

Richard Helms (RH)
Interviewed by R. Jack Smith (JS)
21 April 1982
Retyped by P. DeStefano

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(U/~~FOUO~~) RH: I think, Jack, that I'd like to, since we'd already mentioned this matter, that I'd like to take up this question that I have down here as number 5, first, the [Nelson] Rockefeller Report. Because there is a point, in connection with that report that I wanted to make to you. As Ray Cline points out in his book on page 262, at least this is the most recent version of the book; he quotes from the Rockefeller Report. And I guess he has quoted this accurately, you can certainly verify that with a copy of the report, but he points out that one of the most pertinent comments in the whole Rockefeller Report recommended that "careful attention be paid to selecting a person with independent stature for this crucial post of public service" - being Director of Central Intelligence. They said, and this comes from the Rockefeller Report I assume, "Persons appointed to the position of Director of Central Intelligence should be individuals of stature, independence and integrity. In making this appointment, consideration should be given to individuals from outside the career service of the CIA although promotion from within should not be barred." Now when I read that passage, at the time that the Rockefeller Commission Report first came out, I took that very personally. In other words I took it subjectively, because I figured that this was an attack on the various things the report addressed itself to and that they were being laid at my door since I was the first career person that had been made Director.

(U/~~FOUO~~) I think that if that is what they had in mind (or the staffers who wrote the report had in mind, because when one reads that report it is quite clear that neither Nelson Rockefeller nor a lot of members of that Commission really carefully focused on what they were saying - it was written by those lawyers that were the staff men - I don't think that this would have appeared in the form that it did) but nevertheless, let me make the point that I want to make to you, which is this: if one examines the various operations, projects, and events which were so criticized at the time of the 1975 events, it is true that I was in the Agency all during that period. But certainly I was not the only person who knew about or authorized some of these things, for example, the "letter opening" thing was started by Allen Dulles. It was well known to John McCone, even though he denies ever having known about it. The drug business was known to Allen Dulles and known to McCone. All these question about assassination plots, which I throw down as being utterly wet and weedy, there was no intention on anybody's part, that I know of, to blow up Castro with that crazy thing that Des Fitzgerald invented, but leaving all that aside

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: MAR 2008

and putting the worse case on it, a lot of people shared in these things, they were not solely things that I was responsible for.

(U/FOUO) So I think that when you look down the list of complaints, most of them start on somebody else's watch. Now, it will be said that John McCone, when he testified in 1975, denied that he knew of these things. But as a Republican staff man pointed out to me one day, privately he said, "Don't you realize what's going on up here?" This is about my third trip back from Tehran [where he was serving as Ambassador]. And I said, "No, what is going on." He said, "John McCone's former Executive Assistant, Walter Elder, is in charge of all the papers, the section that decides on all documents that are going to come up to the Senate for these hearing. He goes through those papers, he is able to tell John McCone what is in writing and what is not in writing so if McCone wants to deny something he's absolutely scot-free to do so, there can't be any problem about it." He said, "This is, I know, what is going on. And I think it only fair to you to tell you privately this is going on because in a sense you are being made a sucker of a little bit." Well, leaving all that as it may, leaving all that aside, the fact remains that I would like to know what these things were that were solely my responsibility that shows that I lacked in independence or lacked in integrity or because I didn't have a large constituency, either Republican or Democrat, I wasn't able to stand up to the problem. It seems to me that conduct in Watergate demonstrated pretty clearly that unless they expected me to quit, because I had been asked to do some unreasonable things at the time of Watergate, and the fact remains I never did them. And if I didn't blow the whistle, I had good reasons for not blowing the whistle. In short, all I want to say about this whole affair is that I think that in life, fair is fair and I doubt that my Directorship involved individual decisions by me that showed that I lacked any of the things that they're saying that this man ought to have. In other words, let's put it in the negative, but you get my point.

(S) Let's go on now to the first item I have on this list of "Oxcart Operational." The follow-on to the U-2, which came known to the Agency as Oxcart, was started I believe - I don't know whether it was at the end of Dulles' administration or at the beginning of McCone's, but sometime during that period - it was certainly after the U-2 had been exposed on the shoot down of May 1, 1960. And a lot of work was being done on the so-called follow-up aircraft. Well, it did finally come on-stream in the middle sixties, and it had its first operational use over North Vietnam during the period that I was Director. Now, one of the things that gets forgotten, I truly believe, is that the Oxcart aircraft was different from the Air Force version, i.e., the SR71. In other words, the Oxcart had only one crewman, i.e., the pilot. It had a much larger swath for taking photographs and it carried a lot more film. In short, it was not only a slightly higher performance aircraft but also much more effective for the job for which it was designed. It was Lyndon Johnson who finally decided that the United States Government could not afford two different organizations running essentially the same aircraft and therefore opted in favor of the SR71 since the Air Force would bear the expense for that. And [to] mothball the Oxcart. But it would be too bad to have the Oxcart vaporize into history without being due credit for being one hell of a technical performance.

(U/FOUO) JS: Incidentally, at one point later, and I forgot exactly when it was, you offered the use of Oxcart. There were some of those aircraft sitting in the hangers. I can get the dates for that if you are interested in knowing; you offered it over to [Secretary of Defense Melvin] Laird, I think it was.

~~(S)~~ RH: Well, you know, it was a great aircraft. And I just would not like to have those flights over North Vietnam, the speed in which they were made, the excellence of the photography – all the rest of the stuff, to just get lost.

