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**ARLEIGH BURKE**  
**CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS, 1955-61**

BETHESDA, MARYLAND

NOVEMBER 9, 1983

INTERVIEWER: MAURICE MATLOFF

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Matloff: This is an oral history interview with Admiral Arleigh Burke held in Admiral Burke's home in Bethesda, Maryland, on November 9, 1983.

ADM Burke, if you don't mind, we will focus on your role as Chief of Naval Operations and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in this interview. But, first, I should like to direct your attention to certain factors in your very varied background and experience relevant to the history of OSD and national security policy in the post-World War II era. Let's begin with the movement for unification of the services after WWII. How did you view the National Security Act of 1947 as it affected military organization, and were you consulted on your views before that act was passed? Any recollections that you may have of your dealings with Forrestal in that connection that would be of interest. Those are really three questions in one, but what do you recall about the unification act of 1947, your role in it, and any relations and reactions you had to it?

Burke: Let's start with Forrestal. During World War I I was very lucky to have had a great many different types of combat experience. First, I was involved in surface ships, in destroyers, and then I became chief of staff to Admiral Mitscher, who commanded Task Force 58, the largest naval combat force that had ever been assembled. Carrier warfare was a brand new type of warfare, and we had to develop it as we went along. After the war I went with ADM Mitscher again when he was in the Atlantic fleet. After he died, I became a member of the General Board, which was an organization of very senior officers who were about to retire. The Navy wanted to get their ideas, thoughts, and wisdom before they retired. There were nine people

on this board. During the war it had become dormant. But after the war Mr. Forrestal decided that he wanted it to become an active force again and he wanted some younger people put into it to reactivate it. I was one of those. We were concerned with the questions that Mr. Forrestal, then Secretary of the Navy, asked us. I had known Mr. Forrestal during the war and I admired him. He had presented a presidential unit citation to my squadron when it was brought back here after the war. He used to call me up now and then, not for consultation, but usually to ask one or two questions, sometimes personal questions about what to do. So I knew him pretty well. I'd like to expand that just a little bit. He was a distraught man at one time during the latter part of his life. His portrait was being painted by Al Murray. Murray called me and said, "I painted this man's face three times. I get a distraught look in his painting that I don't see in his face, but it comes out every time. He's tense; he needs somebody to talk to. Would you mind coming over and sitting with him and talk to him while I'm painting?" I replied, "He'll move." "That's all right," Murray said, "I can catch it." So I did. It helped a little bit. But still Al Murray could never get that look out of his face. I knew Mr. Forrestal pretty well. He asked me a lot of questions for offhand, off the top of my head suggestions. In 1947 I was on the General Board. I had had some concern about our organization of the military before the war. I asked Mr. Forrestal one time, in talking about something else, if he thought that we ought to examine that a little bit. The Navy had not done anything at all on

this. He said, "Why don't you write a paper on it?" So, I went back to see the Chief of the General Board, Admiral Towers, who said, "Fine, you write it, and we'll comment on it." So I wrote a paper for the General Board on national security, in which I proposed to have a national security council and other things. It was a very rough paper. As I look back on it, and read it again, it is a terrible paper. But it had some good ideas. A one man show on a job like that was impossible. There was also a time limit. But when that study was written, it was shown to Mr. Forrestal by his aides. He sent for me again. I think that that was possibly one of the reasons why they adopted a National Security Council and some other measures providing for more study of strategic problems before they arose and better understanding among the services.

Matloff: Did that paper, by chance, go forward?

Burke: Yes, it went forward, but it was a very poor paper. It did not have very much of interest unless people were looking for something. The papers that are usually submitted to the Department of Defense now are very well organized papers. But most of them are practically meaningless, because by the time they get so well organized, the guts of them have been taken out. So that paper was a very rough paper; the important parts were still in it, but it was not well written. It was a paper that you could read to get an idea. But Mr. Forrestal did read it that way, and so did a few other people, his associates. As I say, that paper was submitted in 1947. I was called on to write a couple of minor memoranda

for other people, mostly by Forrest Sherman, who was also a good friend of mine and whom I liked very much. He took some of those papers with him when he was talking with the Air Force. He went down to Key West conferences and similar meetings and so I was generally familiar with the problem, but was never a part of the organization dealing with it. At the end of my tour, in the summer or end of 1947, I went to sea for a year. I went as captain of a ship, a cruiser, into the Mediterranean, and then around Africa, and down to Latin America. So I was completely out of touch. The mail would come now and then. I came back about Christmas time in 1948.

Matloff: The act had already been passed.

Burke: The act had been passed and was operating. The important part that Mr. Forrestal wanted was to have policy and general supervision and not a rigid organization. That is an anathema to Navy people. The Army wants things rigid. We do not. The reason is that it doesn't work for the Navy. There are too many circumstances that cannot be foreseen, like weather and other matters. But Forrestal's idea on that, I thought, was very sound. He wanted a sort of a fatherly oversight, with his having a strong voice in policy. Of course, a president has to have the decisive voice, but he [Forrestal] would have a strong voice in policy and all policy matters would be considered by him. There would be no end-running on policy. But he didn't want detailed administrative duties assigned to him in the Department of Defense. He had proposed, I think, to handle any problems that came up in a gentlemanly sort of a way. I

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mean that he would discuss them with people. He knew that they had strong opinions, and that those opinions had great merit, even if they were widely diverse, because these were reasonable men, who had had great experience in in differing types of warfare. His idea, I think, was to have a discussion on these things so that they would get to the points where the differences lay, and then try to investigate the background of how, why, and what were those differences? What were the merits? Was there some way to compromise? But, quite frequently, there is no way to compromise some of these problems. You have to accept one way or another. He wanted a small group, a small staff, primarily to consider policies. Of course, that is fundamental to any war plan. That is why, in the '47 act--I'm talking from memory, and I haven't reviewed this for a long long time and so I may make some errors--there was a restriction to 200 people in the staff. There were, I think, only 3 assistants to the Secretary of Defense. Those assistants were in the policy field in general, and were advisers to the Secretary of Defense. They had no direct responsibilities themselves. One of those people was McNeil, responsible for the budget. He was a naval officer, from the supply corps, very good, extremely conscientious, absolutely trustworthy. When he told you something, you could start acting, because it was going to turn out that way. He wouldn't tell you one thing and then something would be different when the piece of paper came out. I mention him because budget and money are the basic cause of difficulties among the services. Everybody wants the money, and nobody thinks that he is getting

the proper amount. Money is being given to the other people who don't have as nearly as good a reason for having it as your organization. So McNeil had a very difficult job. He was most apt to be the one who would start to take an executive position of making decisions that were irrevocable. But he was pretty good at that. Once in a while he would get irritated, but usually he did not. It ran pretty well, but budgets are built from the ground up, a little bit at a time, and they grow like weeds. And there were great differences of opinion among the services as to the most probable type of war.

Matloff: Can we hold that for a little while? We'll get into the discussion of strategy and budgeting later on, so I think we can perhaps wrap it up there. I take it--if I'm getting the correct impression--that on the whole you were not dissatisfied with the National Security Act of 1947. Is that a correct impression?

Burke: That's correct, except that I was concerned. I was concerned--not much, because I was a Captain. So it was not much concern to me, but there was some concern that it would be like any other bureaucratic organization, that it would grow, and it would gather all the power it could and it would make arbitrary decisions, without understanding of what the hell it was doing.

Matloff: You had some concern, some fears about the potential?

Burke: It could be run well, but it could also be distorted.

Matloff: Let me, if I may, direct your attention to the other association which is always identified with your name--you've been interviewed so

many times on this, so I'll try to keep my questions brief--your role as OP-23, as Assistant Chief of Naval Operations for Operational Research and Policy. Could you tell us, somewhat in a nutshell, how this came about? how you got this assignment, what the problem was, and what you learned from your experience with OP-23? I know that books have been written about this.

Burke: And all of them wrong.

Matloff: Perhaps this is a good chance to put it on the record.

Burke: It was largely accidental, because I came back to the States in December of '48. I had had a command at sea, and so I was vulnerable and available. Although I didn't know it, my ship was going out of commission. So the big reason why I was chosen for that job was that I was available. But the other, and subsidiary, reason was that I had been a trouble shooter for so long that when they needed a fall guy, I could go. I didn't mind that kind of a job. So as a result of the two together, being available, and having had quite a bit of experience in various types of naval warfare, I got called. I knew ADM Denfeld. I was called on Christmas Eve in Philadelphia. I'll never forget that.

Matloff: This would be in 1948?

Burke: '48. ADM [Charles] Wellborn called me and said, "You're to be relieved of your command. I want to know when you can come down here." I said, "Look, I can't just walk away from a command. I've got to find a relief. Somebody's got to relieve me." He said, "I want you down here just as fast as you possibly can get here." I thought it was temporary



duty at first, but it turned out to be permanent duty. So I got down there in about three days, which was remarkable, considering everything. I went in to see ADM Wellborn first. I got down there in the late evening, about 8 o'clock. Wellborn was still in his office. So I went to see him. He explained to me that they were starting a new organization, that nobody understood this unification business very much, that nobody was particularly interested in the thing, and that he would have to take me up the next morning to see the Chief of Naval Operations, who would explain my duties. The next morning I went in with ADM Wellborn to see ADM Denfeld, and ADM Denfeld gave me about a five-minute briefing of what the situation was. He said that there was a big surge, not of unification, but of merger and that they were fearful that they were in danger of losing all naval aviation and the Marine Corps. He showed me the various papers, and said, "We've had an organization here that didn't do a good job and didn't get into the proper things. So you're to take it over." I asked, "How many people do I get?" "The people you need," he replied. I asked, "What are the specific orders?" "I don't know the specific orders," he said. "I don't have anything; whatever needs to be done, you do it." They were in desperate trouble, because if the papers had been approved, the Navy would have been gutted. So I went back to my office. I had about five, six, or seven officers, and about the same number of enlisted men. That was it. Of course, you are a little cautious on something like that. Those were big problems. I was a captain, a young officer. There were a lot of things that I didn't know. My people were commanders,

but we were very young, and we didn't know the opinions of the senior officers very well. They had general ideas, but not specifics. So I had no specific direction and what was done in OP-23 was done primarily by my own volition. Nobody told me to do these things; nobody told me not to do them. So I was fully responsible. That was fine and good. The first thing I had to do was develop a policy that all naval officers believed in--which we did. Then I had to find out whether there was any basis for the charges that our naval aviation and our Marine Corps were about to be gutted. There was some basis. The steps were being taken leading to that and it could go pretty fast. So it was a question of survival. That was the origin of OP-23.

Matloff: Then this got you back into the unification problem again?

Burke: Yes, I was in it real deep then.

