was there any particular conflict . . .

GILPATRIC: Well, I gave that as an example of something that, if you want to overcome a deep-seated resistance in the Congress, you've got to plan on a rather elaborate lead time and a full-scale campaign. Now in that case, McNamara turned that over to Mac Bundy and myself, plus some people from the AEC. And whereas everybody said you can't get by the Joint Committee, we did. We had the thing pretty well lined up by the 22nd of November, '63. But that was something that, as I remember, McNamara had no patience with, and probably he was right in the sense that he shouldn't do it. But it was only later on that he realized the importance of that to the point where he made sure that people were doing that kind of thing.

O'BRIEN: How did you do that? Was there any particular strategy?

GILPATRIC: Well, first of all, we got a group of the key people at the White House, and while the president didn't personally do the briefing, he was there. He came in, shook hands, indicated the whole project had his blessing, and then he left it to Mac Bundy and myself to give an exposition to these key people. Then, before that had gotten to their staffs, we deployed another group. And I myself went up with some of the outriders and talked to a lot of the key staff people. So we had a sort of a pincer movement with the staff coming along and being educated in a favorable way; at the same time, their principals were being given the high-level treatment. So we didn't go over the heads of one, nor did we overlook the importance of the other.

And the principal thing was just laying out all the different elements from the senator or congressman himself down to the people on quite a low level in the staff that weren't even known to most of the top officials. And then there was the timing of it and doing it in stages; not trying to get an immediate response, but letting it sort of marinate awhile before you asked them to do anything positive. That was particularly true with a man like Holifield, who felt, you know. . . . In the end, you had to make it his project so that he would sponsor it rather than being sold on somebody else's idea. But I just cited that as an example of something that had all the odds against it at the go-off, but did manage to get turned around in the course of this process.

O'BRIEN: That's rather interesting. I wonder if we might take up one of the favorite topics of conversation of the president, or do you have to go?

GILPATRIC: No. Go ahead.

O'BRIEN: I was going to say one that looks fascinating right off is "New York politics, particularly Nelson Rockefeller." Did the president have strong feelings on Nelson Rockefeller?

GILPATRIC: Yes. He regarded Nelson Rockefeller as his probable opposition in '64. He had both a fascination and a fear of Rockefeller: a fascination because many of the things that Rockefeller stood for and had done were much akin or parallel to his own objectives and thinking. They were both liberals, and they were both humanitarians, and they both had plenty of money, and they both were doing this for a job. But he also didn't feel, at that stage, that he had any real sense of New York politics. None of the people around him were really--Averell Harriman, sure, but he was long since out of the New York picture. I mean he had been defeated in '58, and

he left the scene except for having a house here. And none of the president's own group were New Yorkers. His principal political official, John Bailey, was from Connecticut.

So whenever I was with the president alone, whether it was on the Enterprise or the Northampton or down in Palm Beach or at the Army-Navy football game, he endlessly questioned me about every phase of the Rockefeller family. And I happened to have been a neighbor of theirs and was very close to the boys from early, early days. And he wanted to know every facet, you know, their marriages, their children, their interests, their wealth. It just absorbed him. And once he found I was a source of some information, he pursued that. And I think he felt that it would be a close contest between the two of them, as he saw it, and he wanted to have a good feel for what he was going to encounter.

O'BRIEN: Right. Well, it was the current thinking, as I recall those years, that had Rockefeller been the candidate in '60, he would have won. At least, a lot of journals were suggesting that.

GILPATRIC: Whenever Rockefeller came to Washington--you see, he was particularly interested in civil defense. He was the Chairman of the Governors' Conference Committee on Civil Defense. And as part of his job he would like to come to the Pentagon. He was very fond of McNamara, and he knew me very well. He'd get briefed. And word always went out: Whenever Rockefeller comes down, you route him to the White House first. He's got to be given the presidential treatment. He can't just. . . . The President wanted to be right on top of the situation as far as Rockefeller was concerned. Rockefeller had a house in Washington. He was down there a good deal, and there was a lot of concentrated espionage, you know, on who Rockefeller was seeing and what he was doing.

O'BRIEN: Did Rockefeller realize this?