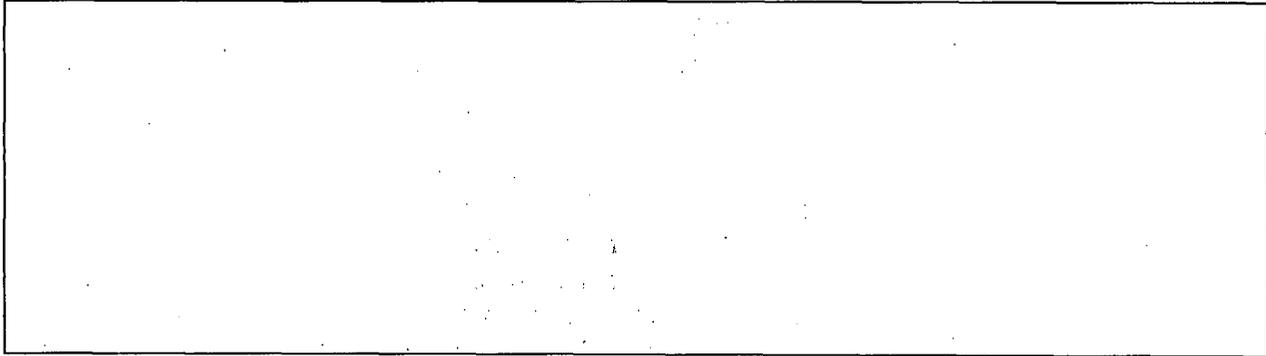
~~(U/FOUO)~~ Because I truly believe that one of the great contributions that the CIA, over the years, has made to Intelligence is the extraordinary ideas and technical achievements that have come out of the Agency. Really has been absolutely first class. And even though I realize as it's the conscious policy to say that it's the Intelligence Community and give all due credit to the Defense Department because they have been putting up the money and so forth. The fact remains that all the ideas came from the Agency or from various people in the Agency. Not one single fellow, just several people responsible for these things. Well, I think it's absolutely extraordinary how good it was over the years and somewhere in the historical record out there that point should be pretty clearly made. So that as we go to our Maker, and other generations have a good look at what went on, that the credit doesn't suddenly get shifted to a bunch of people at the Pentagon that couldn't have done it if they'd had to.

(U) JS: Right.

~~(S)~~ RH: That's the U-2 and the Corona and the Oxcart and so forth, which now brings me then to [redacted] [redacted] Neither you nor I have clearances, I assume, for this kind of thing, but I certainly remember what was going on at the time. And this [redacted] affair actually started, I mean its very seed started, during the Helms administration when [Deputy Director for Science and Technology] Les Dirks came up with this idea that maybe this kind of a thing could be worked out with the use of, well I don't know what the technical terms are anymore, it's been so long since I've discussed them with anyone.

~~(U/FOUO)~~ JS: Was it [redacted]

~~(C)~~ RH: Yes. That was the basic thrust of it, but in order to achieve this we were going to have to demonstrate that you could actually use some kind of chips that they had in mind to perform this function. And it was a way-out scheme at the time, there was no doubt about it. And I remember vividly, the sessions I had with Dave Packard, who was then Deputy Secretary of Defense, as you also remember he was also Chairman of NRO [National Reconnaissance Office] in those days and also the fellow that had the money in the Pentagon. So he was the one that really helped to get the seed money to get this thing started. Because with his background in electronics in Hewlett-Packard and having spent his life in this general area, although he was no expert on this particular thing, at least he knew the state of the art and so forth; he'd made the personal calculation that maybe it was do-able and if it was do-able it was certainly worth doing. So he was the one who provided the support and the seed money to get this whole thing rolling. And so it was really rolling by the time I left. I remember that was just the last thing I OK'd in connection with the project was setting up this, whatever they called the installation [redacted] [redacted] And after that I left the Agency, so obviously had been perfected and so forth. And I can only assume there's been a great success. Because you know you can't avoid getting that impression. I simply wanted to give that little bit of history as to why it was [redacted] finally came on-stream because various people tried to kill it over time as being way out.



(U/~~FOUO~~) Now let's move on to Watergate, this is just as good a time as any to talk about that. I assume, because I've never read all the Congressional material and I understand that there are thousands and thousands of words on the Watergate and the Agency, and if one has the entire stack you can probably find almost anything that went on at that time, some explanation of it. I'd simply like you to have, and I want to make two or three points about various aspects of it. They're rather gross points but they're important points to me.

(U/~~FOUO~~) One - when Howard Hunt was hired by the White House to go to work there, I was never informed or consulted. To the best of my knowledge, nobody in the Agency was ever informed or consulted. It seems to me that in the minutes of the Executive Meetings that we used to have every morning there must have been some reference to the fact that at one time I inquired whether anybody was asked by the White House about Howard Hunt's employment record and so forth. That related to his later request to [DDCI General] Bob Cushman about the wigs and various gadgets that were involved in his escapades.

(~~S~~) His requests were eventually turned off when he wanted to get a secretary from Paris that he had there and was really leaning on the Agency for services that didn't seem to make any sense.