Matloff: How did this get involved with the B-36 controversy? I take it that one began to lead to the other.

Burke: They were interconnected. You see, that came about in the differences of opinion in the fight over aviation. The Air Force at that time was run primarily by the bomber command, whose leaders believed in Douhet's theory that if you can terrorize a country enough, you can win a war quickly. They based that on the very successful actions that Hitler had in Poland. Their error was that that was a combined operation of both ground warfare and air warfare, but the air people assigned all the credit to the bombing, and not to the German occupation forces. And Douhet had had a great influence. The bomber command, or the bomber adherents, believed

that if they were given enough bombers, they could very quickly destroy the enemy's will and capability to fight and that nothing else was needed--no ground forces, no navy. But to do that, they had to have lots of money, and they had to have control of the air, and the initial thing--control of all air forces in the United States--so no need for carriers. Our carriers had been cut down to four at that time. When we were in the war with Japan, if we had less than ten carriers on the line, we were commencing to feel a little naked. Four carriers weren't very much, and there were threats of more cuts. (That figure may be six at the time, I don't know, and the threat to four, somewhere around there.) In the first proposals that were put out, the air force would have control not only over all military air but also all civilian air. That was the initial paper. I don't know whether that was the official paper or not, but they soon dropped that because the civilian part didn't work and wouldn't apply, and they saw that they were getting too much opposition. But people didn't seem to care very much about the military part. Our budget was being cut drastically, particularly in air. It was quite obvious that something had to be done pretty fast. We thought that the people were not looking at facts, that it was purely just to get control. We in the Navy had inherited the problem between the Army and its air force. The Army just gave up on and did mistreat its air force. But we got caught in the middle on that thing, and we were caught in ignorance.

Matloff: So I take it that operating with the OP-23 problems you became involved also with the B-36 controversy. One flowed from the other.

Burke: It did, because the B-36 had faults in it. The defects were known, but they were ignored. For example, Mr. Symington put out an order, not at the beginning, but some time along the line, that---I may have this a little wrong too---the B-36 could fly ten thousand miles at ten thousand feet with ten thousand pounds of bombs, or something like that. Any one of those he could do, but he couldn't do them all together. But that was an order that he put out to the Air Force: these are the characteristics of the B-36. It's a damn lie. Then we found that there were a lot of people in the other services, particularly in the opposition, and not only in the services, that were saying that the B-36 is the ultimate weapon. It wasn't. It had a lot of known faults. Then some of our Navy people became impatient. I insisted that our people would fight with the truth, as much as we knew how, that we would fight desperately, but we would believe in what we had to say. We would never suggest anything that we couldn't actually believe. I'm accusing the Air Force people of saying things that not all of them believed in either. So some of our people went out to do what they felt that the air people were doing to us--talking to people, not telling quite the truth, exaggerating things. And then somebody wrote a letter. [Cedric] Worth, a civilian aide in the Navy's secretariat, wrote a letter, which was unsigned, and gave it to a congressman. Of course, that letter had a lot of charges in it. The charges had some basis in fact, but were not provable, and some of them did not have basis in fact. It was a scurrilous letter. That was absolutely the wrong thing to do. It got

the Navy into a lot of trouble. It got us into a lot of trouble. We got involved in that thing.

Matloff: It's still OP-23?

Burke: Still OP-23. We didn't have anything to do with that particular thing, but we got called. The investigation was not really an investigation of the B-36's, but an investigation of the service arrangements.

Matloff: This was the congressional investigation?

Burke: The congressional investigation. Mr. Vinson's armed forces investigation.

Matloff: Would you in this connection tell us a little about the incident of protective custody, which has been written about in some accounts of this matter?

Burke: I never heard it called protective custody, but I know exactly what you mean.

Matloff: However you would describe the incident.

Burke: Mr. Matthews was Secretary of the Navy. Mr. Matthews had become Secretary of the Navy because he knew absolutely nothing about government service, and nothing about the Navy, at all. Mr. Matthews was chosen by Mr. Johnson because he was a very ardent, respectable individual.

Matloff: This is Louis Johnson, who was then Secretary of Defense?

Burke: Louis Johnson the Secretary of Defense. Mr. Sullivan had resigned, because Mr. Johnson had cut out the United States carrier it was building without even consulting him. That was the guts of our future. Mr. Sullivan resigned, and Mr. Johnson wanted a pliant, respected individual who would follow his direction, and he had to have somebody pretty ignorant

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to do that. He chose Mr. Matthews, who was just that kind of a man. Mr. Matthews wanted the job very badly. It was an important job. He didn't know anything about the Navy; he didn't know how to ask; and he grew into his shell, because he would come down with Mr. Johnson's ideas in the Department of Defense and, of course, nobody in the Navy liked him. So Mr. Matthews became isolated. He isolated himself, and he opposed most everything that naval officers did. He didn't trust anybody. After he had become ambassador to Ireland, he changed. He found out what had happened to him and why and he was very contrite, but it was too late. Mr. Matthews never understood the Navy, or what the world problem was all about.

Matloff: What were your relations with Secretary of Defense Johnson and President Truman, in the midst of this controversy? Do you recall any interplay there?

Burke: Yes. I had known Mr. Johnson, who had been the head of the American Legion, casually in that connection. He was a big man at that time, and I was not, and so I never saw him, except in a group. However, he wanted to get this thing through. Mr. Truman had probably told him, "You stop this damn fight among the services." He probably knew Mr. Truman's ideas, which were generally Army ideas. I mean centralized control; everything flows down from the top; innovations can't be executed without approval from way up. Mr. Truman probably overstated himself a little. He was liable to do that. So Mr. Johnson got the bit in his teeth and went further, probably, than Mr. Truman

expected. But we had no cordial relations. He may not have known I was alive. I don't know.

Matloff: Did he play a part in this incident, when your staff couldn't even see its own papers?

Burke: No; Mr. Matthews did. Mr. Matthews ordered the Inspector General of the Navy. First, there was a leak. We knew the dangers of leaks and we had taken great precautions in OP-23 that there would be no leaks from us. I was confident that there wasn't. But there was a leak either of a paper or on a conference in Mr. Matthews' office. He sent for the Inspector General to tell him to run down that leak. Then he did a thing that he should not have done. He said, "It's probably OP-23." Or maybe he said that it was OP-23. And he also said, "I want it stopped right away." Along about 5 or 5:30 in the afternoon, he came up with a flock of Marines and ADM [Allan R.] McCann, who was Inspector General, and called me out into the passageway. By that time I was in the Pentagon, on the fifth floor, and in the E ring. He said, "I want you to leave all papers alone. Everybody who is here stays here, until you are released. You will not touch any papers; you will not converse with one another; you will not answer any telephones; you are incommunicado. You don't talk to anybody, including your own people." He had a man stationed at every door, at every desk. I don't know how many men. We were held absolutely incommunicado. After he got his setup arranged, he called our people up one at a time up for a conference, an investigation. He grilled them very hard. It was a difficult grilling. They grilled

women, who would come back crying. Men would come back hard-faced. Nobody said anything, because they were told they could not. They were told again, "Don't discuss this with anybody,"--and they didn't. So we didn't know what the hell was going on. We never asked after a couple of times. But that was entirely due to Mr. Matthews, we found out later. I kept asking all the time, "Tell us what you want; we'll show you where it is, if we've got it; ask us--what the hell are you looking for?" They didn't tell us.

Matloff: Was he reflecting, you think, Louis Johnson's, or President Truman's ideas?

Burke: No, no, it wasn't Louis Johnson.

Matloff: Purely Matthews on his own?

Burke: I think so. It may have been, although Mr. Matthews, who would make decisions like that, may have done it without knowing what he was doing. He may have talked with Mr. Johnson, but I don't think so. Of course, I don't really know.

Matloff: Let me just wind up our discussion of OP-23 and ask you, were there any permanent effects on the Navy resulting from OP-23?

Burke: I'm sure there were, and I'm sure that some of them were adverse, because we were vilified in the press. It was done by our sister services. They planted a hell of a lot of stories, some of which we could trace. It was a nice hatchet job, which is why I'm a little cynical about a lot of things. It didn't do the Navy any good, except that if it hadn't been for OP-23, we wouldn't have a Navy now. I'm sure of that. I'm sure



that if we hadn't fought like hell, we would have lost our aviation, the Marine Corps would have been cut to a token, and we wouldn't have had any control over naval warfare at all. But the sad part about it was that the Navy was correctly criticized for writing these papers that it should not have done. That didn't help at all.

Matloff: Let me direct your attention now to your appointment as Chief of Naval Operations, and obviously with it, as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Do you recall the circumstances of that appointment? What instructions or directives, written or oral, were given to you, and by whom? What role did the President and the Secretary of Defense play in orienting or guiding you when you were given that assignment?

Burke: This was a very unusual event, too. I was in command of destroyers in the Atlantic fleet, and I was at sea in a new frigate down in the Caribbean. We were just leaving Havana, I think, to go to Key West, when I got a dispatch from ADM Radford to please call him on the telephone as soon as I arrived in Key West, and I did. He said, "I want you to come to Washington as soon as possible." I replied, "I can't do it; I'm at sea; I want to inspect Key West, and it's very inconvenient." He said, "That doesn't matter; get out there." I asked, "How?" He responded, "Commercial." He said, "Come to my office as soon as you get here. Take an aide with you. Call me, as soon as you make your transportation arrangements, when you will be here." So I did that, and I came, of course. I went to see ADM Radford, and he said, "The Secretary of the Navy wants to see you." The Secretary of the Navy was then Charlie Thomas,

whom I knew slightly. I went up to see the Secretary of the Navy, who said, "I want you to give a briefing to Mr. Wilson and to the President on carriers." I replied "Mr. Secretary, I'm not prepared to give that briefing off the top of my head. I have no charts." He responded, "I want you to do it. I want you to go down right now." So I went down with him and Under Secretary of the Navy Gates to Mr. Wilson, whom I briefed. He asked a lot of questions on carriers and many other subjects--I guess for about an hour and a half--and said, "Thank you very much." We went back to the Secretary's office, and he said, "Thank you, and thank you for coming up." I said, "Not at all, what's this all about?" He said, "We just wanted you to do a briefing." So I went back to see ADM Radford, and I said, "This is the damndest thing." I told him what had happened, and I asked, "What's this all about?" He said, "I don't know. Why don't you go back to Newport?" I responded, "My flagship is down at Key West." He said, "I suggest that you go back to Newport." I said, "Are you serious about that?" He said, "Yes." So I went to Newport, and some time later, four or five days maybe, I got a call about nine or ten o'clock at night from the Secretary, who asked, "Can you be down here at 8 o'clock in the morning?" I replied, "Mr. Secretary, I'm in bed; I can't get down there--no way. I can't possibly do it. I can't get a Navy plane that fast." He said, "Get down here just as soon as you can, come to my office first, and don't go to see anybody else, just come to my office. I've got to go to the Hill to testify at 9:00, and if you

