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Interview with General Robert E. Pursley, Part II  
May 7, 1996

Trask: This is Part II in a series of interviews with General Robert E. Pursley, being held in the Pentagon on May 7, 1996. Participating as interviewers for the OSD Historical Office are Alfred Goldberg and Roger Trask.

General Pursley, in our first interview with you on September 6, 1995, we discussed your prior educational and professional experiences and the period when you served as military assistant to Secretary McNamara, from 1966 to 1968. We had begun to discuss your work in the same role with Secretary Clifford in 1968-1969. We talked about the changeover from McNamara to Clifford and the general nature of your duties with Clifford. At the end of the interview we were discussing working relationships in the Pentagon. Could you begin this morning by commenting on Clifford's relationships with the assistant secretaries, JCS, service secretaries, and perhaps others in the Pentagon?

Pursley: Secretary Clifford's relationships were perhaps a bit more distant than had been Secretary McNamara's or, later, Melvin Laird's. Secretary Clifford used a fairly unique management style. His closest relationships were with a group that euphemistically became known as the "8:30 group," a group that he assembled generally each morning at 8:30. It included Deputy Secretary Paul Nitze; Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs Paul Warnke; Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Phil Goulding; and George Elsey, who was Clark Clifford's special assistant. George Elsey was the only person that Clifford

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brought in from the outside, otherwise he stayed with the team that Bob McNamara had put in place.

Goldberg: He would have had trouble bringing in another team that late in the administration, wouldn't he?

Pursley: I would think so, yes, and it would have taken a great deal of time and effort. He probably appropriately reasoned that he could use his time some other way. I think also that he seemed quite satisfied with the team that McNamara had assembled there. Then, I was the other member of the 8:30 group. So, in effect, there were 6 people, including the secretary himself. Just a note: that does not mean that he did not have frequent contacts, particularly with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had a very close relationship, I think, with General Wheeler. I think he thought highly of General Wheeler and therefore met with him and consulted with him very frequently. He did not have as frequent contact with either the civilian secretaries of the departments or the individual chiefs of staff. He met with them relatively infrequently. He would see them each Monday at what we called "staff meetings." I think there are fancier names for that particular group, and somewhere in the Defense regulations there is mention of it.

Goldberg: The Armed Forces Policy Council.

Pursley: Yes, thanks. I don't know that I ever heard it referred to that way except by R. Eugene Livesay [staff secretary], who sometimes kept notes. We just called it the Monday morning staff meeting. To elaborate a bit on that, the Monday morning staff meetings constituted a forum for Clifford to both talk to and have

dialogue with the other individuals--you mentioned the service secretaries, the chiefs, and selected people from the OSD staff. At that time there were fewer assistant secretaries. The staff meeting would include, of course, the director of defense research and engineering. The meeting would include most but not all of the assistant secretaries. The assistant secretary for administration, for example, rarely came, but apart from that, most of the others were there. So it would be a group of 15 or 16 people.

Goldberg: How did you keep Solis Horwitz out?

Pursley: That wasn't hard, because Bob McNamara had never allowed him in, so the precedent was established. I guess that's another issue. The staff meetings under Secretary Clifford tended to be something of a set piece. There was almost a script to them. Clifford adopted the practice early on of asking me to prepare some talking notes, which I usually prepared near the end of the week, prior to Monday morning. There would be a set agenda and even some suggestions in my notes about comments that he might want to make on each topic. Those notes are available for you if you ever want to dig through them. Clifford almost religiously followed the script. There would be added dialogue, and people would make comments, so a dialogue would develop. Clifford usually kept those meetings to about an hour, so the dialogue was controlled. Apart from activities like the staff meetings, Clifford was involved with a small group of individuals.