(U/~~FOUO~~) Now, the criticism that seems to have been directed at both Cushman and me was that we never should have gone along with his request in the first place. By the same token, I think it was a pretty tough thing to ask of Cushman that a guy who was calling up on [Robert] Erlichman's behalf in those days to ask for something without any indication of what it was that he planned to do with it. That was hardly beyond Cushman's good sense to say, "OK, give it to him. He is a White House man and he's working for the President and all the rest of it and we don't need to get into his private business. I mean they must know what they are doing." And at that particular time there was not the slightest suggestion anywhere that anybody in the White House intended to do domestic operations with something later called the Plumbers or anything else. There wasn't a suggestion of it at the time. This was in its infancy and I swear to you I don't understand how anybody could have expected either Cushman or me to have gone down and quizzed the President or Erlichman why it was that Hunt wanted X, Y, and Z when it was a piddling request. And it seemed to me that it got turned off in plenty of time. And if he went out and tried to steal Fielding's files and so forth we certainly knew nothing about it. With all the evidence that has been accumulated, including those photographs that were alleged to have been sent to out laboratories and so forth, I can only assure you that I knew nothing about it. I just want to leave it there. I just want to tell you that as far as I was concerned, absolutely there was no suggestion of any of these things. Now when the Plumbers business came along, and David Young was talking to various ones of us about getting information and profiles on [Daniel] Ellsberg and things like that, I

would agree that probably when we were asked, even by the White House, for a profile of an American citizen that was a bad judgment call. We shouldn't have done it. So, okay, we shouldn't have done it. But as far as the Plumbers were concerned, they were never identified to me for what they were. This was all put in the context of a perfectly legitimate tightening up of security on leaks and various things of this kind. In other words there was no smell of cadavers in connection with this at all. At that time when I heard about the Plumbers I was as thunder-struck as anybody else.

(U/~~FOUO~~) Now "The protection of sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure," that famous sentence in the 1974 (sic) statute. One of the criticisms of the Rockefeller Commission, directed at me was the efforts I made to find out who it was that had leaked certain intelligence material, how it came that Jack Anderson had vast amounts of materials, how it came that Jack Anderson had vast amounts of materials in his possession and so forth. And eventually the truth came out that it was the Yeoman in the Office of the Joint Chiefs in the White House who was putting this stuff together and giving it to Jack Anderson because he was disaffected and he was a Mormon [as was Anderson]. Rather a bad view was taken of efforts by the Agency using any resources other than passive or negative ones to find out why these things had happened and how they had happened. I would rather have somebody with a legal turn of mind make a judgment on this. I think the Rockefeller Commission was rather high and mighty about it and did not focus on what the problem was. If you have the charge on you by statute to protect – that's what it says – and you are actually losing out – in other words, you are not "Protecting"; you find out there are holes in the dam and the water is coming through. It seems to me that some active effort to find out and to plug these holes is perfectly legitimate. I think that if one had done less than that one would have not have been effectively been carrying out the law. Now the interesting thing about all of these items in the Rockefeller Commission Reports is that they have never been adjudicated before a judge or before a jury or before any court of law. They've all been sort of *ad hominem* comments by commissions of individuals who may have had their own particular axes to grind. If I went too far, or was over-zealous, possibly that's true. But if that's the case, at least it seems to me that I had a legitimate reason for being. My plea is that either that language be taken out of the statute and done away with entirely or redefined so that it's clear what the responsibilities of the Director is to this matter and what is expected of him in the execution of this responsibility. I don't know what's been done because obviously I'm out of touch with these things, but I'll bet you that it's still in the law and I'll bet you that nothing has been done to take it out, and I'm wondering how the present Director or subsequent Directors may interpret this. In any event, I think it's a bad piece of language and I think it ought to be eliminated or redefined and clarified.

(U) JS: Is it the language that's at fault or is it the interpretation of the actions taken in support of it that's involved?

(U/~~FOUO~~) RH: Well, it may be the latter but it seems that the language invites this misinterpretation. If the Rockefeller Commission fellas have any case. That's my point.

(U) JS: But it's so much of a cardinal principle to all of us in the Intelligence business, it just seems remarkable that it should not be regarded for what it is: a prime first principle.

(S) RH: My next item is about the war in Laos. I didn't have any very complicated point I wanted to make about that but there obviously has to be a chapter on the policy involved, who authorized it, how

come it went on so long, all the money paid on it and so forth. Now it was obviously authorized in the [John F.] Kennedy administration when we were actually ordered to get involved with the Meos and various others and try and keep Laos from falling under the aegis of the Pathet Lao. I think when one looks at it it was an enormously successful operation that was run there and I think the outcome was extraordinarily successful – all things considered. The thing that has gummed up, or tended to dirty up, a rather major Agency effort here was the conduct of Senator [Stuart] Symington in connection with this whole thing. He twice visited Laos and knew all about this war. On one occasion he called, or had the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee call, a meeting of the whole Armed Services Committee. Ted Shackley was back from Laos – [redacted] – and Shackley briefed the entire Armed Services Committee in detail on what the Agency was doing in Laos. And at the end of the meeting Symington gets up and says, "I wanted you gentlemen to hear this because that's the way to fight a way a war in Asia. They don't spend in a year what we spend in Vietnam in a day and I just want you to know that this is a great affair that's going on here and I just wanted you to hear all about it." And a year later he's talking about the "secret war" in Laos. And he got a lot of publicity with this. He kept talking about the "secret war" in Laos. So it was that that sort of cast a pall over it and a lot of Senators believed that it was a secret war. Sometime after 1975 Senator [Richard] Schweiker took me aside after a hearing one day and said, "Now that stuff that you're doing there in Laos . . ." I said, "Senator Schweiker, go and ask anybody on the Appropriations Committee about the war in Laos. They authorized every dollar that was spent; they knew all about it." He said, "Is that right? Is that right?" I said, "Of course that's right. You ought to know better." So I make this point not because I'm interested in making the case for or against Symington. I simply think that if history is worth anything, because to those who read it you would hope they would learn by it, it seems to me that some of these points ought to be identified rather than just a straight recital of we spent X dollars and we killed Y people and so on. This eternal problem which the Agency has in any of its operations of anybody being able to go off and make a television program or a statement in the Congress or a speech or something of that kind. And this becomes truth and it never gets untangled and never gets taken back. This is a good case in which to do something about that.