can get here before that, fine, but if not, you come to my office and stay there." I called up the airfield in Newport, a naval air base, and said, "I need a plane right now," and they said, "It will take us a little while to get it squared away." When they got me a plane and got me down here, I arrived just after 9 o'clock, too late to see the Secretary. I waited in his office until he got back, around noon. They wouldn't let me go out to lunch. Jackson was his aide. I said, "Andy, I'm going out now to lunch. I'll be back. I'll go down to the cafeteria." He said, "I don't think you'd better do that." I was a Rear Admiral, and he said, "I don't think you'd better do that Admiral. I was told that you were supposed to stay here." I replied, "The Secretary told me that, but surely he doesn't want to starve me to death." He said, "We'll go get you lunch." So I got the word, and I waited until the Secretary came back. He walked in the room, put his briefcase down, and before he or any of us sat down, he said, "Do you know any reason why you shouldn't be CNO?" I had never thought of it. I had never thought of ever being CNO. I didn't particularly want it. I thought for a minute or two and went over to the window. I said, "There are three things that are important. There are a lot of qualified people, more qualified than I am, but I won't do anything that will bring discredit to ADM Carney, whom I am relieving," (I had great admiration for him and I knew he had been in the newspapers). I will not retract anything that I did or said in the B-36 investigation. That is a black mark, and if anybody attacks me, I'm going to fight. I'll do it no matter what the hell happens. The President and the Secretary

of Defense won't like that. The third thing is, I'm a stubborn man, and I'm not easy to get along with, and you won't like me." He thought it over, and said, "I think you ought to have it." I asked, "Does ADM Carney know anything about this?" He said, "No." I asked, "May I go down to see ADM Carney now and tell him?" He said, "Yes." Then I went over to see ADM Carney and, of course, that shook him. He didn't expect that at all. He was a wonderful man and said, "As long as it's got to happen, more power to you." Then I went back to see the Secretary, and we went over to see Mr. Wilson. In the meantime, I'm sure that the Secretary of the Navy had talked to him on the telephone. He asked me a few questions, and said, "We've got to go see the President. They had made the arrangements, and we went over in his car to see the President. The President didn't know anything about me. I had briefed him, and I had met him several times, but he didn't remember me at all--no reason why he should. They had briefed him, of course, and somehow he knew my three reservations. He asked, What do you feel is your most important job as Chief of Naval Operations?" I replied, "To be the Chief of the Service." He said, "No; your most important job is in the Joint Chiefs of Staff." I said, "About equally important, all right, Mr. President, but the reason why you have a naval officer there is because of his expertise in the Navy. You've got to have an experienced naval officer and an experienced army officer. They're there because of their background, and they have to have the confidence of their service." President Eisenhower was very kind and very insistent, but he understood, and I understood.

Within three or four days, of course, there was another thing. At that time, the Navy was very short of men. We were having ships tied up and couldn't go to sea because of lack of people, lots of them. We couldn't train for lack of people. There was a proposal for the Navy to go to the draft that had been turned down by the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of Defense, and the President, and the decision had been made that we should remain a purely volunteer service. The Bureau of Personnel had recommended that we go to the draft, but my predecessor and all the others up the line had decided that was not the best thing to do. But I worked over this damn thing, and I listened to people, and I didn't see how the hell we could come out of it. So I went to see the Secretary of the Navy, who said, "This has all been studied, studied, and studied. We've gone over this. Your predecessors approved it. Everything is squared away. You can't change it, it's a law now." I said, "What can be made can be unmade." He said, "No, you don't understand. You're just here. You don't understand the background." That was true enough, so I went back, worked like hell, and I talked to everybody I could talk to that knew anything about the problem, and asked whether anyone had a solution. There wasn't any. I went to see the Secretary of the Navy, Charlie Thomas, several times. Finally, I said, "Mr. Secretary, I'm going to see the Secretary of Defense and the President." He replied, "You can't. This is decided. He has decided." I said, "This says right here that I can see the President when I want to see him, and I want to see the President." He said, "Don't do that, Burke. You can't

do it. The President will throw you out." I replied, "Maybe so, but it's the right thing to do." So we went over to see Mr. Wilson. He took me over there. Charlie Wilson tried to dissuade me. He said, "There's some way you can cure that. You've just got to find the solution." I said, "Mr. Secretary, there's no way that I know of that I can cure it. We can't wait. We've got to go to the draft." I went up to see the President. To see the President, of course, you wait about fifteen-twenty minutes always, and I walked up and down. Of course, both the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense were angry. I don't blame them; they were right to be angry. I walked up and down and I said, "What the hell am I doing? Here I am. I have just been appointed; I don't know anything about my job; I'm balking at a thing that's already been done, and I'm a damn fool." I thought, "It's too late now. I can't walk out of here and say, 'I'm sorry', or I will have had it. I still think I'm right." So I went in there. The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Navy explained their position first, and then I did. The whole thing took about five minutes. After the President listened, he waited about two or three minutes, and said, "We go to the draft then. You want to go to the draft, we go to the draft. Change it." So we all walked out. Just as I got to the door, I heard, "Admiral." I turned around, and the President asked, "Have you got time?" I said, "Yes sir," and went back. He stood up and said, "Goddamn you, you know what you did to me?" I replied, "Yes sir." He said, "You know that I had just two choices, either to do what you asked for or fire you." I said, "Yes

sir." He said, "I may have done the wrong thing, but don't you ever do it again." I said, "Mr. President, if I think it's important enough, I will." He was furious, and he swears a lot. I thought, "This certainly gets me off to a very good start." End result--the President used to send for me and after a year or so, we became very good friends. I trusted him absolutely, and I could take problems to him, and knew that he could use the data that I was giving him against me if he wanted to, but he never did. He didn't agree with me lots of times, but he would send for me sometimes, and for the other Chiefs, too. He had a strong mind and a quick temper, but he needed help and advice. That's when I first realized that the President is a lonely man.

Matloff: You found that he asked your advice on other than Navy questions?

Burke: Yes. He used me as Major Smith sometimes. You know, Major Smith is the dumb man on the staff. If he's going to understand it, anybody can. And so I'd go over there. He would make a big Old-Fashioned. Mostly it was over military questions, but sometimes it was not. I'd reply, "Mr. President, I don't know a damn thing about that," and he would say, "I know that you don't know anything about it; listen," and he would tell me what he thought the problem was. He needed somebody to talk to that could give him not advice, but thoughts. He appreciated it. It was clarified in his own mind, when he was making his statements.

Matloff: Can you remember at this late date, and this must be very difficult, any examples of those kinds of questions and the areas in which he might be asking for advice?

Burke: Sometimes they were in areas of the other services, but mostly they were economic. The thing that bothered President Eisenhower was increasing debts, the increasing deficits, which also bother me. It bothered him to see that social programs that were just starting under him would grow, grow, and grow, and that there would be corruption in them, because if people get something for nothing, if they get something easy, if the government can give something, then they can get into the line and get things that they don't deserve. He could see that. What can be done about that sort of a problem? You don't want people to starve, but you don't want people to steal.

Matloff: This might be a good point to raise the question of budgetary ceilings for defense and your impressions of how this was done during the Eisenhower administration. What were the dominant influences? Was it economic considerations; was it relationships with domestic priorities? What impact did the budget have on the service differences over roles, missions, strategy, weaponry? This is the period when the so-called vertical approach to budget making was in effect. This whole question of the budget and its impact--who was setting the ceilings, what were the considerations, and what was the impact on the Navy, for example? Whatever impressions you have now, recollecting that phase of the activities, would be of interest.

Burke: Of course, the budget is a fundamental requirement for any service or any organization. If you don't have money, you're not there, and what you can do is largely dependent upon the amount of money that you



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have. It's the important question. The Joint Chiefs had varied opinions on it. They figured that we ought to make a decision among ourselves as to what the budget should be. That sounds good, but we could never arrive at a decision, because we had had dissimilar views on what was important. It's very difficult for me and the Navy, for example, to determine the relative priorities of things in the Army. Of course, as far as the Army budget was concerned, if they were presenting it to us, the things that were vulnerable were not going to stand out. They were going to be in the background someplace. You have to dig to find out what those vulnerable things are. The things that are visible the Army needs, and the same thing is true with the Air Force. The Navy-Marine association here is done in a completely different manner, or was then, and I think still is. But still, we could never arrive at a way to determine what the total Department of Defense budget was. One of the big reasons was: supposing we did, supposing we set a total and we would arrive at a certain amount above the present budget, what good would it do? Would it stick? No. So maybe we would have a big row, spend a hell of a lot of time, and to no end. It would be a waste of time, wasted effort, because we were not responsible for the budget of the United States. The President was. The President had to have advisors, and his advisors were not only his Secretaries, but also his budget officers. His own personal staff had great influence. So the President has the responsibility in the long run. There is no way that he can divest himself of that responsibility. This used to gripe the hell

out of President Eisenhower all the time. He'd swear, and he'd say, "Damn you, Chiefs. You've got to get together." "Well, Mr. President, that is your job." And he'd blow his top.

Matloff; I take it that he did not like split opinions coming up from this group.

Burke: No, he didn't like it. Nobody likes it. But that's one of the things that he used to set for himself. He said, "You disagree." "Yes sir." "Well, why can't you agree?" I said, "Mr. President, you've got to make the decision. You've got to know what that decision means, or what you think it means, and the possible consequences of that decision." He would agree to that, but he did not want split decisions. There was no way that you could put yourself in the position of the president. I've tried to think what would I do if I were president. And you can't do it, because you don't know all of his responsibilities. You can try, but there's no way you can. He's got that responsibility; he's got to do it. He's got to make the final decision, and he's got to stand on it. The trouble with that is, not with Eisenhower, but with a lot of other presidents, that the decisions are made on a political basis instead of a military basis. And the services do suffer, because they don't get together. I think they tried most everything during President Eisenhower's time. First, the Chiefs had nothing to do with budget. Then we devised an idea of having a plan, a five-year plan--I've forgotten what it was called, a war plan, a possible war plan--on which we could base our forces, and on which we could agree, and which we could cost out. It

always cost out too damn much. It was always more than the United States could afford. We realized that. But don't cut mine. So we would present the President with a very difficult problem. This bothered President Eisenhower. I guess it bothers all the other presidents, too, but it bothered him a great deal, because he wanted to get a single decision. But you can't do it, unless he abrogates his own responsibility, which can be done through the Secretary of Defense, in which case the Secretary of Defense is running the government. Under Mr. McElroy the Joint Chiefs tried to arrive at an agreed budget, and could agree on a lot of things. There were some things that you couldn't agree on, the big things, usually the important things. Whenever you brought the budget down to the size that it had to be brought down to, some organization, some type of warfare got hurt, and got hurt badly, and you couldn't get an agreement on that and you couldn't expect to. The best thing that the Chiefs could do then, and I think we all realized that, was to give the President our views on what might happen if he took various steps, and that's what we tried to do. The Secretary of Defense can't do it either, legally. It's getting so he can do it now, but he can't do that either, because he doesn't have control of other things in the budget. The Secretary of Defense can advise, but he is not in effect establishing budget ceilings. In other words, the President has less and less power, and is losing some of his power to his own bureaucracy, and a great deal more of his power to the Congress, so that no matter what he wants to do, he has great difficulty in doing it.