To get back to the 8:30 group, the format there was pretty much set, as well. People always sat in the same chairs. Clifford, obviously, behind his desk; directly

across from him would be Paul Nitze; then to his left Paul Warnke, Phil Goulding, George Elsey; and I would be the one right around by Clifford. It always started with Clifford bringing up a topic that was at the time very much on his mind. It might be something that he had just talked to the president about, or an issue of some importance concerning Southeast Asia. Occasionally it would be something else; for example the possibility of Abe Fortas being nominated as Chief Justice of the United States. Non-defense topics were rare, but it would happen occasionally. So, Clifford would bring up an issue, and then talk through the issue, much as you might imagine happening in a law office. He would bring long, legal-sized yellow pads, and talk through a set of issues. Having done that, and without announcing any particular point of view or any resolution of that on his part, he would then ask Paul Nitze to comment. Then Paul Warnke would comment, and we would go right around the table. At the end of that, Clifford might announce some decision, having heard these points of view, or he might announce some specific set of actions to take place. Having thus disposed of one topic, Clifford would go to a second issue, if he had one, and then to a third one; typically it would not be more than two or three. Having gone through that routine, he would then open the floor to Paul Nitze, and the deputy secretary would have the opportunity to bring whatever issues he wanted to bring before that group. Then we would follow the same routine around the table, so that each person had an opportunity to raise topics. These meetings tended to go fairly

long, and it was not unusual for them to last most, if not all, morning, frequently until 11:30 or 11:45.

Trask: Was this every day?

Pursley: Perhaps not every day, because it was not unusual for the president to intercept Clifford on the way to work and get him over to the White House. There were days when we wouldn't even see Clark. Apart from that, yes, it would be every day. So the morning of every day was occupied with that process.

Goldberg: Unusual for a secretary to do that.

Pursley: Very unusual. It occurred to me that it was probably the style that Clifford had seen at the Truman White House and one that he may have used in his law offices with partners or associates. He found it useful in trying to keep his line of reasoning straight. I found this process to be vigorous and instructive, to start back with the most elementary kinds of considerations on any issue. He'd start from zero and talk through the things that all of us supposedly already knew. To me it was a practice that he had probably evolved to make sure that we weren't assuming something that may not have been accurate or right. It was an opportunity for people at any point to break in and question assumptions.

Goldberg: Did he give you a full-scale brief?

Pursley: He'd go step by step in a very pedestrian, clear, articulate manner. He always talked very precisely and had such a logical mind. He was one of the few people I have seen who could be caught mid-sentence because he couldn't find the right verb or predicate and still make a good sentence. He could talk

extemporaneously and when you tried to fill in or edit what he said, there was not much to be done. He thought very precisely and presented things precisely. This is by way of showing why it was time-consuming, but probably why to him it was very useful. It certainly reflected an orderly, incisive mind and an incredible discipline in reasoning.

Goldberg: I had the impression that he was always on stage.

Pursley: He would give you that impression, yes. I don't think he did that deliberately, it was just the way he thought.

Goldberg: In our interviews with him, we always felt that he was not play-acting, but originally he must have been presenting himself in a particular way and eventually it became his natural way of doing it.

Pursley: One reason I thought it was not out of the ordinary for him, was the way he told jokes in such a precise way. He was one of the best story tellers I have ever heard, and yet he told stories that way, also.

Trask: You said he sometimes announced decisions after one of these meetings; do you have the impression that those decisions were based on what he had heard there, or had he made up his mind ahead of time?

Pursley: I think it would be a combination. In many cases, I'm sure that he had some opinions very firmly in mind, but he would test those, I think. He was a person quite willing to back away from positions. If you engaged in debate on some topic with Clark, you knew you had to have things fairly straight and orderly because if you were caught in a non sequitur, you lost a lot of your clout in

that particular forum. He enjoyed trying to develop a number of different positions. It was not a way of developing a group of sycophants; he relished the idea of having an active and dynamic dialogue. That, again, is why it sometimes took a long time. But he never put a time limit on these 8:30 meetings, unlike the staff meetings. As long as it took, that's how long we would be there.

Goldberg: These were his "think sessions."

Pursley: Yes, very much so.

Goldberg: How did Nitze and Warnke get along at that time?

Pursley: Very well. That may sound a little surprising, given some later events, but they worked together very well. That whole group worked together well, indeed. I can never remember anything even approaching acrimony in any of those sessions. There would be substantial disagreements, at times, I can't think of any specific item right now, but that group worked together well.

Goldberg: Did Clifford and you have any problems getting information from the JCS and the services? Did you feel that you got whatever you needed and that they were forthcoming?