GILPATRIC: He didn't at the time. He was kind of oblivious to the. . . . But I never saw more concentrated attention given to any political subject, from the time I got to know the president well toward the end of '61, through the next two years, than on that subject.

O'BRIEN: How does the president look at Democratic politics in New York? Is he satisfied?

GILPATRIC: Well, he was rather contemptuous of the. . . . He didn't think much of [Robert F.] Wagner and,



you know, the [Carmine G.] DeSapios. He thought that no one had done what he had done in Massachusetts, modernized the machinery and brought in some new blood. He had a respect for [Jacob K.] Javits. He had no use for [Kenneth B.] Keating, not only because Keating, you know, spread all those stories before the Cuban missile crisis, but also because Keating really wasn't very long on intellect. And in light of hindsight, perhaps, I think he was figuring, somehow, something's got to be done about New York: "How are we going to get in there and do it?" Certainly, it didn't take the Kennedy machine long, after his death, to begin to focus on Bobby and press him into moving up here.

O'BRIEN: Well, was there something in the works before the assassination?

GILPATRIC: Nothing specific, but I talked a number of times to Larry O'Brien and Kenny O'Donnell about personalities up here. Of course, I've never been involved in the Democratic club or lower level; I've been on the state or the mayoralty level. But they were probing around, obviously, for they recognized that New York was a key state, and it wasn't well organized from the Democratic standpoint.

O'BRIEN: Did the president ever talk about [Barry M.] Goldwater or Nixon or Lyndon Johnson?

GILPATRIC: No. He was very. . . . He'd occasionally make some jokes about Lyndon Johnson. Not unkindly jokes, but poking fun at him in a gentle way. But he seemed to me to have a real respect for Johnson's political savvyness. He was always telling McNamara, "Now you go talk to Lyndon about this," or "Talk to the vice president about this." And when he brought Johnson into the sessions at Palm Beach or at Hyannis Port or any other informal setting outside the White House, a lot of kidding went on. And he liked to just talk politics with Johnson, no question. I remember one day sitting on the fantail of the yacht down there out in Palm Beach for the day. I bet he spent two or three hours going from state to state and just dredging out of Johnson every bit of the latest political gossip and lore that he could elicit. There's no question that he loved to talk politics, eat, sleep, drink politics. And it was just because of my connection with New York and because nobody else had any particular intimacy with the Rockefellers that I got into it. Certainly, it was a never failing pastime.

O'BRIEN: Were there any other political people that entered into your conversations that he admired or didn't

particularly care for?

GILPATRIC: Well, I don't. . . . He remarked on John W. Gardner a great deal. He asked me about Gardner. And I don't recall any other one to stand out because they were mostly a host of lesser characters at that stage on New York scene.

He did have another great interest in talking to me because of my long working with the business and financial community. He couldn't understand what made businessmen tick, why they did things the way they did, what was their mentality, what was their process of reasoning. Now, I would have thought he would have talked more with McNamara, but actually McNamara had a much narrower based experience. I mean from the time he went out to Ford after World War II, he knew the motorcar business, and he knew Ford and transportation, but he was not a fellow who went down to Hot Springs to conferences and business associations and hail-fellow-well-met at all.

And knowing from--at Yale I was a classmate of Roger Blough. Well, after the steel strike confrontation, he spent hours talking about why Blough acted the way he did and what in his past history would have led one to believe--because the president thought he had been misled, grossly misled. I don't believe he was; I think it was a misunderstanding. But then he would ask about the banking community and different people in the business world, and many of his questions were very naive because, obviously, what he'd learned from his father was, again, only one slant on the thing.

And he didn't have around him, you see, any top-notch business people. Luther Hodges wasn't really--more of a politician than a businessman. Sure, he'd run a few gristmills. Doug Dillon was briefly in investment banking, but he'd always been in public life. And Henry Joe Fowler was a lawyer like myself, but he was in the Washington end. So he didn't have. . . . And of course, in the Attorney General's office, Nicholas deB. Nick Katzenbach, Byron White, none of them had any experience. There was very little expertise, if you want to call it, in businessmen's ways.

O'BRIEN: Well, is it nearly 5:30?

GILPATRIC: Yeah.