Matloff: Do you recall that incident when McElroy referred the 1960 budget to the Joint Chiefs for endorsement? Why did he do that? any idea at this late date?

Burke: No, that'd be guessing. But I remember the occasion. He tore me to pieces down in Quantico. This was right after the Quantico meeting. We used to have a meeting down there with the Secretary of Defense and all the Secretaries and the Chiefs of Staff and there was about a three or four day seminar.

Matloff: How often did this occur?

Burke: Every year.

Matloff: Every year--once a year?

Burke: Yes. I think it was a budget problem. Mr. McElroy got very incensed at me and, unfortunately, he said so to the press. I went around to him and I said, "Damn, Mr. Secretary, what did you release that for? You put me on the spot. Now I'm going to have to do something, because what you said is not exactly right." He apologized later, but the trouble is that all of these problems become personal problems, and you get personal interests. They are of great and serious importance to your service, to the United States, and to the whole future of the country, and you've got different opinions. It isn't a question of one being right and one being wrong. Most of the time, it's a question of some justice on all sides, and military people, as a rule, do not have the proper sense of value of either time or money. That's true of all nations. I mean, no matter what it costs, we need it, we have to have it. You

can't go in with the second best weapon. You can't go to war, if the enemy has superior weaponry or capability. We have to be able to meet them. This is the argument, and a good argument, but it isn't true. You've got two things that are of value, that are important in war: one of them is your weaponry--your equipment, and the other one is your people. You play one against the other. If you've got wonderful weaponry, you don't lose so many people. But if you don't have weaponry, you can win. A lot of wars and a lot of battles have been won by mass killing.

Matloff: This may be a good time to ask, now that we touched on Secretary McElroy and the relations of yourself and the other members of the Joint Chiefs, about your own impressions of various Secretaries of Defense and your relationships with them. For example, we might start with Wilson. Were your relations close with him?

Burke: I liked Mr. Wilson. I liked all the Secretaries of Defense, in spite of the fact that I would disagree with them. I didn't like them as much as I like my wife, but the same sort of principle applied. Not everything she does do I agree with. I liked Mr. Wilson. He was trying hard. He needed help. There was a lot of things he didn't know, a lot of things about which he was ignorant, a lot of things he said that were misconstrued, but he was a good man trying to do the best he could. He felt that he was called there because of his special qualifications as head of General Motors, and so he tried to run it like General Motors. That was all right, and he had some good ideas. True, he didn't know as much as he should have known, and neither does anybody else. He was

relieved by McElroy, who also was a man who was trying to do his very best for the good of the United States. He recognized the difficulty of his position more than Mr. Wilson did, I think. But I remember that once in a while he would lose his temper. Wilson never did, at least that I know of. McElroy was one of my best friends, and I liked him very much. I have a philosophy that I was brought up with in the Navy, that I think explains why the majority of naval officers think this way: the most evil thing a junior officer can do is to permit his senior to do the wrong thing, when the junior officer feels that he is doing the wrong thing, without notifying him. This is not what the other services do so much. But you're brought up that way in the Navy, so that when a junior officer in the Navy pipes up and says, "I don't think that's right, Captain," and the Captain says, "Why?" he [the Captain] will listen, because the junior officer might be right. The Captain can override, but he's been given a warning. That's all you can do as a junior officer; you can't continue the fight. This is done in civilian life a great deal more than it is in the military, I found afterwards. McElroy understood that, and so did Wilson. Tom Gates to a lesser extent. Tom was a political man mostly, a very good man, a Navy man, but he made his decisions largely, I think, from a political angle. I don't think that he was quite as good as he thought he was. One of the reasons was that he couldn't see that even in the Navy there are difficulties among the various arms--submarines, surface warfare, aviation--that have to be settled. He would try arbitrarily to make a settlement. You can't do that. He couldn't do it running

the services either. But he was a good Secretary. Gates wasn't there very long. I had trouble with all of these Secretaries; I fought with all of them; and I would think I was friends with all of them. I don't know about Mr. McNamara. Mr. McNamara is not influenced at all by any advice. I think he was a bad Secretary of Defense. He would be horrified if he heard me say that because he felt he was very good. He was sure that he was doing exactly the right thing always. He was very positive of that. He based everything on statistics, a numerical value. Everything can be computerized. And it can't be. He thought that everything could be computed and given a priority. It can't, because circumstances change quickly, and besides that, there is no priority. I go back to marriage quite a bit because that's the most difficult relationship that man experiences, and what happens there works in a big organization, too. You can't put one emotion as a priority over another, because it varies. If you ever want to get a divorce quickly, just write down what you think your wife's responsibilities are and give it to her. She'll blow her top, because it's not what you think they are at all. But this is what Mr. McNamara couldn't understand. When he first came in, I got to my office usually at 7 o'clock in the morning, when I was CNO, so did he. I didn't know that, but there was no chance to talk to him. You could go down and get a feel for most Secretaries. So I went down to see him one morning on a chance. I wanted to know what he thought about something, and so I went down to see him about 7 o'clock, and got in the office. He was very happy. We talked a few minutes. I left, in maybe 15 minutes. I did that about three times

a week for quite a while, and sometimes when I didn't come down, he would come up to my office--never for long, just a few minutes, but usually about one problem, and just a discussion. What bothered me mostly about Mr. McNamara was that he'd send his young expert analysts up and they would give you advice on something they didn't know a damn thing about, and you'd tell them so, and then they'd try to force it through, and sometimes could. They were trying to run the internal matters of the service and Mr. McNamara did too. I thought that Mr. McNamara was a very poor man because he didn't have a goal. I don't think he had a goal; if he did, it was not in a military sense. He didn't have an objective in his mind for the United States, even vaguely, I think. I believe that he thought that everything could be quantified. His analysts quantified it, but they quantified it in such a way that that the results came out the way he would have liked.

Matloff: I might ask you, Admiral, while we're talking about Secretaries of Defense, in your opinion who was the most effective of those with whom you had dealings? You can go back to Forrestal, if you want to include him too.

Burke: Forrestal was not an effective Secretary. He could have been. Forrestal was undercut so much. Something was wrong with Mr. Forrestal that caused him not to be effective. I don't know the best one was. I think that it probably was one that the other Chiefs wouldn't agree with, and that's McElroy, because I think McElroy was not very forceful. He was pretty good. The poorest one was McNamara. Engine Charlie tried hard. Gates tried hard; he did everything he possibly could.



Matloff: Let me ask you about the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, and your relationships with the various Chairmen that you had to deal with--I believe those were ADM Radford, Gen Twining, and Gen Lemnitzer. Were there any problems in the fact that Radford was a Navy man also? Did this make your job easier?

Burke: It made it much harder, because Radford knew all about the Navy. I used to call him on it every once in a while, mostly privately. He and I were good friends for years, always were, but I'd say, "Goddamn you, I'm the head of this man's Navy; you aren't. You can't state the Navy position." He'd say, "Look, I spent years in the Navy; I know as much." I'd say, "I know you do, but you aren't running it." He was a very strong man, as virtually all the chairmen were, but he was the most difficult man that I had to work with because he knew a lot of the answers, and a lot of the answers he and I disagreed on. He recognized after a while that he had to present my view, which he would do. He wouldn't agree with it, but he would present it. Of course, I was on the Joint Chiefs with Air Force people. I knew Twining from years before. His brother was in the Marine Corps; he also had a brother in the Navy--I didn't know that at the time. I mean I knew his brother in the Marine Corps but didn't know he had a brother in the Navy.

Matloff: General White was also the Air Force man on the Joint Chiefs.

Burke: Yes. Twining was not a brilliant man, but he was a very honest man. It got so after a while that the Chairman would go up and see the

President more often than anybody else, of course. The Secretary of Defense was not so important then as he is now. The President was the man that made the final decisions. The Secretary of Defense had to be kept informed, and some things he could handle. But mostly the things were serious enough so that either we could handle them or only the President could handle them. It got so after a while that Twining and I would have an argument, and Twining would say, "You want to come up with me to see the President?" "No," I'd reply, "thank you, you go up there, and you can explain it, just as well as I can. Let the President make a decision." He could do that. I'd trust him absolutely with the Navy's position. Sometimes Twining would say, "I'm not going to do it. I just think that's so damn wrong that I can't give the President your views on the thing. I think it's absolutely wrong, you come with me." That was pretty nice. Twining didn't feel that he knew everything. Twining knew that he was limited, as we all are, and you could talk with him. He was a realistic individual. He was one of the finest men I knew. I had absolute faith in him. Now with Tommy White I had fights on an Air Force position lots of times, particularly in relation to SAC. Tommy White, a fighter pilot, a tactical man, was harder to get along with. He and I fought like hell, but we didn't carry it over into personal things. He was a very good friend, too. When he died, an Air Force officer and I took care of Connie [his wife], to help her out. When he was dying--he died of leukemia--he sent for me. Connie asked me to come over and talk to him. It was Sunday. He was asking general questions on "Why are we here;

what the hell have I ever done; what's the purpose of all this living business?" Of course, nobody knows the answer to that, but I said, "Tommy, what the hell are you asking me that for? I don't know." And he said, "Because you'll tell me what you think." That's pretty nice, the best compliment I've ever had. Tommy was a very good friend. Lemnitzer was, too. I knew Lemnitzer better than I did Twining. He was also a trustworthy man.

Matloff: Did you find it easier to persuade Lemnitzer than, let's say, Radford, when there were differences of views, particularly over the Navy positions?

Burke: Yes. Radford was impatient with me. He was patient with a lot of people, but he was impatient with me. Radford would understand the Navy and my views quicker than Lem would, but Lem would try harder.

Matloff: Let me ask this question. In relations with Congress and with the President, when you appeared on the Hill, and you were asked for your own position, in cases where that original position was different from that of the Secretary of Defense, or even the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, did you encounter any problems with both the Secretary of Defense and the White House?