Pursley: I think the answer to that is two-fold. I never had any impression that any requests were discarded or that there was any reluctance on the part of the military departments or the JCS to provide information. On the other hand, you never know what they are not providing on their own. I had no doubt that the JCS and the military departments did not always provide all the material that would have been useful in talking about any issue. You can imagine with the

JCS, on items like Southeast Asia, and various kinds of activities, I have no doubt that there were a number of things that would have been kept from the secretary of defense. On the whole issue of the F-111B, which is now unfolding even more, I have no doubt that the uniformed part of the Navy was keeping a lot of material from the secretary of defense, and maybe even from the secretary of the navy, although I think Paul Ignatius might argue a little differently there. Probably both sides of that are accurate, but one did not shy away from asking for material and usually would get some kind of response. On the other hand, common sense would indicate that there were a lot of things that were not provided.

Goldberg: I've asked all the secretaries this question.

Pursley: What was the response?

Goldberg: Most thought they were getting what they wanted and needed and they didn't even address the second part, about information being withheld. I know from the record that information was being withheld, specifically by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And I know of instances at a lesser level where requests for information were refused, not directly from the secretary. I know one instance where Roswell Gilpatric asked for information from the Joint Chiefs and they told him no. He went to McNamara and asked what to do about it. McNamara wrote a note to Taylor and said, "Dear Max, can you help Ros?" That was it.

Pursley: He would have been the first to say that he was not naive enough to think he would always get everything that was known, but he apparently felt

satisfied that he was getting sufficient material to allow him to proceed in doing whatever analysis he was doing.

Goldberg: Or that he could get what he asked for when he demanded it. It's what he didn't know to demand that he didn't get.

Pursley: Both of those are very important considerations. It would be something short of mutiny and rebellion on the one hand, but on the other, you recognize that people are not going to be totally forthcoming with you all the time. In any large organization that is true, I think, not just this department.

Trask: I'd like to ask a question about Clifford. He came in at a critical time, there was a lot going on, Vietnam and other things. Did he come in running, or did he need a period of adjustment to the Defense Department and have a learning process?

Pursley: He came in running. To underscore your premise, there was a lot going on. In the week preceding McNamara's departure, we had the loss of a B-52 that was carrying nuclear weapons up in Greenland. We thought that that particular event was pretty important. Those were spectacular events when you lost an aircraft with nuclear weapons on board and when it wasn't clear that we could retrieve it before somebody else got it. That was an important event. Within hours after that happened, the *USS Pueblo*, the spy ship, was captured off the Korean coast. Everyone knew that was an important event. Within hours after that, the Tet offensive started. So by now nobody was worrying much about the B-52 and the nuclear weapons any more. A little vignette--the public affairs

lieutenant colonel who was dispatched to Greenland to cover the B-52 incident was told by the ASD (assistant secretary of defense) for public affairs that he wanted to be called every few hours to be briefed, and not to let anything impede that. By the time he got up there all the other events had started to unfold and Goulding wouldn't talk to him. Finally the colonel sent a telex asking if the United States was still in friendly hands. I'm saying that a number of crises were transpiring, and in the midst of it all we were getting a new secretary, whose clear job was to gain some kind of hold on what was going on in Southeast Asia and give the president the benefit of a new review. Those were four major things to handle at a time when we were shifting people. So the whole place was running at a very high RPM, if you can use that metaphor. At that point it would be almost impossible for someone to come in and not be caught up in that pace.

Goldberg: You didn't have to convince me of the worthwhileness of doing a book on the secretaries and how they work. Now I am more convinced than before. You are making the case very clearly that a book of this sort would be truly revealing, because it has not really been approached this way. You are getting down to the nitty gritty, how the secretary approaches the problems he faces.

Pursley: There were very different management styles and in some cases on somewhat similar kinds of issues, because the Southeast Asia conflict cut across the McNamara-Clifford-Laird line; but there were very different management approaches to similar types of problems, anyway. And there was a variety of other issues--the military departments, procurement, budget, issues concerning how

you go about the planning and programming and budgeting, the whole question of person-to person relationships. Laird, for example, was very direct and had distinct and personal one-on-one meetings frequently with a broad span of people. Other secretaries almost never did that--at least to the degree Laird did. It strikes me as interesting, and if one starts to draw judgments about which was more effective, there may be no answer to that, they could all be effective in their own way.

Goldberg: What it does reveal is the enormous complexity of the Defense process. This is important to bring to the attention of the public, because they don't know the nature of these problems and how much pressure is brought to bear and how much these people have to deal with all the time. If this is true of the secretary of defense, just think of the president. There have been some books of this sort on the presidency, but they are limited in the scope of what they can cover.