(U/FOUO) The last item on the list are allegations from the Church Committee Report about National Estimates.

(U) JS: Have you read them, Dick?

(U/FOUO) RH: No, I have not, I'm ashamed to say, but I know that there's an intimation in there that I yielded to political pressures from the White House. At least I believe there's [such] an intimation. I wanted to ask you to talk to Dick Lehman and to Paul Walsh, both [of] whom individually told me that they have tried to persuade the young lady who was writing that report that this was simply not true as far as they were aware. And they were for some reason unable to persuade her. Now who it was that appeared before the committee, or appeared before the staff, who gave this impression, whether it was Abbot Smith or it was John Huizenga, I haven't any idea. The point of the matter is that my recollection is that the only time that there was anything like this particularly at issue was over the business of MRV's [Multiple Re-Entry Vehicles] and MIRV's [Multiple Independently Targetable Re-Entry Vehicles). This was early in the Nixon administration. This was the time in which people were talking about so-called "foot print" that were made by these MRV's of the Soviet Union. After attending several meetings in the White House and talking with people in the Department of Defense, it became clear to me that they at least had a legitimate point, that it was a point that had to be covered in the

Estimate even if it didn't change the whole outcome of it, and I insisted that it be put in. Because I don't think that there was any reason for me to necessarily assume that all and eternal wisdom was vested in the Agency and whatever they said had to be right and whatever anybody else said had to be "political pressure." It didn't make any sense to me at all. So I believe that on that occasion and maybe on two or three others I insisted that a certain adjustments be made in order to accommodate other points of view in Washington. I would like history to show that we did our level best to make these Estimates sensible Estimates, to try to accommodate the varying points of view that existed in the Government in various times, came out where we thought we ought to come out and did an honest job with a great deal of integrity. It isn't that I feel any great feelings of resentment or that I was being used, or that political pressure was being put on me that I yielded. It was only the fact that it isn't true and therefore I'd like the record to show that it's not true.

~~(C)~~ JS: There are two instances that are talked about usually and one of them has to do with the ABM-SS9 question. The other has to do with the numbers in Vietnam. But let's talk about the SS9. The episode, which is pointed to, has to do with a statement on 11-8-1967 concerning the Soviet intention to develop a "first-strike capability." And this really spoke to strategy downstream some way - several years actually. I believe you had a telephone call from Mel Laird about that time on the subject, saying that this was a statement that was flatly contradictory to U.S. policy and a lot of other hoopla and stuff. And at the USIB meeting you, I believe the record shows, requested that that statement which you found gratuitous be taken out. Do you recollect that?

(U) RH: No, I don't recollect that, but that doesn't sound strange to me. That doesn't offend me in any sense. As a matter of fact, it turns out not to have been correct.

(U/~~FOUO~~) JS: Exactly! But I think that's one of them - that you succumbed to the pressure and had this statement taken out. But the point is, I believe, that the Estimate was really about current numbers, current capabilities, and projections. And this was an element of strategy, which you just felt we did not have any particular claim to.

~~(C)~~ RH: This sounds quite likely; I might very well have done that. I think very likely that I might have. You know, just to put a parenthesis in here. It's ironical that in those days I was being accused by the hard-liners of not being tough enough, too soft regarding Soviet intentions, the Agency wasn't really seeing what was really going on and so forth. And the liberals were saying we were far too hard-line and so on. The years go by; suddenly you discover that the hard-liners in town are accusing the Agency of not having recognized what the Soviets were up to. In short, whether you want to call it the blues, the reds, or the whites or the blacks or the left and the right, the Agency estimating process, including my role in it, has been accused of both things, and it seems to me that that isn't all bad. And I have to say that as one looks back on it, that if we had written Estimates that were essentially different from the ones we wrote in the latter days or the latter years of the [Lyndon] Johnson administration and in the early days of the [Richard] Nixon administration, I don't think we would have had an audience, particularly in the Johnson administration. {Secretary of Defense Robert} McNamara would not have accepted an Estimate that said the Soviets were going for a first strike capability. I don't think that Johnson would have either. I think the Agency's credibility would have been ruined with those fellas. The Nixon people took just the opposing view. I remember sitting with Laird one day before the Foreign Relations Committee and [Senator William] Fulbright wouldn't let me open my mouth. He just made Laird do all

the talking. And Laird was trying to persuade him that the Soviets were going for a first strike. And were going to go for a build-up much larger than Fulbright believed.

(U/~~FOUO~~) JS: Which underlined the requirement for the ABM [Anti Ballistic Missile].

(U/~~FOUO~~) RH: That's right! But in any event, the fact remains that now when you look back historically Laird was closer to being right than Fulbright was. Even though most sentiment at the time was on Fulbright's side. So it's another way of saying that the estimating business is a damn lonely business. [Laughter]

(U/~~FOUO~~) JS: Well, it's one of those anomalies of history that too often – it seems to me – the bastards have turned out to be right. After WWII, when we were all trying to follow the beat of getting along with the Russians, we could live with them, they could be copartners in some kind of a world settlement – uneasy perhaps, but still, we could work out something. And all the extreme rightists were saying never-never, and of course, they turned out to be right. Perhaps for the wrong reasons, but right. And I think it's true of Laird. Laird's basis for thinking that, I think, was almost entirely emotional and based on his feelings he had to get the ABM built.