Burke: Not so much the Secretary of Defense. I mean that all the Secretaries of Defense, when I was CNO, had grown up within things, so they knew that; but I had most of my trouble with the President. He sent for me once or twice and said, "What did you say this before Congress for? You know it's not my position." I replied, "It's not your position, Mr. President."

And he'd say, "Well, dammit, why can't you support my position?" I said, "Because, Mr. President, as I have said many times before, I don't think it's the right one. I'll support your position until I'm asked, but if they ask me for my opinion, I've got to give it." He understood that, but after a couple of experiences it's embarrassing, because you can't explain those things off the top of your head. So, then, when I had a problem, when the President disagreed with what I thought, and it was important--if it's unimportant, it doesn't matter, but if I thought it was important--I would write out my statement. I'd start it off, and say, "This is the President's position." I'd give it as clearly as I knew how. I'd go on to say, "And this is what I think is wrong," or "This is my position; this is what I believe." And I'd take it over to the White House, and say "Mr. President, would you look at this?" And he'd say, "Oh, goddammit." But he would keep it and, in the long run, I think he realized that was the best way of doing it, because, then, I wouldn't slip and say something that might not be quite right. That was also if I disagreed with the Chairman, which was very seldom when we appeared before Congress, because they wouldn't bring up the differences between us, except on the question of strategy. Usually, then, we could compromise on a strategy. We could get a joint strategy that was pretty good. But whenever I thought I was going to disagree with somebody, I wrote my statement out and went back and repeated that statement over and over and over again, so that I made sure that I was not undercutting the President, that I stated his position as well as I could, and

after very careful consideration, and then stated my own the same way.

Matloff: What were your relationships with the State Department, particularly with Secretary of State Dulles, in this period when you were CNO?

Burke: First, I didn't know Mr. Dulles at all to begin with, when he came in there. I had met him, but that was all. But, of course, things happen. As a Navy man, I will say that when things go wrong, the Navy's got to go in first usually. It's got to do something. At that time as CNO I had command of fleets, and I was responsible for their operations. When something would happen, the Navy would have to act fast. So I would act. Then I would rush over to see Mr. Dulles. For example--and I don't know when this happened--the Chinese shot down one of our planes that was flying from Japan, and that was going down the coast of China. I know they were well out, probably out beyond the twelve mile limit, but they shot it down. So I moved the Seventh Fleet. I gave orders to the Seventh Fleet to go up to the three mile limit, steam up and down, and fly cover above the three mile limit, but to be very careful not to get inside the three mile limit, and if the Chinese wanted a fight, to make it damn well evident that we were willing to fight right then, and we weren't going to take that. The fleet was on its way. I went rushing over to see Mr. Dulles Sunday--I don't know if it was Sunday or not--but I rushed over to see Mr. Dulles, and I explained it to him. I said, "I've ordered the fleet in there." He said, "We've got to see the President." I said, "Yes sir." So we went over to see the President.

The President said, "Damn, wouldn't it do just as well--nobody's there yet, they're just on the way--if they stayed out beyond the twelve mile limit?" I said "Mr. President, the United States recognizes the three mile limit. We do not recognize the twelve mile limit. They state the twelve mile limit. We want to show them that we're running on our rules and not theirs. It's been three miles for years, for generations, and now we're not afraid." He said, "I can see that, but why don't you stay well clear." I replied, "They have orders to stay outside the three mile limit. They will add their margins--I don't know what the margins ought to be--but they will add their margins for safety. They aren't going to get inside the three mile limit." So they let it stand. If the President said, "Why don't you do this?" I said, "Mr. President, if you want it done, just tell me and I'll do it, but not on my own initiative," He would do that. Sometimes he would override me--not very often, though, because usually the President and I fought about it. Mr. Dulles was apt to want to run the military, too. The coordination has to be very, very close, but if you have too many field marshals in the State Department, you have lots of trouble. Mr. Dulles and General Eisenhower understood that. It was a good thing that that combination was there.

Matloff: To wind up some of our discussion on the organizational matters, let me ask a question about the DoD reorganization in 1958. Do you recall why you opposed that one? What was the problem as you saw it with that reorganization plan?

Burke: Oh, yes. I commanded the fleets before; I could move in five minutes, and usually did. When we ran into Lebanon, the President gave

me 13 hours notice and we landed on time.

Matloff: This is while you were CNO?

Burke: While I was CNO, and I had command. I could move the fleet. I moved the Mediterranean fleet a dozen times before that [1958], because I knew this was going to happen. I'd order it to sea someplace to the eastern Mediterranean. I did it so often that it wasn't newsworthy any more. I could operate because I was responsible as the executive for what the fleet did. With the '58 reorganization, I lost the chain of command. There was nothing I could do about it. As long as I was CNO, the CINCS went along fairly well. I mean that I put down a suggestion and they did it.

Matloff: The authority, then, went up to the Joint Chiefs?

Burke: Unified and specified commands to the Joint Chiefs. The Secretary of Defense was not in it. But it took a lot of time.

Matloff: Then I take it that one of the objections you had was that it made a big difference in the CNO's handling the fleets in crisis situations. Were there any other objections, do you recall?

Burke: Yes, because who's the boss of the fleet? This is a fundamental difference between the Army and the Navy. We don't have multiple bosses. We didn't have; we do now. You have a captain who is responsible for his ship and everybody in it, and everything those people do, ashore and afloat. If his ship goes aground, the captain is hung. It doesn't make any difference whether the captain was on the bridge and whether he did it or did not. He was responsible for the training, and the whole ball

of wax. That's not true in the other services. In the Navy you have to act without full information, and always have had to. If a storm comes up, you have got to take action, maybe in a few minutes, and on the spot. You can't send a radio back. We lost ships during World War II because our own Navy people didn't recognize it. Mostly it's who is responsible. Take this case in Grenada, where Metcalf, the commander of the Second Fleet down there, an old Navy man, one of my junior officers, acted properly. He told the President, "The buck stops here. I am responsible."

They said about giving command to CINCPAC, a Navy command, "Why isn't that just as good?" Because he doesn't have any control over his budget. Who does have? Neither does the Joint Chiefs. So he's responsible for something, but does not have the authority to be prepared to meet that responsibility. There's nobody he can complain to, because if he complains to the CNO, the CNO could say, "Buster, that's tough." He actually tries to help. But it's a complicated thing that you have to do, a lot of work to get a simple little thing done. What I object to mostly about the Department of Defense, anyway, is the bureaucracy. Everything is run by bureaucratic methods taking a long time, complicating matters with lots of approvals up and down the line by people who haven't the least idea of what the hell they're stamping.

Matloff: Let me direct your attention now to an area where I know you have long had an interest, the area of strategy. We've touched on it briefly in our discussion. Let me ask you this: as you know, Dulles and Eisenhower,



particularly Dulles, are associated with the policy of brinkmanship, and massive retaliation. Did you ever have any discussions with either of them on this? Did you agree with that policy?

Burke: Not with the way you stated it, because that was not the policy of Dulles. Dulles was credited with reliance on massive retaliation. I don't think he should have been, because what he said, or at least I think what he meant to say, was that you've got to have the power, you've got to have enough nuclear weapons to make the Soviets fear you. They can't do anything with nuclear weapons without the fear of great retaliation. But he didn't rely on that. There's going to be other kinds of wars and you've got to be able to meet them too. But at that time there was a fight to get enough nuclear weapons in the arsenal of the United States so that Russia could not blackmail us. He did not rely solely on massive retaliation.

Matloff: Was it merely rhetoric, then, on his part?

Burke: No, he meant what he said, except that it was misinterpreted as meaning sole reliance. This is happening over and over again now. The President, I'm sure, as almost all Presidents, is being misinterpreted in the news press all the time, and being credited with things that the press knows damn well are not what the President intends.

Matloff: In your view did the policy differ from that of the Truman period?

Burke: No.

Matloff: It did not?

Burke: No. There are an awful lot of people who are writing about strategy--and some of them my good friends--who want to be known as great strategists.

They don't invent it, but they write so that it looks like it's brand new. It's a word, or a set of words. It doesn't mean a damn thing. It can be interpreted in many ways.

Matloff: Did the President encourage you and the other Chiefs to go forward with the development of conventional weapons?

Burke: Yes. He knew that the bayonets were still important at that time.

Matloff: Did you have any differences with the Eisenhower administration on national strategy?

Burke: Yes, I don't think that there are any two people who believe in exactly the same national strategy for the United States. But the President is involved in one hell of a lot more things than the Joint Chiefs are. Peripherally the Joint Chiefs know very well that the economic situation is very important. They know very well that the political situations are very important. And they know very well that the social programs are very important. But military people usually do not take those things into account very seriously, except the political factor sometimes; for example, the political aspirations of another nation. The job of the Chiefs, by nature of their trade, is to make sure that the military capability is there in case it is to be used. We are a great country, the only country in the world that has ever developed the type of government that we have. But that type of government is dependent upon a disciplined people, and, by disciplined, I mean a conscientious people. As soon as people get the idea that the government is a great big bank that they can draw on for their needs, as soon as they get the idea that

their particular group is the most important in the world, and that nothing will interfere with the progress of that group and to hell with the rest of the society, the President has a lot of problems that the Joint Chiefs don't have. There's no way that the Joint Chiefs can take those into account fully in their considerations. A military man can determine pretty well in his own mind what he thinks the strategy of the country ought to be, but he's always got to recognize that behind that he's weak in his economic and political considerations. I think that the strategy of Dulles was pretty sound except for one thing. A strategy has to be enforced. You have to do a lot of things. Mr. Dulles sometimes forgot that military force wasn't something that you could call on in unlimited degrees. There was a limit on what we could do. Fleets take time to get from here to there. Armies take time to be trained and to be transported. It takes a hell of a lot of training.

Matloff: Do you think that he understood the use of sea power, for example?

Burke: Yes, pretty well.

Matloff: While we're on the strategy questions, wherein were your views of limited war and conventional weapons different, if they were, from those of the other Chiefs? You recall that this is the period when Gen. Maxwell Taylor was becoming an advocate of the flexible response strategy. I'm sure you were hearing this from him. Were your views in any way different from those expressed by either General Taylor or the Air Force?

Burke: Yes. They were. We were different from all of them.

Matloff: Particularly on limited war and conventional weapons, or in any other way, for that matter?