Pursley: This strikes me as being exceptionally important in talking about the secretary of defense. I'm not sure it was explicit, but it's been somewhat implicit with some of the secretaries I have known, that they come in with a specific agenda, in some cases a fairly narrow one. Clark Clifford had a very narrow agenda. His mandate was to get some kind of new perspective on the Southeast Asia situation so that he could give the president of the United States and this country a better idea on how to proceed and gain some resolution to the problem.

Goldberg: Laird also had a limited agenda.

Pursley: Laird had five or six items that he decided he was going to spend his time and attention on. Coming to grips with the Southeast Asian situation and effectively pursuing a resolution, that to a great degree Clark Clifford started, was paramount. A second issue for Melvin Laird was arms control or some start toward it. That may have seemed a little confusing to some and almost contradictory to others at a time when we were just getting into MIRVs in a big way. It would have seemed to some that rather than getting arms control we were getting an extrapolation of the problem and a great profusion of weapons. But Laird had arms control in his agenda. A third was the question of selective service and an all volunteer force. I think that he felt, and to a degree it was part of his character, after being told by so many people that it wasn't possible, that we would damn well give it a try. The more he thought about it and worked on it the more he was convinced that it was the right way to go. Another was the concept of total force. That was really born of the Nixon Doctrine to a great degree, not the idea of just of more effectively integrating the Reserves and National Guard with regulars, but out of the Nixon Doctrine that one would try to more effectively utilize our alliances and our working relationships with those around the world. In that way we would get a larger total effort in behalf of U.S. interests. To that end, Laird started working more closely and set a precedent for working closely with ministers of defense and even heads of state in various places like Japan, the Republic of Korea, and in Europe with a variety of people. He became close with a number of people in the NATO organization. He tried to extend this and had an

idea of meeting with Minister of Defense Grechko of the Soviet Union; but Henry Kissinger put the kibosh on that. He wanted no part of allowing that. Laird was taking the idea of total force into a whole new realm and he felt strongly about that.

Goldberg: He would include the Soviets in total force.

Pursley: Absolutely. If you can get them to back away from doing certain things, what could be more effective, in terms of national security. I think he was right. The last major item for Laird was the whole question of personnel--getting women and blacks more effectively integrated. That, to him, was a very important aspect of management.

Goldberg: Did he want to integrate homosexuals, too?

Pursley: He didn't step into that arena. But your point is well taken. And the fact that he picked good issues and things about which something could be done, limited the agenda to those, and worked very assiduously on those, meant that he could accomplish far more than leaders who tried to spread across a wide range of topics or take a passive, and very much a reactive, kind of role.

Goldberg: To get back to Clifford: What were his relations with President Johnson, Rusk, and Congress. You've already mentioned that he was very close to Johnson. Anything in particular you might want to mention about that relationship?

Pursley: There are a great many things. Clifford's book shows that he had a strong and dynamic relationship with presidents, not just with Johnson, but going

back to Truman. Clark Clifford was proud of the opportunities he had had. He had served a number of presidents in a variety of roles. Being secretary of defense was just an extension to him of a long history of having served at the elbow of the president and on important national issues. That service, again, went back to President Truman. The formulation of the National Security Act of 1947--Clifford was very much involved. The whole question of the state of Israel--the fact that Clifford took a position on that against George Marshall showed that the relationships that Clifford had with the presidents were important and influential. His relationship with Lyndon Johnson could be accurately characterized as a love/hate relationship. Not so much on Clifford's part, because he had great respect for Lyndon Johnson and was eager to serve him in any way he could. But Johnson would encourage Clifford's commentary, want his counsel, and at the same time when he became a bit piqued would turn away, shun, and ignore Clifford for days at a time.

Goldberg: That was typical of his behavior.

Pursley: It probably was, I could only see President Johnson through Clifford's eyes.

Goldberg: Generally he didn't do to Clifford what he did to others, really abuse them and put them down, did he?

