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Interview with LtGen Robert Pursley, Part V  
January 27, 1999

Goldberg: This Part V of an oral history interview with General Robert Pursley on January 27, 1999, in Arlington, Virginia. Alfred Goldberg and Ronald Landa are the interviewers for the OSD Historical Office.

General Pursley, we had in our last interview been discussing your service with Secretary Laird. We had gotten to the discussion of some of the effects of interservice competition and your remarks about them. I would like to go on to talk about the role that Laird and OSD played in defense budget formulation and your connection with it. What from your perspective were the dominant influences in setting the defense budget in the Nixon administration--for instance, economic considerations, the war in Vietnam, the threat to Europe, etc? The budget is always so central to everything that happens in defense, it is deserving of the attention that it gets.

Pursley: The budget formulation process that was intact when Nixon and Laird came into office was one that had been developed and used for a great number of years. In effect, the head of the Bureau of the Budget (BoB) had a very substantial influence. The first real budget go-around in which Secretary Laird was a participant in terms of actually formulating the budget was in December 1969 when they were finally putting the package together for the coming year. I have a vivid recollection of the gentleman from BoB coming over on Christmas Eve late in the afternoon to go over what for all intents and purposes was the budget figure that had been assigned by the White House to the DoD. This was the dollar amount, the overall macro-aggregate look at what the figure would be. That was the start of the downturn on the defense budgets, even though we were engaged heavily in an ongoing

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war. That struck me, without much knowledge of the intricacies of the process, as a fairly arcane way to go about establishing a defense budget. How does that budget number relate to the overall impact on national security; what are the pros and cons to be considered by the president in determining an allocation of resources to Defense; what were the relationships of the budget number to the U.S. economy at large; what impact would the DoD budget have on growth, price stability, income, balance of payments; what of the political impact of the Defense budget. As I recall, there were only three people, (a gentleman from the Bureau of the Budget), Secretary Laird, and I, there. It was simply the delivery of a budget number.

Goldberg: It's surprising that Packard wasn't there, wasn't it?

Pursley: He may have been, but I don't recall him being an active participant. In effect, the secretary of defense was there as a recipient of the message. It wasn't a dialogue or discussion. One might have thought that the budget number might have evolved from a discussion of a broader range of people.

Goldberg: But it was from the White House?

Pursley: Yes, and the head of the Bureau was there to deliver the message himself. He didn't send someone or call on the phone.

Landa: Had you had any hint that this was going to happen?

Pursley: No, not that I know of. It just struck me as being curious. I don't recall that process happening that way for Secretary Clifford or Secretary McNamara. They didn't have a delivery by the BoB on Christmas Eve.

Goldberg: It may have been a hangover from the Eisenhower administration. How did Laird react to this?

Pursley: He didn't react strongly to it. He tried to establish a different kind of procedure though the Defense Program Review Committee proposition, where in a more direct and forthright way there would be an ongoing dialogue and an established process where the economic factors--growth, price stability, employment, income distribution, etc.--would be factored into the national security equation, so that the amount of national security needed would be discussed and debated in an environment in which those other factors came into play. With a more rational process you could look at tradeoffs and the president would be asked to make a decision based on those tradeoffs. The president would have these various plusses and minuses in the tradeoffs put in front of him so that he could make rational choices and it would not be just a political number emanating from the Bureau of the Budget.

Goldberg: Laird also knew there was going to be a very substantial congressional role up ahead, which could result in a lot of changes. It did result in changes in the budget, and he had a lot of influence there.

Pursley: Absolutely. That was always very much a factor with Melvin Laird. His former role with the Appropriations Committee was always a prominent influence. The Appropriations Committees were the ones who ultimately would determine what the Defense budget really looked like. Mr. Laird was quick to remind people that Congress should and would have a very substantial role to play.

Goldberg: How about the process within DoD that was well established and under way?

Pursley: The macro budget figure is one thing, the process within the DoD is another. Laird didn't change or alter the on going process that had been established by McNamara, the five-year planning cycle.

Goldberg: Did he give anybody within DoD a bigger role, JCS, for instance?