Burke: Let's take the question of missiles. That was a question that came up. The Army was limited. The Army and Air Force had had an agreement that the Army would have missiles up to a range of 200 miles and the Air Force would have all missiles beyond that. We asked, "What the hell does 200 miles got to do with it?" It's a definite thing--that's the real reason. It was a physical limit. But there's no reason beyond that. The Army needs missiles. It needs them to protect or to support its land warfare. It might be 50 miles, 250, or 300, but there is some limit. That limit can't be fixed, because it depends upon a lot of things. A big argument in the Joint Chiefs, mostly between the Army and the Air Force, ensued on this question. So I went around to see Tommy White. (I guess it was Tommy). I said, "Why don't you give the Army their desired range?" and he said, "Dammit, because they won't stop. You make it 250, 300, but if you make it up to their judgment, their judgment's going to be 50,000 miles very quickly. We don't trust them." So I went around to Gen Taylor, and I said, "I think you're basically right in what you want to do. I'll support you, but you've got to set a limit or condition on what you're going to grab for." He didn't want to do that. The Navy wouldn't have settled it that way. We have those fights all the time within the Navy--how many carriers, how many aircraft, how many submarines? The submarines and the carriers are in competition with each other. It comes and goes, and yet it can't come and go very quickly

because it takes years to build ships. But you can't throw away a method of warfare that has been successful until you get some other method of warfare that can do the job. Neither the Army nor the Air Force ever understands that about the Navy. I don't understand why the Army is always straining for more divisions. I can see why the divisions it has have to be in very high combat readiness, but I don't see why it needs so many. I really don't. The Army says that it's the time of training, that it takes a lot longer than folks think it does. I'm sure that's true, but the time of readiness of divisions is dependent on somebody's taking them. All that has to be entered into. So there's a limit on what you can do, and those arguments will go on forever. They are good arguments; they are sound; and they will come and go. There is one rule of warfare that we forget lots of times. You don't ever want to throw away a method of warfare that is still useful. We are doing that now, and have done it.

Matloff: Your name will, I think, always be identified with Polaris.

Do you recall why you were so anxious to push for Polaris?

Burke: I wasn't particularly for Polaris. I am a chemical engineer. I took my graduate work in chemical engineering. I worked on explosives.

Matloff: You were associated with the gun club.

Burke: I'm a gun clubber.

Matloff: Also, you did your work in chemical engineering at the University of Michigan.

Burke: That's right, and so I was interested in solid propellants for missiles. The state of the art in the late 50's was changing very rapidly. A lot of things were coming. The liquid propelled missiles at that time were big complicated pieces, But two things were happening. One possibility was that you could get enough specific impulse in a solid propellant to use in a missile, as had been used in rockets before. The other one was that things were being miniaturized. Radio sets were getting much smaller. Television was just coming in. This was before the days of the silicon chip. You still had vacuum tubes. The Air Force had its ballistic missiles placed. Anybody in the world who wants to know where our ballistic missiles are can find out. A ballistic missile can be destroyed by another ballistic missile, if it's in a fixed place. A ballistic missile is no good if it doesn't know where it's going to shoot. If you could get a mobile ballistic missile, it would be a hell of an advantage. All those factors came in. So I came in and called all of our missile people together, especially ADM [John H. "Savvy"] Sides, who was a very brilliant, wonderful man. I suggested that we ought to look into ballistic missiles at sea. We were working on guided missiles. He said, "It would take too much money." I said, "Do we know what the other services are doing?" We weren't doing much. He said, "Yes, we do." I went around and we didn't know enough. So, I said, "We've got to get into ballistic missiles so we know what they're doing." I went around to the Air Force and said, "Can we go into your Thor missile? You give me a foot of your Thor missile; we'd like to buy a foot. We'll

put stuff in it that we need for a mobile platform, and roll and pitch, and all the things that have to be in a ship. We can do that in a foot of your missile." Tommy White said, "No, nothing doing, you'll interfere with our progress." So I went to Trudeau in the Army, and Trudeau said, "All right, but it will cost you." What it cost us was that we paid for the R and D for the past four or five years in that thing, which was fair enough. So I signed an agreement, or had an agreement--I don't think we ever wrote it out--with Trudeau that we would do everything we could to get research done on solid propellant, and on miniaturizing equipment. Since liquid propellant is dangerous for use aboard ship and is very difficult to handle, we needed a solid propellant. If they wanted to go to solid propellant, we would be very happy to have them go with us; but if they did not want to go to solid propellant, we would divorce them, because we were going for solid propellant solely. They agreed to that. So we went heavily on research. We also wanted some vehicle to test this. We converted the Norton Sound, a seaplane tender, and put a missile platform on her and an installation in her to fire liquid propellant missiles. We had no intention of putting them in submarines. You couldn't put a liquid propellant in a submarine in the first place; in the second place, the missile was too damn big to put in a submarine. So we did a little research on that. I talked to a lot of scientists, including Kistiakowsky, a scientific aide to the President. I needed somebody to run a ballistic missile program. I talked to Savvy [Admiral Sides] about this in his missile shop, but he didn't believe in it at

all. I said, "Savvy, this is coming; it's got to come; and so we've got to have somebody that will run it." He didn't want it, and I said, "OK." So I looked around and examined all the flag officers, and then captains, to find somebody that could take this thing over. I wanted somebody that didn't have too much technical education, but would think and could receive new ideas. I figured that [William F.] Raborn was probably the best man in the Navy for that. I pulled him in, told him to get going on this thing, and gave him the general outline of what we had done. He did a magnificent job. When we got solid propellant, the question was in what ships do we put them? It happened that the diameter of the submarines at that time was just about the height of the missile. I said, "Let's try it; maybe it'll work." At the time that we decided to go in for a submarine missile, we had no idea it could be fired under water. But we put it in a submarine because of the damn length of the missile, which, by accident, was just about the diameter of a submarine. We started working on missiles and submarines, and both took money. I had diverted from other programs money to do what we had done already.

Matloff: Were you getting backing from the Secretary of Defense in this enterprise?

Burke: Not particularly. He knew about it. I went to him and asked for money to put into this project, after going through the Secretary of the Navy.

Matloff: This was Wilson or McElroy?

Burke: No, it was Gates.



Matloff: This would be around '59 or so?

Burke: No, before that, about '58.

Matloff: The actual launch occurs in '60, as I recall.

Burke: Yes. That program was the last program that ever got off fast. Anyway, he said, "We won't give you money, not until it's gone farther along." I said, "Mr. Secretary, if I put the money in there and if this thing works, will you give me back the money that we put in, next year?" He said, "Yes." So I did. I discharged 15,000 men and I hassled a hell of a lot of programs, some pretty good programs, to get the money to put in there. When, next year, I went in to get the money, Gates said, "The circumstances have changed. You can't do that any more." So then I went over to the toy store and got three little shells with my own pea, and I brought those out every time I had a conference with Gates. I put those three shells down there, and he said, "What for?" I said, "Mr. Gates, I'm not going to take any chances. If I'm gambling, I'm going to gamble on my table, with my own equipment." In other words, he lied--that's a little strong--but he didn't think the damn thing would work and so he took a chance. He never got the back money, but that program was run very well. From the time we started it, which was in early '56, until we had it at sea, was four years. Now you can't even get an agreement in four years.

Matloff: Let me turn to a quick question on NATO. I know that during your period as Chief of Naval Operations, NATO problems were very much on the surface, as they have continued to be ever since its creation. Do you recall in your own thinking, and also in any discussion that you

might have had with President Eisenhower, how permanent the investment of our troops in Europe would be?

Burke: Yes. He tried to withdraw those troops several times. I think it may be in his official papers, but I'm not sure. I don't know whether it got that far or not, but I think it did. At least it was in the newspapers. He wanted to withdraw them, not tomorrow, but in five or ten years, because they get dependent upon us, and you get into bad habits. He wanted to withdraw them sometime, and he wanted that time limit put down. I agreed with that, but the Army did not agree with it at all, Taylor particularly, although no Army man would, because that meant more divisions. The Army had a terrible time in peacetime, and always has had, in getting enough money to keep troops in a ready condition. The Army was caught much worse than the Navy was at the beginning of World War I and World War II, and we were caught flat-footed ourselves. But the Army had a hell of a time, because it hadn't been able to get any money. It had to have a use for troops in peacetime. If you've got divisions in Europe, then you've got to keep them up and they have to be ready to fight. That was a very good thing. So the Army was not about to pull them out of there or Korea. That's the primary reason. There's another factor in that. When you teach a hog where the trough is, that hog will die if you take the trough away. The European nations have become dependent upon not only our support, but also upon the forces that we have there. There is no way that I can see that you can withdraw them now. Reduce them, maybe. But as long as you leave them there, you've

got problems, the problems with which the Army is suffering now: the boredom; the problems with foreign nations; with, in effect, operating under laws that are foreign to that country, which is not occupied--a sore spot. There was a lot of discussion on withdrawing forces. I think initially there were very few people that thought that this would be a permanent situation, with permanent, large forces, in Europe.

Matloff: Certainly in the original testimony by Acheson before Congress on the treaty, he had stated definitely it would not be a permanent commitment. Later on he backed off from that. While we're on NATO, we might talk a little bit about the British. Did you have any objections to the British going into developing Polaris submarines?

Burke: No. As a matter of fact, as soon as we got those, Mountbattan, the first sea lord, wanted them. I tried to persuade him that he did not want Polaris, but he insisted. I said, "If you want them, we'll help you, but for God's sake, don't do it, because it takes a lot of money. What you can do in that is limited, and you won't add anything to it." He said, "It's the only thing that will give us national pride, and we can do some good." He said also, "We can act independently of you." This is a national view. No nation wants to become dependent upon any other nation. In all history, one of the things that is clear is that nations are very undependable and will cut your throat. So it's quite reasonable that they would want missiles. It's quite reasonable that France would. I don't know why we fought to keep them from having them, but where they made their mistake was putting those missiles at sea, I thought.

Matloff: These are the French, or the British?

Burke: British. But they don't think so, because they would have a lot more nuclear freeze activities now if they had had a missile site there. But anyway, the British were all for this. The French were, too. We had a lot of arguments with the French, because the French government was deeply infiltrated with communists. The French Navy was not. Right after the war, the French Navy purged communists pretty well, and they had a hell of a lot of trouble doing it.

Matloff: This is after World War II?

Burke: After World War II, yes. Madame Curie, for example, was a communist and had a lot of followers. But I can see why France wanted its own nuclear weapons. We did not support that but we finally had to. DeGaulle maneuvered us into the spot where we had to support it or else break clear.

Matloff: Let me turn your attention to some of the area problems and crises that arose while you were CNO. Starting with the Suez crisis in 1956, did you agree with the administration's policy not to help the British and French?

Burke: No.

Matloff: What would you have done, had you had your way?