Pursley: Not specifically. But to indicate how far that kind of a relationship might be taken: on inauguration day, January 20, 1969, after the inauguration, Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird went to Clifford's house for a little brunch and

reception. That's fairly instructive, showing the relationship and the closeness of two individuals. If it is the last thing you do officially in Washington before you jump on the airplane and go to the ranch, it shows a closeness and kinship that was special. Johnson apparently had thought that Clifford deserved the Medal of Freedom, the highest award given to a civilian in this government. Yet he could not bring himself to have that ceremony at the White House. During the course of the brunch he asked Clifford to go upstairs and in the bedroom handed him the Medal of Freedom. This was to recognize that Clifford had served well and honorably, but the ceremony was not in public and certainly not in the White House. President Johnson couldn't bring himself to do that. That is a metaphor of the kind of relationship they had. And yet there was something in the whole relationship that always kept them together and productive--yet a love-hate characteristic carried through right to the end.

Trask: Can you explain why he wouldn't do this publicly?

Pursley: I think that probably he felt that the kind of counsel that Clifford had given, particularly on Southeast Asia, somehow was part of the scuttling process of a presidency. In regard to the material that Clifford had provided leading up to the March 31, 1968, speech in which Johnson announced that he wasn't going to run again, there were some testy exchanges. Clifford would never have suggested the president should not run again; but he forcefully argued that the president should adopt new policies in Southeast Asia. The whole question of negotiations, bombing halts, were all part of that process and that chemistry. I think that

Johnson, very much as Nixon later, felt that people weren't serving him well, that there was a chance perhaps still for a military victory, a chance to assert U.S. prominence and domination in certain areas. But the president seemed to feel there were people who were somehow subverting that view. Maybe the president was just being a human being and didn't want to hear all the bad news. As you indicated earlier, Al, President Johnson apparently treated others somewhat similarly, but his relationship with Clifford was closer than with most other people in the city.

Goldberg: Do you think he kicked Fortas around?

Pursley: I would guess so. Maybe not as much.

Goldberg: They go back a long way. But on the other hand, his record does indicate that he was very inconsistent in his dealings with people, especially those who worked for him. He would both put his arm around them and kick them in the pants almost at the same time. He was given to abuse and suspicion of people who worked for him.

Pursley: But it was not unusual for the president to intercept Clark Clifford early in the morning coming into work and then we wouldn't see Clifford for one or two days at a time. The president would just keep him in the White House, to talk through issues. It was not unusual for the president to call Clifford Friday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. and say, "Grab your bag, we're going to the ranch." He would usually call me in and say, "We have to go down and look at those G--D---

cows again." It was not Clifford's favorite activity. But Johnson liked to have him around to talk issues.

Goldberg: The president obviously valued him.

Pursley: And there were times when he would shun Clifford, when Clifford couldn't reach the president.

Trask: I want to make sure I understand what you are saying here. In a way, Johnson blamed Clifford somewhat for the decisions that he had to make?

Pursley: In reading President Johnson's materials later, or interpreting through the people that I had contact with, including Clifford himself, his commentary about what he thought the president's reaction was, I would say yes. I am making an inference. I would say that perhaps that is not just Lyndon Johnson; I think Richard Nixon had some of the same feelings about Melvin Laird.

Goldberg: And others.

Pursley: Yes, and Bob Pursley was one.

Goldberg: Henry Kissinger is another; Nixon certainly had mixed feelings about him. He valued him but made obviously invidious remarks about him to others, and treated him rather badly. I guess it goes with the territory.

Pursley: It must. There are very difficult decisions to be made, and it's a difficult position for a president to be in. One can understand that even getting good analyses must be a hard thing to accept.

Goldberg: Did Clifford have much to do with Rusk?

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Pursley: I'd say not a lot. The two got along very well and had high respect for one another, but except in meetings at the White House, there was not a lot of dialogue. I don't recall an instance when Rusk came over to the Defense Department when Clifford was there, and it was rare for Clifford to go to the State Department.

Goldberg: There was much more of a relationship between McNamara and Rusk.

Pursley: Yes. That's not to say that there wasn't a lot of activity between the State Department and the Defense Department at other levels. There was a lot of activity, and very effective, I thought.

Trask: What about Clifford's relationships with Congress? Did he testify much?

Pursley: Yes, but by today's standards it wouldn't seem like much, because the committee's structures were different then, in terms of numbers of committees and subcommittees, in structure of what the party leaders could do in their persuasion with the parties. People didn't testify as much 25 or 30 years ago as they do now, for a variety of reasons. Clifford spent a lot of time on the Hill and he prepared very strongly and deeply for that. He didn't do anything without thinking about it a lot. He testified a great deal and he did it seriously.