Pursley: No, I don't believe he did. JCS, in not a very meaningful way, kicked off the process of the planning cycle with the JSOPs, the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan. Even when Laird was there, the JSOP was the old business of a collection of wish lists from various military elements, but no analyses to indicate where the tradeoffs would be. It was clear that when all the programs and initiatives in the JSOPs were added up there was no way that the available resources would come even remotely close to the JCS wish list. The numbers that stick in my mind for the defense budget in then-current dollars in 1970-71 were between \$70 and \$75 billion. I think that's a fairly accurate neighborhood. The JSOP was around \$120-\$125 billion. When you say that JCS played a role--they put the JSOP together, but I don't recall a secretary ever sitting down and seriously looking at that. It came across the desk and went into a file. The JCS didn't seem to have any inclination to want to change that. They felt that they were working for their constituencies by continuing to put together a wish list, throwing it into the hopper, and letting someone else work out the political verities and take the blame for any money taken away from the national security of the country. It was not a terribly insightful or helpful process, but there was no inclination that I could see on the part of Gen. Wheeler or Adm. Moorer to do it differently. They did not like the fact that Systems Analysis (part of the OSD staff) played such a strong role in analyzing the budget; but the military didn't seem inclined to want to adopt or develop a more helpful system so that they could play an effective role.

Goldberg: That was one thing that made most secretaries of defense critical of the Joint Chiefs. One of the greatest dissatisfactions with the Joint Chiefs was that sort of thing.

Pursley: I shouldn't put all the military in that same hopper. For example, Gen. Bruce Palmer was one of those who recognized that this was not a helpful way for the military to go about their business. There are strong statements in his book, The Twenty-Five Year War, indicting the military, particularly the chiefs, for not putting together a coherent strategy for Southeast Asia, or not making whatever we were doing there part of a greater worldwide strategy. Strategy involves budgeting. Part of strategy has to be the amount of resources available to work with. The budget process gets wrapped into that, as Bruce would look at it; but Bruce was not looked upon by the military as the strongest advocate for the military way of doing things.

Goldberg: Years ago I did a study in the Air force called "Strategy and Money." I related specifically strategic planning and thinking to the budget and to money available, and the way the services looked at the money. It was very enlightening, the way they costed each other out.

Pursley: It seemed to me that one process of developing strategy is laying out your objectives, seeing what resources you have, and seeing if the two match. Normally, they will not. Usually there are far more objectives than resources readily available to work with. Then you either have to shave your objectives or look for more resources. That process of trying to match objectives and resources is a completely iterative process that goes on all the time, with no end to it. The budget is simply a way of quantifying what all those resources are: hardware, people, etc.

Goldberg: You have contending interests involved, all of them working on their own behalf and seeking to get something from the others. It's a constant battle.

Pursley: I'm not sure if the chiefs today have a wholly developed or useful way of developing a strategy in which they can line up the resources that are available to pursue the objectives, many of which have been assigned to them; assess the tradeoffs, and find out what objectives would have to be cut or changed, or where to get more resources.

Goldberg: The problem is that people who ought to be giving them the objectives are not doing it and are changing their minds so much. It gives them a ready out if they can't get the guidance they need to know what the objectives ought to be. That kind of uncertainty probably always will exist, because our international objectives and political objectives are always in flux.

Pursley: It seems to me that that's not an adequate reason for the chiefs not to be going through a strategy-developing routine all the time.

Goldberg: They used it, all the way back to the 1950s. Even before, they were asking what the objectives were; they couldn't plan unless they were told. They got some NSC papers along the way.

Pursley: That is still not an adequate reason, particularly if you have 50 years of experience not getting those objectives laid out clearly. They should develop a process of "what if." If these are our objectives, then this is what we are going to need. You have to deal with the parametric of these things.

Goldberg: We ought to, but you pointed out what happened with the JSOP through all these years. The same thing.

Pursley: There were two or three things wrong with the JSOP. It wasn't priced out. It was so far out of bounds that that made it less than an effective vehicle for starting a whole

planning cycle. Everybody nodded and got on with something else, but nobody paid any attention to the JSOP or used it for anything that I know of.

Goldberg: There are always so many uncertainties and contingencies in the process that the Joint Chiefs themselves are usually uncertain as to where to go and what to do.