Burke: I would have helped them. I would not only have helped them, but I would have run it, if I had, because the British were not prepared for a long, sustained hard battle. If they were going to do anything like that, they had to get it over with fast, and get out of there. That's an

awful lot to call for. The British are very adept at using other people's forces to pull their chestnuts out. They have done this over and over again, and very successfully. They are still trying to do that and they still can manipulate us pretty well. That's not bad altogether. Although the British were wrong in their continued occupation of Egypt, it was bound to blow some time. If Egypt gained its independence violently from Britain, there was very apt to be a communist-type government, or at least a government greatly influenced by communists. So the least of two evils, I thought, was for the British to go in there and take control very fast, pull their troops out, and then set up a a native government that was favorable to Britain, which I think they could have done. The President didn't agree with that.

Matloff: Did you run into problems with Dulles?

Burke: Dulles was the one who persuaded the President. Dulles was very adamant.

Matloff: Against Britain?

Burke: Against Britain, but it didn't become evident. I ordered the fleet to sea several times.

Matloff: During that crisis? Did you clear this with anyone?

Burke: No, I was in command. I didn't clear it; I'd tell them. Once you are asking for permission, you've had it.

Matloff: You didn't clear it, then, with the Secretary of Defense or with the President?

Burke: No, I'd do it. I did it, and I'd tell them right away, so that they'd know what I was doing. If they didn't like it, they'd get the President to change it. Never do anything that they don't know about, but don't ever start begging for permission to do what you've got to do, or you've had it. That's what happening now. That's why that whole operation in Grenada was cleared in absolute detail by the President. It's remarkable. That's the only way he can do it now. That means weeks of preparation. It's remarkable that they kept that a secret and could keep it quiet. It was extremely well done, and I think it was done exactly correctly, as far as I know. But it was a very difficult thing to do.

Matloff: How about the Quemoy and Matsu crisis in 1958? How important did you feel it was to help the nationalists? How far would you have gone in helping?

Burke: I thought it was very important. Far enough to keep them from being swamped.

Matloff: Would you have used nuclear weapons, if necessary?

Burke: You know, you can't stop at things like that. You can't lay the limit down ahead of time exactly. The more you try, the more gets known one way or another, even if you don't say anything. Leaks, in this government, are very apt to happen, and you don't know it, as happened in the Korean war, where Philby and Burgess knew all the stuff that we had. You can't put down a limit. If you have a friend downtown who is sick and doesn't have any money, what do you do? You are going to help him. You can't lay a limit.

Matloff: Let's come back to the Mediterranean and the Lebanon operation in 1958.

Burke: Let me expand on it, just one more minute.

Matloff: You want to go back to Quemoy and Matsu?

Burke: Not Quemoy/Matsu, but generally on what I mean by this. If you lay down a limit, the enemy will know your limit sooner or later, and probably right away. He's going to go just a little beyond that, and you either lose or you lie. One way or the other, he's caught you. The President cannot say that he will not use nuclear weapons. You can't say that our marines in Lebanon will not go into the hills. You can't put any limit on it at all. If you're going to put a limit, don't put them in. Don't go into a battle that you aren't prepared to win. Don't go into a war that you aren't prepared to win. We've done that twice, and maybe more, and we lose them every time.

Matloff: You're referring to Korea and Vietnam?

Burke: Vietnam. It showed horrible examples of limiting. Not that you don't try to keep it as small as possible, but you don't tell the enemy this is as far as I will go and if you want to go beyond that, it's all yours. You can't do that.

Matloff: Let's turn back to the Mediterranean with Lebanon in 1958, and again with the Sixth Fleet very much on the scene. Do you recall your role during that crisis?

Burke: Yes, very well. That's the time that I moved the Sixth Fleet over and over and over again, when the tension was there. You have to be

ready for it. When things got tense, I'd send the fleet to sea. This story gripes Gen. Taylor. We had one Marine battalion that was at sea in the Mediterranean. The battalions were relieved about every six to eight months. So I figured when the tension was going to grow. You make an estimate. At that particular time we should relieve, so we would have two battalions there. We happened to hit it pretty lucky. We had two battalions. Things got more and more tense and it looked like two battalions might not be able to do it. If we do this thing, we're going to hit hard and move. We're going to be sure we can win. We need about three battalions. Let's put in a training battalion. All this was known, but we didn't make any noise about it. I mean that when the thing actually occurred, we had three battalions.

Matloff: So there was considerable pre-planning going on?

Burke: There was a lot of pre-planning. Now, also, when you land troops, they've got to be supported. We had support there for an amphibious landing, maybe for ten days or fifteen days of combat. But, in the Navy, when you start battles way off, you've got to start your logistics going right away. I had orders out to the fleet that just as soon as we landed any place, certain ships went into commission, the supplies started flowing, and all the people, up and down the coast, started doing certain things. One of the things you have to have is air support. And you have to have air transport. So we made arrangements with local air stations. We did this lots of times--four or five times--for the drill runs. When it came time that we landed our Marines and supplies started coming in, we



didn't ask for permission. We had already had permission. We didn't go to the government. We went to the commander. Of course, the Army put its troops in there later, and it couldn't get permission. The Greeks wouldn't let them land. Gen Taylor got madder than hell. He asked, "How the hell can you do this?" I said, "We don't ask anybody. You get people at the station to do it. You get them used to it, and you don't make a big thing out of little things. If you go to the top of the government, and say, 'We'd like to do this', he's got to say no. You can't, that's the difference. We go down to the lower people, and say, 'we're going to do this if you don't mind', and then they say, 'Sure, go ahead'."

Matloff: The Bay of Pigs, 1961. Do you recall, in a nutshell, the JCS role, if any, during that operation, and what went wrong?

Burke: Same old thing. Unwillingness to start something and see it through, and stupidity, not only of the administration but also of the Chiefs, me included. The first time that the Chiefs ever heard about this--the first time that I ever heard about any part of this thing--was in about the middle of the summer of the year before we landed, i.e., during 1960. I read a Naval Intelligence report that something was going on in Guatemala, and I idly inquired to find out more. I found that the United States had a training base down there, but not very many people. I didn't think much of it one way or another. But at that time, under General Eisenhower's administration, a lot of Cubans were training to infiltrate within Cuba. All of this was under CIA, headed by Dulles.

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Some of those operations were of fairly good size. I mean that they had small boats and small ships, were taking a few arms in, and had air drops and things like that. We really didn't know much about it. We weren't particularly concerned about those particular operations, but after the election was over, we heard that there would be a bigger operation, a landing operation of pretty good size. I don't know whether it was official or not. But anyway, when the CIA showed this general plan to Mr. Kennedy before he took office, he asked if the Joint Chiefs knew about it. The CIA didn't know whether they did or not; they thought that we did. But they said that they would tell us; and that's the time--in January--that we were briefed on this operation. Until that time, each of us had heard rumors. Mr. Kennedy wanted to know, either then or later--I've forgotten just which--whether the Chiefs thought the operation as conceived by the CIA would be successful or not. But he did not want anybody to know about it except the Chiefs. We couldn't staff it at all; he just wanted the Chiefs' personal opinions on this thing. So the CIA came over and briefed us. We looked at the proposal. There was nothing; we had no plans, no papers. I don't think any papers were left even after the briefing. But, in any case, we said that from our cursory examination of this thing, it looked like it had a 50 percent chance of success. This involved the landing in Santiago, the Trinidad plan. If it failed, the troops could go into the Sierra Madres and do just the same as Castro and could support themselves. So it had a 50 percent chance, but President Kennedy didn't like that, because it looked like an amphibious landing--

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which it was--and he wanted it someplace else, other than Santiago. I think that CIA proposed three or five places and sent the proposals over to the Chiefs, who examined it and said of the three, this was the best one, but that it had less chance of success than the Trinidad plan. Every meeting that the Chiefs had with the President, and we had a lot of them, the President would say, "This is not a military operation." We would suggest something, and he would say, "This is not a military operation, not your operation. We want your advice and your advice only. You have no responsibility for this." We were told this at every meeting over and over again. It took. The Chiefs were wrong because in these meetings with the NSC, to which the Chiefs then belonged, we would say something, the President would discard it, and we shut up. At the end of the meeting, the President would summarize the thing, in the way that President Eisenhower had done. We thought that the President knew what he was doing. We had no idea that he was so uninformed. We had no idea that when he made a decision, he didn't think that he was making a decision. It was like a high school seminar--the matter was up for discussion, that's what he thought then--but he didn't realize that he was making a decision. When he made a decision, we shut up. What we should have done is pound the table, scream, and bellow, and we would have had some effect, but we didn't do that.

Matloff: I recall that one of the upshots of that operation was the appointment of a study group, of which you were a member. Do you recall what that group recommended about the role of the JCS in any future Cold War operation?

Burke: Yes, that the military operations should be under military command.

Matloff: Any thought about the political and economic implications of operations?

Burke: I don't remember in detail now. That report is out.

Matloff: Obviously, there were some improvements in the procedures, because when the missile crisis came up in Cuba the following year it was handled far better.

Burke: No.

Matloff: No?

Burke: It was handled better, all right, but not far better.

Again, Mr. McNamara came up, in the missile crisis. I wasn't there; this is after I left. But he came up to run it from the Navy's flag plot, which I had put in when I came there in order to be able to know what was going on. It was an operating room with charts, communications, and people. You could do things. He came up there and was positioning ships, individual ships. The CNO, Anderson, said, "You can't do that. You can't tell a commander to do that. You can't run it from here. You don't know enough from here." The President had learned that you can't start showing force unless you're prepared to use it. So it was there for the Soviets and they backed off. They weren't prepared. To that extent, it was much better.

Matloff: Let me ask about Indochina, another crisis area, which went along throughout the period that you were CNO and, of course, continued. It started before and it continued after you left that position. What was your attitude toward our involvement in Indochina, when you were CNO?

And what role did you play, both in the Eisenhower administration and in the short period during the Kennedy administration when you were still in the office, in this respect?