Trask: Generally, were his congressional relationships good?

Pursley: I think so.

Trask: No significant problems along the way?

Pursley: I don't recall any significant ones. He had great regard for the party leaders. He probably would not have gone out of his way to cultivate people in the

Republican ranks the way someone like Laird would have in the Democratic ranks. But at the same time he tried to avoid the whole business of creating antagonisms. He had some special people that he was particularly close to, like Senator Symington, who was one of his closest friends. Those kind of things helped, as well.

Trask: A few questions about issues other than Vietnam. There still was the problem of the Soviet Union. Did Clifford have to deal with that very much, outside of the Vietnam context? What was his view of the threat?

Pursley: He dealt with it in a number of ways and in a variety of forms. One was Southeast Asia; another was the frequent NATO meetings, the form in which the Soviet threat was always paramount. Within the NATO structure was the Nuclear Planning Group [NPG], for example, which McNamara had started for tutorial purposes among our NATO members. Clifford participated actively in that kind of thing. He was not doing the NPG in the same way McNamara was, almost as a tutorial, but he enjoyed the activity of those NATO meetings and forums. He liked people like Denis Healey, for example, obviously a good politician as well as a good strong thinker. He relished that kind of activity. Clifford made a trip to Berlin while he was secretary; that short stay was perhaps not one of the most popular things one could do as secretary. Things were still tense at that time. Those were things that he enjoyed doing and did effectively and well. Clifford followed fairly actively and accurately the strategic balance. He was something of a student of where we were in terms of various kinds of strategic

weaponry, and used the weapons litany frequently in remarks, even off-the-cuff remarks, about the status of the strategic balance, what the threat really was, what it amounted to, and what the implications were.

Goldberg: Did he have a specific view of the threat?

Pursley: Yes, and he expressed it fairly strongly. He thought the United States was still in a very strong position and that strategically we had the upper hand and could put great pressure on the Soviet Union apropos of what later transpired through that strategic balance. Probably four or five years later, when MIRVs had come about and the large strategic weapons the Soviets were developing came on the scene, much of the Clifford dialogue would have had to be revised substantially. In part, that was because we were devoting such a large part of the whole Defense budget, nearly a third, to Southeast Asia; we were losing some of the momentum in maintaining the strategic balance. Clifford talked about Soviet affairs frequently, studied them, and paid a lot of attention to them. If you go back through his press conferences and speeches, and he gave quite a few as secretary of defense, you almost always find the strategic balance being part of that dialogue.

Goldberg: If you do write about the secretaries, we have all the public statements of all of the secretaries, from the beginning down to date. If you need them, they are available to you.

Pursley: I don't know if I would ever undertake that task. It would take a lot of energy. I just have the feeling that the story or some analysis of the role of the secretary of defense could be useful.

Goldberg: Our oldest author is 82 years old. Don't be discouraged yet.

Trask: One other question: Did Clifford agree with the strategic policy that was identified with McNamara?

Pursley: The short answer would be "yes." One could go ahead and further say, concerning the strategic balance, that there were secondary or tertiary kinds of issues such as: What kind of follow-on submarines are we going to have? What should the design characteristics and the deployment characteristics and the timetable and cost of those be? Clifford became somewhat involved in those kinds of issues, but he left most of that detail to Paul Nitze. I can recall on occasion in the 8:30 meetings the subject of nuclear submarine procurement would be one of the topics discussed, but typically that would have been within Paul Nitze's (deputy secretary of defense) purview.

The whole question of Rickover was a different thing. I can recall that subject coming up, as it did, I'm sure, with every secretary of defense until Admiral Rickover finally left.

Goldberg: He didn't leave. It took John Lehman to pull him out.

Pursley: For the record, Clifford, like anyone else who had been secretary before and for some time after, also dealt with the Rickover issue.

Goldberg: Some decided not to deal with it.

Pursley: They tried, but no one dealt with it very effectively.

Trask: What did Clifford do, or try?

Pursley: The topic came up a number of times. I think they tried to put certain constraints on the realm in which Rickover worked, both from a policy standpoint and a public statements standpoint. It's usually those two kinds of things. I don't think anyone ever did anything very effective there.

Trask: Did the Navy resist this?