(U/~~FOUO~~) RH: And Laird, interestingly enough you know, compared with some of the people that are now in office, was not regarded as hard-lined at all. In fact, if he walked in here, he'd say, "Me, hard lined! I'm just a patsy." So it's a bit of extraordinarily interesting debate. If we had these days enough responsible people with the wit to look at that debate and examine the nuclear debate which is now just cascading all over us. There are some very good lessons to be learned. You mustn't let your emotions control what has got to be done. I'm just amazed at some of the proposals that are coming out by people who seem to think that all of a sudden they've discovered Armageddon and they've got to prevent it. And it's their sole responsibility.

(U/~~FOUO~~) JS: But nothing has changed all of a sudden. The problem's been there all along. I had this discussion at dinner last night. Nothing's changed; it's just the way it's been.

(U/~~FOUO~~) RH: Jack Smith, back in the fifties, you remember as well as I do, there were students on college campuses saying that they weren't going to do any work cuz' after all they were going to be obliterated by a nuclear bomb. There were other people who were agitating and going out into communes because they figured that they better live in the country because the cities were gonna be nuked. Then, all of a sudden, that just disappeared. Under the pressures of Vietnam or whatever it was. And then for 20 years you don't hear anything about it, and then all of a sudden, bang! It comes right back and it's the same.

(U) JS: A certain amount of boredom and apathy sets in too ya' know. After a while you get tired of being so scared, you start thinking about something else.

(U) RH: Who was it, Henry James, that said people liked wars, particularly non-participants, because it gives them the thrill of excitement to an otherwise dull and tedious life.

(U) JS: Look at the Falkland Islands. The most exciting thing, it's better than any TV show, better than Brideshead revisited.

(U/~~FOUO~~) Because of a gap in the tape (fault of J.S.) Richard Helm's statement about CIA performance in Soviet advanced weapons Estimates is missing. (He had little of note to say previously on questions Re. Vietnam, bombing of Hanoi and Cambodia.)

(U/~~FOUO~~) RH: Actually, this question of Agency Estimates goes back to something we were discussing a few minutes ago. From the very beginning of the Nixon administration Nixon was criticizing Agency Estimates, Estimates done back when he was Vice President. What he knew about Estimates in the intervening years I don't know. But he would constantly, in National Security Council meetings, pick on the Agency for not having properly judged what the Soviets were going to do with various kinds of weaponry. And obviously, he was being selective but he would make nasty remarks about this and say this obviously had to be sharpened up. The Agency had to understand it was to do a better job and so on.

(U/~~FOUO~~) And I haven't the slightest doubt that Nixon's carping affected [Henry] Kissinger who after all was his National Security Advisor. And Kissinger, in those days, was hardly an old comrade of Nixon's. He'd only been hired a few months before and they'd been strangers and so forth. So estimating was hardly something that he wanted to be a champion for. I don't know how much he'd read the Estimates way back then himself. But in any event, these two men tended to work on each other with respect to the estimating process of the Agency. And Kissinger, feeling that Nixon didn't regard the Estimates as being very good, didn't pay very much attention to them himself. And he had a tendency to be selective in the way he read intelligence. I remember, maybe after a couple of years or so his commenting to me. He said, "You know, the most useful document you fellas turn out is that Weekly Summary that you put together. That's much more valuable than the daily stuff. That I can sit down on a Saturday morning and read and bring myself up-to-date and I think it's a good publication." And this was part of Kissinger's tactics. The more you keep people off balance, the more you keep the pressure on, the more he felt that they'd work harder, or be more careful or do a better job or something. So that getting any praise out of Kissinger, for any particular thing was almost - well, it virtually never happened; he didn't have any commendations to hand around to anybody. I've sat through endless meetings with him and there was nobody he ever told, "You've done a good job or that's a good paper" or something of this kind. He'd just go plowing along with whatever he had on his mind at the moment. So, there was a period there, there was no doubt about it, when Agency analysis and estimating was having heavy weather in the White House.

(U/~~FOUO~~) To this day, I obviously don't have any way of judging what my being Director had to do with this one way or the other, because, after all, Nixon re-appointed me. But I was no man for Erlichman or [Bob] Haldeman. I mean they didn't like the appointment in the first place. So there was an element around Nixon that was certainly anti-Helms. I mean it didn't manifest itself with knives in my back, particularly. But you know, "This guy is not for it."

(U/~~FOUO~~) I think Kissinger says in his book that Nixon never really fully trusted me and so forth. And I was no friend of Kissinger's in those days. I barely knew him. I'd met him before the Kennedy administration and I got along all right personally. So that whatever frictions there were over various pieces of paper, they were not exacerbated by any personality conflicts between me and him. That I think probably was a plus. I mean if there had been personality conflicts in addition to these other matters than I think there would have been blood on the moon of a different kind. Not easy to deal with in any sense: Kissinger. But on the other hand, you had to admit or admire the fact that he paid

attention to his job, that he was working at it, that whether you liked what he did or not, he was paying attention. You know, you could get his ear for five minutes, or whatever the case might be, and he was bright enough to get the point. So, I think over time the Agency's performance with him improved. In other words it had no place to go but up, if you want to put it that way. But it did go up. And now what happened after I left and he became Secretary, and [William] Colby and all the rest of it that's an era that I don't know anything about. But, you're absolutely right when you say that the Agency was not having an easy time of it in the early days of the Nixon administration.