Burke: I'm a great believer in Gen Ridgway. Gen. Ridgway got his command in Korea when I was out there, and I knew him very well. I was on the military armistice committee. Ridgway has one firm belief--that you don't ever land in China. You don't ever put troops on shore in Asia. He's generally correct, but there was an exception and what I thought could be done. I thought that we had to support somebody in Vietnam. Diem was chosen. I didn't know anything about Diem, but I thought that was all right. We supported Diem. We started to tell him in detail what to do. Of course, he wouldn't do it. Nobody ever will, unless you make him do it. If you make him do it, then he's not an independent man; he's yours. Maybe they chose the wrong man. Anyway, the President gave orders to get rid of Diem, and, indirectly, probably caused him to be killed, although he didn't intend that, I'm sure. If we wanted to save Southeast Asia from communist domination, we had to do something. We had to make up our minds whether we would or would not accept a communist-dominated Southeast Asia. We decided that we would not as a political matter. That's a very important thing, and not a factor on which as Chiefs we had much influence. We would try; we would make our statement, but I don't think we were really very influential on that with Eisenhower and with Kennedy. If Southeast Asia was not to be communist, what were you going to do about it? You had to support somebody. Before Vietnam,

the big trouble was the civil war in Laos. We weren't really sure, after we got started, whether Phoumi was a friend of ours or whether he was a communist. We didn't know. Nobody had checked him out. I recommended that if you're going to go into Laos, you go in with enough force so that you can do what you need to do and then get out, within not later than two months. You may have to go back in again, but do this over and over and over again. All you're doing is punishing and exhibiting overwhelming power, but you don't stay and occupy. No Army officer would agree with that philosophy. Anyway, that's what I thought. I tried to convey that to President Kennedy. I thought he understood it, but he didn't. He vacillated on most things, because he was young and inexperienced. The problem was far beyond his depth. But when Diem was killed, it shook him terrifically. He drifted into Vietnam. Looking back on it, I can see that we should not have permitted him to drift into it. We should have shocked him into realizing what he was doing. We gave him too much credit for knowledge. We thought that he knew more than he knew. We thought he was getting better advice than he was getting.

Matloff: Looks like a playback of what you were saying earlier about the Bay of Pigs operation.

Burke: It's the same thing. I'm not so sure that all my associates and the Chiefs would agree with this, but I believe that the United States has to be powerful, that it has to use military force sometimes, but only when it has to. But when it does, it should use it fast and get in and get out. If you don't have arrangements for that ahead of time, whom do

you support? Whom do you leave there? Who's your friend? If you pull out, you can't leave a vacuum.

Matloff: This may be a good time to ask you: Did you believe in the domino theory, which was so current at the time?

Burke: Yes, and it worked. That's exactly what happened. Every time I think of Vietnam my heart breaks. I feel very sad since there are millions of people who died because they put their faith in the United States and we let them down. We didn't intend to do that. Our intentions were good.

Matloff: I might shoot this question at you: do you feel that Vietnam was a military failure or a failure of national policy, or what? What failed?

Burke: Organization. You cannot run a war from here.

Matloff: From the capital?

Burke: From Washington. It doesn't matter who is trying to run it. The basis of my feeling of hopelessness for the United States now is that our organization is such that we can't do anything.

Matloff: You are referring to the Department of Defense?

Burke: I'm referring to the government.

Matloff: The national security apparatus?

Burke: The whole government. The whole government can't do anything-- not just in the Department of Defense. Officials can't move, because they want to know the restrictions beforehand. They ought to know. Everybody's got his finger in the pie. No one trusts anybody else. So it ends up where the President is the sole man that can do anything. He gets all the blame and the credit, too, I guess, but his hands are

tied over and over and over again. It's remarkable that this Grenada thing came off as well as it did.

Matloff: Then I take it that you feel that there's need for a change of organization, structure, working relationships?

Burke: No. There's a need to fire about 90% of the Department of Defense.

Matloff: What would you keep?

Burke: Nothing. Policy. Go right back to the beginning. I know that it won't be done, and that it's hopeless to try to do that, because once you've established a bureaucracy, you'll never get rid of it. This is what revolutions are all about. It will never happen that way, but that's the only way you can do it. Take right now--does the Navy have anything to do with the shipbuilding program? No. Who makes decisions? People that haven't the slightest idea of what's in a ship. Recommendations come up by the thousands. But who makes the decision? It's an assistant deputy, an acting assistant secretary, way down the line, because other people up the line haven't enough time to handle all of those matters. Here are people making decisions about which they don't know anything. They make big justifications that you read. It's incomprehensible.

Matloff: We touched on the nature of the threat as you saw it in your role as CNO, but we haven't really asked the direct question: how did you view the threat? Did you see communism as a monolithic block? Has your view of the threat changed over the years, or is it still basically pretty much as you saw it as CNO?



Burke: I think the threat is about what I thought it was then. It's not monolithic. It's an amorphous threat. It's basically the problem of a socialistic type of government run by an elite group in each case jockeying for position. That group holds its position by power which it uses drastically to kill people, the opposition, and it has to do that. The Soviets have been remarkably successful so far. We have lost our high standards to a large extent. We have abscams of various kinds, that are very successful. You just can't trust news people. Whom do you trust? It's ending up where you trust another military man. The other people you don't know. That's a terrible thing to say. But I believe a military man. I believe a Navy man more, because I know more about him. I don't believe what any civilian tells me any more. That's bad, because I know that there are a lot of very good people, but the general high standards are gone. To get back to the threat, I think that this is not just communism. It's a search to rule a lot of people. It's power. The communists have a system of obtaining power, but it isn't the spread of communism as a theory. It's a spread of power-grabbing, of getting hold of nations and directing those nations without their having any say in what their destiny is.

Matloff: Then it's far more than just a military threat.

Burke: Yes. And this is why we're having trouble in Latin America. It's primarily an economic threat, but political and military, too. But all these things always end up as a military action. We are the only nation in the world whose military cannot take over the government. The Army is

structured, developed, and trained so that it couldn't possibly take over a government. The United States and Britain are the only countries where it is not possible. So, we're going to have trouble because as we lose our faith in one another, and as more and more corruption appears and is not punished or corrected, we're going to fall apart sometime.

Matloff: You've commented in passing on President Kennedy, and you've said something about President Eisenhower as a commander in chief, in effect. How would you compare the presidents under whom you've served-- Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy--in terms of effectiveness as commanders in chief?

Burke: I think that Eisenhower will go down in history as one of the best presidents we've ever had. I think he was magnificent. Next to him was Truman. Truman took me off the promotion list.

Matloff: This was an upshot of the OP-23 and B-36 controversy. Did he put you back?

Burke: Yes, he put me back. He sent for me afterwards and said, "I'm sorry that that happened; it should never have happened." I replied, "Mr. President, it doesn't matter whether one captain or another is promoted. You didn't have to do that. I appreciate it very much personally, but it doesn't really make any difference as far as the United States is concerned." It takes a great man to do that, but he was that kind of a man.

When I came back from Korea, I was furious because the communists had our orders directed to the military committee that was negotiating there. They had our instructions before we had them. I was sure of that. So was

General Hodges of the Army. We asked to be relieved, when they countermanded our orders. I came back here furious, because we had asked over and over and over again please not to accept the present battle line as the final line of demarcation. They they ordered us to do it. We did, and then we left. I came back to see my own boss, the Chief of Naval Operations, and he was interested in it, but not much. I said, "Admiral, this is a real serious matter." He asked, "Would you like to talk to the Chiefs?" I said, "Yes, I would." So he arranged for a meeting with JCS. I went down and I explained the whole detailed, complicated business, and why I believed this. Vandenberg, the Air Force Chief of Staff, went to sleep. He was sick, so there was some reason for that. The rest of them, including my own Chief, weren't particularly interested either. So I was still furious, and I didn't know what to do about it. Somehow or other President Truman sent for me, and said, "I'll give you fifty minutes." I went right over there and stayed all afternoon. He was the only man that understood what I was talking about and he did something about it. He set the wheels in motion. This is when Burgess and all of those people were getting our orders. They were extremely efficient because they'd get them back to Britain or to Moscow and out to Kaesong before we did. Before we'd get our orders, they had to be cleared, and as a routine matter would take overnight. But they'd get them ahead of time, and, with the difference of time zones, it made a big difference. Truman recognized it and did something about it. I think that, due to his efforts--I don't know how--Burgess and Philby were finally discovered.

Matloff: There was a leak somewhere in the chain of communication?

Burke: No. The British were permitted to see this, because it was a NATO operation. It wasn't that anybody on our side leaked it. Burgess and Philby had the dope. They were important people and they got it.

Matloff: You know, a revision is going on among some historians about the view of Eisenhower as president. The revisionist historians are saying that he was a very activist president, in contrast with the earlier view that he was a rather passive president. What is your view?

Burke: This is pinning a label on people--which we've gotten used to. It's like "flexible response," that doesn't mean a damn thing, and "massive retaliation," which means less. Eisenhower had a feel about his duty to the United States that was terrific. So did Truman. The rest of the presidents that I knew didn't feel that way to that extent. Eisenhower was not a brilliant man at all. He was a conscientious man. It's a big help not to be too damn brilliant. He didn't know it all. He would take action if he felt it was necessary, but he wasn't in a hurry to take it. He was not an activist really, but when he took action, he was willing to take it.

Matloff: Did the Secretary of Defense consult you on your successor?

Burke: Yes, they wanted me to submit a list of people for my successor. I submitted about forty names. They were all qualified. I said that it would depend upon the personal characteristics sought as to who ought to get the job. They said, "We don't want that many; give us two, three, or four." I said, "I'll give you one name, but only on condition that

you appoint him. I'm willing to do that." Of course, they wouldn't do that. They said, "Why don't you give us a few names? I replied, "Because it will leak. And if I give you four names, three of them are going to fail, and they're going to be labeled. It's going to be known that I've submitted four names and so you're damaging three officers. There's no way you can keep that thing secret." They couldn't see that. Gates particularly couldn't see that. But Eisenhower would have known why.

Matloff: Was one of the names the man who eventually was selected?

Burke: He was one of the people that I would have recommended.

Matloff: That would have been Anderson.

Burke: Anderson, yes. He's a good man. There's another thing in that. I would never get into the controversy of who was to be commandant of Marines. That's always a problem the CNO has. I would never get into it, and I don't think anybody else does either.

Matloff: The last question would be--what do you regard as your major achievement or achievements during your tenure as CNO? Of what are you most proud?

Burke: I think that the integrity of the officer corps improved a little bit. A lot of things that happen in every Chief's tenure happen whether he's there or somebody else is there. A lot of people beat their chests over "how I am doing," or "my policy." Hell, it's not their policy. They probably didn't originate it; and they probably didn't even get it down correctly. This can happen in material things, too. I just had this reunion of Desron 23--a thousand people. I was struck by the understanding, the appreciation that they had for one another, respect, admiration, helpfulness,

standards, absolute trust and confidence. I've never fully realized the feeling until then. This is what the service is all about. This comes not from any one man but from a whole group of people. But if you can add to that just a little bit, it's probably the greatest thing you can do for any military man.

Matloff: Conversely, what was the biggest disappointment?

Burke: The Bay of Pigs. Because, although we were told that this is not a military operation, and that we should stay out of it, what I and the other Chiefs should have done is to say, "It's a stupid damn thing," and insist to the President and everybody else, "Either you do or you don't. Either we overthrow Castro, or we play; but if you play, don't jeopardize the United States. If you're going to go in, go in and take the damn thing." That's the biggest mistake I have ever made.

Matloff: Thank you very much, ADM Burke, for sharing your recollections and observations with us. You're very kind.

Burke: Thank you. No, I talk too damn much.