Pursley: The Navy didn't, the Navy kind of cheered it on, because the Navy was trying to find some way to restrict Rickover, also. It was everybody against Rickover.

Goldberg: Not certain congressmen and senators, though. Without them he couldn't have made it.

Pursley: That's right; that was his constituency.

Trask: What about the defense budget? Did Clifford work much on that?

Pursley: He worked some on it, yes, the broad parameters, but not in the broad detail that Bob McNamara or Melvin Laird did. Clifford was very much attuned to the broad general structure of our national security establishment, certainly sufficiently so that he was well armed when he went to the Hill to testify or to defend certain positions.

Trask: Were there any problems during Clifford's short period relating to interservice rivalry and competition?

Pursley: None comes immediately to mind. The carryover F-111 issue was somewhat there, because the plane was just being introduced by the Air Force into Southeast Asia. That was at the time when the F-111B was really taken out of the program as a General Dynamics/Pratt Whitney product and was being shifted over into the Grumman arena as a new airplane, the F-14. There were strains involved in that between the Air Force and the Navy, but I wouldn't say it was in any overt, deeply problematic way. I can recall a time or two when those kinds of things came up in the Monday morning staff meetings, but that wasn't a forum in which anything would surface that was egregious in any way. I can't think of any instances right off hand where service rivalries surfaced in a way that became a major issue. To some degree, I think that attests to the kind of team that McNamara had put together and the kinds of people who were in the Defense Department, and the fact that they had worked together for quite an extended period of time. When you look through the Harold Browns, the Paul Ignatiuses, and the Johnny Fosters, these people had worked together very effectively for quite some time, so that while there was never unanimity of opinion, perhaps, on any single issue, there were also very few cases where they came at each other in a subjective or counter-productive way.

Goldberg: It wasn't them so much as the uniformed people.

Pursley: That's a fair point. Among the uniformed people the chairman, Buz Wheeler, had been around for quite an extended period of time and, I think, had the respect and the regard of people in uniform and out.

Goldberg: I am thinking of within the services, at lesser levels. There were strong feelings about weapons and other things. They represented a kind of interservice competition. It is always there to some extent.

Pursley: I agree with that. But nothing surfaced and came to the attention of the secretary. The generals' and admirals' cauldron was bubbling, as it always does.

An example, and this was not so much a service to service situation as a personality phenomenon, involved General Abrams, just after he had been selected to replace General Westmoreland. He had not taken the position yet, it was in 1968. It was very soon before Abrams would have replaced Westmoreland as high commander in Southeast Asia. You may remember this incident. It caught Clifford's eye and it was one of the two times I ever saw him angry. Some underling in Southeast Asia had sent a memorandum that surfaced somewhere here in the Washington area suggesting that our military was not as careful concerning casualties as it might be, nor were we teaching the South Vietnamese to be as careful as they might be about civilian casualties. Clifford asked Gen. Wheeler as chairman of the Joint Chiefs to look into it and Wheeler apparently sent some note out that Abrams intercepted. Abrams took great exception to the fact that anyone would even suggest that he or anyone else in command out there would be taking less than strong views and practices toward civilian casualties and sent back a testy note to Wheeler saying not to call his integrity into question on the thing. Abrams was the one who had been in charge of training the South Vietnamese. The tone of the Abrams response sent Clifford into orbit. Abrams

came as close to being fired even before he took office as could possibly happen. Clifford was ready to immediately terminate any relationship with Abrams. He thought the tone of the note and the fact that he had even had the temerity to send it was far beyond the pale. I even got my chance to put in two cents: Not to do anything quickly, but to think about it first. Wheeler sent a note back to Abrams saying that he had a tremendous problem. I'm sure he suggested to Abrams that he make amends. Abrams sent back a personal note of apology to Clifford. Clifford cooled down, but that was a close call for Abrams and for the United States. Abrams was a superb military leader whom we desperately needed.

Goldberg: It's interesting to note the high regard in which Abrams was held by most people.