~~(U/FOUO)~~ JS: You know, I have a foot note. I don't know if I've ever told you [of] a remark that I've always thought that was extremely funny but also bears out precisely what you were saying about your relations with Kissinger on a personal level. When [Ambassador] Pat Moynihan came home from New Delhi, shortly after the word had come out in the end of 1972 that you were being fired, Moynihan saw Kissinger and said, "What's going on here, what's this about firing Helms?" And Kissinger said, "I didn't do it, the 'Chermans' did it." Erlichman and Haldeman. [Laughter]

~~(U/FOUO)~~ RH: That's right. As a matter of fact, Kissinger didn't even know I was leaving.

(U) JS: I know. But I thought that was excruciatingly funny. "The Chermans did it." [Laughter]

~~(U/FOUO)~~ RH: No, there's no doubt about what happened. And I think they would have liked to have done it four years earlier. In any event, let's say this. Despite this challenge to the Estimates, the analysis and so forth of the Agency, the fundamental fact remains that if the things had not been read, if people were not paying attention to them there never would have been the challenge. So I don't think anybody needs to feel bad about a rocky period in the Agency's history. It was bound to be a rocky period with Richard Nixon as President, given the fact that he held the Agency responsible for his defeat in 1960. And he never forgot that and he had a barb out for the Agency all the time because he really believed, and I think he believes to this day, that that "Missile Gap" question was the responsibility of the Agency and that it did him in.

(U) JS: And it was politically motivated.

~~(U/FOUO)~~ RH: And it was politically motivated. So, dealing with him was tough, and it seems to me that the fact that I ended up with four years of working for him with my head on my shoulders is not the least achievement of my life. [Laughter]

~~(S)~~ JS: Dick, the Arab-Israeli War, the June 1967 war, that's always regarded as one of the high points of the Agency's success. And you've paid tribute to it a number of times. I talked to Sherman Kent about it just yesterday.

~~(S)~~ RH: My recollection of the events are as follows: Unfortunately, I don't recall on what day of the week I was having breakfast at the White House, but during breakfast President Johnson got a telephone call from Arthur Goldberg, who was his Ambassador to the United Nations. Goldberg was apparently vociferous on the phone about an approach that had been made to him by some Israeli Official, possibly the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations, pointing out that Nasser was about to take a step which I believe was the closing of the Straits and the Red Sea, if I'm not mistaken. But the precise thing that Nasser was supposed to do you can readily find in the history. And the President was "just going to have

to do something to help the Israelis about all this. These fellas – Arthur Goldberg – this is the second telephone call I've had from him. What are we going to do about all this?" Now, whether it was the same day or the next day. Abba Evan visits Dean Rusk at the State Department. And presents him with an Israeli estimate of the military balance in the Middle East. Coincidentally with that, Israeli intelligence sends the Agency the same estimate, or something very much like it. When this came in that morning, I turned it over the Sherman Kent, and I said "I want you to give me a commentary on this estimate, and we've gotta have it by the end of the day." Because Johnson had gone to Montreal to open the American Pavilion of Expo 1967, we didn't know exactly when we were going to need the paper. Well, I had left the office, and was even on my way home that night, when I got word that there was to be a meeting at the White House at 7:00 or 7:30. So I turned around and went back to the White House. And we sat in Walt Rostow's office, which is in the basement of the White House. And Rusk came in and I forgot who represented the Department of Defense. Wheeler was there and so forth. At that point, Rusk said to me. "Dick, did you read the paper that your fellas turned out on this Israeli Estimate?" And I said, "Yes sir, I did." And he said, "Did you agree with the paper?" It was a very short paper that Sherman's fellas had done, maybe two or three pages. And I said, "Yes I did." And he said, "Dick, all I want to tell you is this. In the immortal words of [one time New York Mayor] Fiorello La Guardia, "If this is a mistake, its a beaut." And I said OK. Well, about that point, Johnson who had returned from Canada, is up in his office and calls us all into the Cabinet Room for a meeting. He reads this thing. He says, "You fellas think this is OK?" – Turning to Wheeler because this was a military Estimate. And Wheeler said, "Yes, it looked all right." Well, he said, "Wheeler, you and Helms and so forth get together and scrub this thing down and come back in 72 hours and really lay it on the line with me, what the Government really thinks about this." Well, the next Estimate was even more refined than the first one. And I think brought this down to seven days instead of two weeks or something like that so that in the end it was only one day off. Well, Johnson went with the Estimate finally, and he didn't commit anything to the Israelis. He didn't commit his prestige; he didn't do anything. And was enormously relieved to be let off that hook. For a whole variety of reasons, he didn't want to have to get involved in that. And I have always attributed to that Estimate as being the first thing that had happened in his Presidency when he suddenly realized that intelligence had a role in his life and an important part at that. Because you will remember that when he first became President, John McCone used to brief him every day. Then he obviously got bored with that and stopped McCone's briefings. And then nobody was briefing him and nobody got very close to him and McCone quit as you remember because he had no impact with Johnson. He didn't see him; he didn't seem to have any influence with him, and so he just decided to go back to California. And during the [DCI Admiral William] Raborn period, Johnson did not exactly spend a lot of time with Raborn. We were invited, he and I, to the National Security Council meetings because that was part of my so-called training period as they called it. But, this was the first time that he was really sort of jarred by the fact that those intelligence fellas had some insight that these other fellas don't have.

~~(S)~~ Then, subsequent to that I had a private meeting with him at one time about a variety of matters. This is one of those meetings that no minutes were ever kept on, and I briefed him on some of the things the Agency was doing that were rather sensitive. And he told me that he wanted some more in-depth studies about some of the aspects of things in Russia, which I dutifully reported at the time. But it was starting right then, that I began to be invited to the Tuesday luncheons. Which meant, at that time, the Director of Central Intelligence was finally on the magic inner circle where the policy was really made. Those Tuesday luncheons, in my analysis, were nothing but a device invented by Johnson to have around the table the people he wanted around the table. Rather than the people who were dictated by the

National Security Council meeting or a cabinet meeting, or this meeting or that meeting, because there were always added people that had to be around. Whereas if he invited a group to lunch he could have there exactly the individuals he wanted, without any of the people he didn't want. And the people he had there were people he had confidence in. That he didn't think would leak, that would keep his confidence. He never said this to me, but I got the distinct impression that the reason that he valued my presence there was that I kept the game honest when Rusk would go way out on some policy or McNamara would advocate X or Earl Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs would be too far up field. Then I would come in and say, "This is the way we understand it, and the facts are as follows." And I did this constantly. So it was a useful role for him. There was no doubt about it. I was treated very well. I went to Guam, I went to God-knows-where on these various conferences on Vietnam and when I'd get there, there wasn't a hell of a lot of work to do, but he just liked having me around, sitting there.

(U) JS: This is great stuff, Dick.

~~(S)~~ RH: As for policy making, I think it was the most satisfactory of all the years I spent. Most intelligence contributions to policy making are fuzzy, ill defined, difficult to figure out how much was this, how much was that, but here once by an odd arrangement of circumstances you talked about number of days the war was fought that was the way it came out so it was almost too good to be true. And there was another aspect of the war, which I, for historical purposes, should not overlook. We had had a visit from the Chief of Israeli Intelligence about three weeks before the war actually began, and we were having a lot of conferences with them. It was Meir Amit. And he dropped a comment at one point in one of these meetings, "if I am called back you can rely on the fact that the war is going to start." Well, he was indeed called back. And I said to [Counter-Intelligence Chief James Jesus] Angleton, "You'd better give me a piece of paper here now about meetings with this guy and what we read out of all this and so forth." So Angleton did come up with a memorandum highly classified and so forth, about what Amit had had to say: the possibility that the Israelis would start the war, or preempt what they thought was going to be Nasser action and so on. And I just quietly wrapped that in an envelope and sent it "Eyes Only" to President Johnson. Well, he read it and it warned him that in about a week or 10 days or two or two weeks, he's going to have a war on his hands. So when the war did come, he was not so surprised. And he made good on this because when he got to the Congressional leaders down to brief them about the ongoing war, he said, "You know, I had a feeling that this was coming." And I took occasion to tell Senator [Richard] Russell the day the war started that we had warned the President that this was going to happen. He said, "That's good, that's good! I'm glad you did." So it was a fairly tidy package.

(U/~~FOUO~~) JS: Coincidentally, I've read that memo. It's still in your files.

(U) RH: Is it? Really?

(U/~~FOUO~~) JS: Yes and your memos of conversation.

(U) RH: So many things get lost.

~~(S)~~ JS: Yes, I know, but it's there and [also] your remarks about its being held very closely with it. Whenever people ask me, what are some of the Agency's successes? (You know, they all remember our

failures.) This is one, this Arab-Israeli thing. Are there any others that occurred during your tenure that you remember as one even remotely comparable in quality?

~~(S)~~ RH: I don't recall any particular episode that was as clean-cut as the 1967 war was. But there were certain Estimates, including the one that you just mentioned – the Rolling Thunder Studies – during the Vietnamese War. I think that the actual fighting of the war in Laos was a great Agency success. The development of these technical gadgets; they were really outstanding Agency contributions to intelligence. And anything that you see in the record that looked as though they shone brightly I would be glad to have included. You know, one of the things that happened to me, Jack, was that as a result of those investigations in 1975 and being obliged to focus on minor little problems having to do with the Agency's past and with a lot of criticism, and all the rest of it, it has tended for some reason to make my memory almost a hash. In other words, I have a very hard time picking out episodes and putting them in the right time frame and in the right context. In other words, there is no historical perspective in my head any more at all. And so I need help on some of these things. And I would be glad to have you as you examine the record if you tick off two or three things, such as analysis or estimating or some clandestine services operation that was unusually helpful, and throw into the package.

~~(U/FOUO)~~ JS: Well, I don't think there was any lack of success, per se. I was just wondering whether there was any other occasion you remember in which the claim from the White House and McNamara –

(U) RH: Nothing yet, I don't recall anything that was quite as dramatic.

~~(U/FOUO)~~ JS: No, of course not. They'd all be second best.