Pursley: Absolutely, and later Clifford developed a high regard for him. It would have been a tragedy if he had been replaced in Southeast Asia. Occasionally criticism just touches you wrong, as it did in this case with Abrams. The second case was on a Saturday morning in late spring 1968 when the sister ship to the *Pueblo* had lost its engines and was drifting into Havana Harbor. This wasn't too long after we lost the *Pueblo*, and this was an identical ship to the *Pueblo*. The Cubans could have picked up the ship, but they didn't find it. We apparently got the thing hooked up to a friendly vessel and got it in tow, but the tow ship wasn't powerful enough to rescue it. The incident had been going on for three or four hours before someone came and told me about what was going on. We ran in and

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told Clifford. When he found out that it had been going on that long and he hadn't been told he confronted that captain and chewed him out strongly. If anything had happened, the president probably would have been the first to know, through the White House Situation Room, and Clifford would have been sitting around looking silly. Clifford was really furious. Those are the only two incidents that I recall surfacing under Clark Clifford's tenure where there was some real bone of contention. That's different from interservice rivalry; but it represents a general kind of category that requires secretary of defense attention. The crisis finally got resolved when they got enough ships hooked up to it and pulled it out of [REDACTED] after 24-36 hours. The ship was large and we had only small vessels to hook up with it.

OSD 3.3(b)(1)(6)

Trask: Were the Cubans aware of this?

Pursley: That was the question. We were scrambling around through NSA to find out, and apparently they had been asleep at the switch and had not realized that they might have had a prize sitting in their laps.

Goldberg: What would we have done if they had gone after the ship?

Pursley: I don't know.

Goldberg: Was any consideration given to it at the time?

Pursley: We were standing around during the day talking, but by that time we had enough forces we could have probably gotten it back.

Trask: [REDACTED] OSD 3.3(b)(1)(6)

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Pursley: [REDACTED]

Trask: [REDACTED]

Pursley: [REDACTED]

OSD 3.3(b)(1),(6)

Trask: Was there any publicity about this at the time?

Pursley: I don't think it has surfaced anywhere.

Goldberg: There are some records around.

Pursley: I'm sure there are, but it never got into the public arena, at least not to my knowledge. It is an interesting thing to speculate about. Lord knows, we didn't need to have two such surveillance ships in somebody's custody.

Trask: I would like to raise one more question briefly before we go to China, and that is the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968 and how that impacted on the Pentagon.

Pursley: That was very dramatic. President Johnson was about to go to Europe, as I recall. We seemed to be going down a course in possible extension of what started at Glassboro in discussion about arms control, so that a variety of vectors that were being planned for and brought about were at play here. The whole idea of trying to coax the Soviet Union into taking a more active role in intervening against the North Vietnamese or at least in pulling back on the support that they were giving the North Vietnamese was very much on people's minds. When Czechoslovakia was invaded almost out of the blue, it threw a wrench into a lot of things that people had been counting on aggressively, at least in the Democratic party in an election year, to hold up as signs of major progress and foreign policy

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working very effectively. All of a sudden all that was gone. That was a dramatic and large explosion right in the middle of a tense year.

Goldberg: What effect did it have on the Pentagon, on Clifford?

Pursley: I think he felt a sense of great disappointment that all the prospects we had thought to be at hand were put into abeyance at best and maybe that we would have to discard a lot of the cards we thought we might be able to play. So it had a big impact.

Trask: How did the Defense Department react in practical terms?

Pursley: I don't recall specifically. It would not have been unreasonable to have thought in terms of alert changes or what the specific NATO plans were.

What are the other issues you will want to talk about regarding Clark Clifford? I can be thinking about those and we can schedule another talk next week.

Goldberg: The role of civil disturbances in 1968; you've already mentioned arms control and disarmament. Otherwise, his major achievements as secretary.

Pursley: You might want to add to it the election, because there were certain things involved there; i.e., the whole question of whether there were surreptitious contacts being made by one party or another to the South Vietnamese to employ them, either through Madame Chennault or others, to in some way affect the way in which they were thinking about things prior to the election. That was a pretty important issue and might have been a game maker or breaker in the election.

Ultimately, of course, with Henry Kissinger and various people saying they didn't

play certain roles, and Sy Hersh's allegations that maybe they did, the issue seems not only important, but unresolved.

Goldberg: A double agent role.

Pursley: Or the very fact that anybody would have thought about it at all. And then the question of whether the Democrats should or should not have used that in support of Hubert Humphrey's candidacy. It may have been pretty important, and nobody will ever know the answer to these things. We may add that, because the election was very much on Clark Clifford's mind.

If you don't mind, we can recess and pick up at that point.

Trask: We want to talk in detail about the Laird period in the next interview.