~~(S)~~ RH: There was an interesting episode for example. I understand that the Pike Committee was critical in their analysis of what the Agency did regarding the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, that the Agency had missed the mark so badly. Well, I just refuse to accept that indictment. Because I know very well what happened on that particular day in August. Up to that period there were all kinds of reports about the maneuvers of the Russian Army being conducted in East Germany. And about the way that they were coming up to the Czechoslovakian border. And the fact that the Prague Spring and the Dubce thing was bubbling up. I think everybody was concerned with what exactly was going to happen. What are they going to do and so forth. Well, on this particular day, I don't remember what day of the week it was but that's irrelevant, you can look it up in the document. Dick Lehman came into my office; say, middle of the morning, or maybe it was 11:00, maybe it was, that late, he said, "You know, we've got to take a look at something here. Those maneuvers of the Red Army are going in widening circles, and there isn't any doubt that at any time they can simply make a slight turn and go straight into Czechoslovakia. "Now", he said, "On top of that we suddenly got a UPI report here that says that the Politburo was meeting in Moscow." And I said, "My God, who is that UPI fella; isn't he the guy that's been there forever and so forth?" He said, "Yes", and gave me his name, and I've forgotten what it was, Shapiro or something. And I said he usually has his stuff fairly right. And Dick said, "Yea, that's why I bring this to you. Because after all, now let's take a look at this thing, all those guys are supposed to be in Sochi in August. Now what are they doing back in Moscow, having a meeting like this? And I think that you'd better warn the President that the Russians may be ready to be coming after the Czechoslovakians." So I went to lunch that day down there and I reported this to Johnson, and Johnson said, "Oh, no, they're just talking about us. That's what that means." And I said, "No, Mr. President, they're coming after you." What was odd about this meeting was that I was telling

him this sitting at the luncheon table, but before lunch we were having a sherry out in the living room, and he was having some kind of arcane conversation with Dean Rusk about something that I didn't understand. And it was clear that [Secretary of Defense Clark] Clifford didn't understand either. Something was going on. So when I tell him this at lunch, he said, "Oh no, I don't think you're right about that. They're talking about us." I thought to myself, what in the hell does he mean, "they're talking about us." And there were some more veiled references to something going on. When the lunch was over, I got a hold of Tom Johnson, who kept the notes at the end of the table, I said, "Tom what's going on here?" He said, "Don't tell anybody I told you, but tomorrow there's going to be a joint announcement by the United States and the Soviet Union that they are going to enter into Arms Limitation, or Arms Control Talks, and this has been very secretly arranged. The announcements are going to be made, and I think actually he went on to say, although I'm not sure about this, "The President's planning a trip to Moscow." In any event, I then said, "Well, look Tom, you heard my comments about the Russians invading Czechoslovakia. I want to be sure those are in the minutes." "Oh", he said, "I got it down, I got it down." "Well", I said, "you be sure they're in there." So that was the end of that. 10:00 that night, we were back in the White House [Soviet Ambassador Anatoly] Dobrynin having come in early in the evening to tell Rostow that the Russians had invaded Czechoslovakia and that we weren't to get upset or anything. This was a limited operation and all the rest of it. But of course there was a National Security Council meeting called, because I remember I was out having dinner at a restaurant and my buzzer went off, and I went dashing down to the White House. I remember Clifford walking in to the room before the meeting began and saying to me, "What do you think the Czechoslovakians have done to cause the Soviets to invade Czechoslovakia?" I said, "Clark, it isn't what the Czechoslovakians have done, it's what they have not done that caused the Soviets to invade Czechoslovakia." That National Security Council meeting took 2 minutes to discuss the invasion and the ensuing hour to figure out how they were going to kill the joint announcement that was scheduled for the next day. And keep this from leaking to the papers that the announcement was about to be made. In other words, how they were going to tidy-up what was obviously a package that had just dropped on the floor and splattered all over the place.

~~(C)~~ JS: I've always cited that particular episode as a failure of Soviet intelligence because they felt that all they had to do was to roll in there and forces that favored the Russians would rise up and take over the country. It didn't work that way at all; they sat there for two weeks waiting for that to happen, and finally they had a hell of a situation on their hands.

~~(S)~~ RH: My recollection was that we found out later, didn't we, that the Russians' equipment, the Red Army equipment, had white crosses on the engines of the Jeeps and the personnel carriers and so forth to distinguish them from the Russian equipment which the Czechoslovakian army had.

~~(S)~~ JS: Let me ask you, was the Yom Kippur war on your watch or just after?

~~(S)~~ RH: No, it was on Colby's. I left the Agency on the 2nd or 3rd of February, 1973, and that was my last day. I then went down to the State Department and began to get ready to go to Iran. I don't think I ever went back to the Agency building after that. Speaking of the Yom Kippur war, I haven't read Kissinger's book yet, which I believe has quite an extensive examination of the intelligence that was available in connection with that war in 1973. But one thing I do remember: that summer, and I've

forgotten which month of summer, [Jordan's] King Hussein came to visit the Shah [of Iran] and was staying at a private home which the court had taken over for his comfort on the shores of the Caspian. I can't remember now, whether he asked to see me or whether the State Department sent me to see him. In either event this was my introduction to an interesting matter of protocol, which was that if I wanted to visit King Hussein, I had to get the Shah's permission since he was his guest. In other words, this was not something I could just go off and do, I had to go to the court and get permission and so forth. Anyway, I flew down to the Caspian on one of the planes of the court and went to see King Hussein.

~~(S)~~ Well, after we had finished with whatever the business was that I'd been sent down there on in the first place, he gave me a detailed rundown on reports they'd been getting from a Syrian agent about the fact that the Syrians were intending to wage war on the Israelis. They had already missed one date for this attack to take place, as I recall the story. But they were sure of their agent; they were sure this was gonna happen; and they wanted me to know about it. They laid it out in considerable detail. So when I got back to Tehran, I obviously sent my telegrams back and one of them was encompassing this information. So why it was the intelligence people with the Agency who missed on the Yom Kippur war to me is still an enigma because this material looked so solid that even if you thought it was irrational for the Egyptians to attack the Barlev line, the fact remains that it was gonna be an active possibility. So something went askew, no doubt about it.

End of transcript