Pursley: It's an organizational question at least in part. Are we going to leave the discussion, study, and analysis of the various factors affecting national security to the civilians in OSD? Or will the military try to develop that kind of capability so that they can be a more productive player in the national security process?

Goldberg: There has been some effort at that. Colin Powell got involved.

Pursley: Even before that all the service staffs had developed a program analysis and evaluation shop, or Systems Analysis. They all did that, even while they were badmouthing the whole idea and criticizing it. The services put some of their very brightest people in those roles. Lee Butler, for example, when he was J-5 on the Joint Staff, took some good-sized leaps down the road to develop a coherent military strategy. That was in Colin Powell's day, but it was Lee Butler who was taking the initiative.

Goldberg: That's true of the whole J-staff. It has changed in the last ten years. It seems to be a much more effective staff. One could hope they will be good enough to do for the Joint Chiefs what ought to be done, but the chiefs themselves have to want it. They are still often at odds with each other.

Pursley: Not much change there.

Goldberg: Let's go to some weapon and manpower issues, which were very important during Laird's period, with reference to the All Volunteer Force, his work on the draft, and his apparent success in persuading the service chiefs to go along with him. Apparently he was

able to establish good relations with the military. They looked upon him favorably and he had success in getting them to go along with the two big things he concentrated on doing.

Pursley: Secretary Laird's success derived in large part from his political background. He ran for office and worked consistently developing constituencies and trying to get people to go along with him. When you work in Congress with various kinds of blocs and factions and try to develop ways to move some kind of a program or project down the road, you develop a tolerance and even an appetite for listening to the other fellow to find out what he wants, and play to that.

Goldberg: It's persuasion rather than command.

Pursley: It's a willingness to go along with compromise and get on with the work at hand when there are a variety of views. Laird had not only a willingness to listen, but also an appetite for wanting to surface all views. He could then develop ways to make all parties believe they were part of a process and had an opportunity to get something out of the process. Programs thereby moved ahead in a more collegial way. Many elements would be part of the decision process; but Laird most of the time would have in mind where he wanted to come out. He wasn't bargaining and bartering. Most of the time he knew before the discussions ever started about what the decision(s) could be. In the process, by letting other people participate, listening to them, and making them think they were part of it all, he developed a tolerance on their part for whatever answer he ultimately came up with.

Goldberg: It was instinctual with him by this time, wasn't it, part of his personality and character?

Pursley: Yes, and it was a management process that was easy for him. It was one that others would accept. He would be sincere when listening to the comments of others. He



could not only tell them what they had said, but embellish it so it better illustrated their point.

I guess a good politician who needs to run for office every few years develops that technique of listening intently with the purpose of understanding.

Goldberg: The really good politicians can look you in the eye and convince you of their undivided attention.

Pursley: He would also remember and understand. Not all politicians do.

Goldberg: What about the specific reference to his handling of manpower, the draft, and the All Volunteer Force?

Pursley: Maybe I wasn't so attuned to that then, but Laird knew the draft would be a very difficult issue for Congress to handle. There were so many people who were being shipped more than once to Vietnam because of the draft. The draft by itself was becoming a huge political nightmare. The country was having a hard time reconciling it, particularly as the casualties went on. There was something unfair and inequitable about manning our forces through that kind of device—at least the way the draft was being administered.

Goldberg: There had always been inequities, they were just greater and more obvious and far more offensive during this period.

Pursley: They were magnified, and Laird was such a political animal that he sensed that this was one of the huge drawbacks to trying to reconstruct our forces post-Vietnam. It was one he thought we ought to come to grips with and take steps to manage in a better way. Without a spokesman who came from a political arena we might have had a more difficult time selling that.

Goldberg: How did he relate to the White House on this?

Pursley: The White House was never as attuned to that kind of issue. They weren't bothered by the persistent return of draftees to Vietnam. Later in the first Nixon administration, by 1972, it became clear to a lot of the folks on the White House staff that it would be a big plus for President Nixon to announce the end of the system of returning draftees of Vietnam. Laird used the point to push the All Volunteer Force and sell the idea to the White House and others.

Goldberg: How about in DoD, with the services?

Pursley: I don't recall any huge hue and cry. There were grave suspicions privately that an All Volunteer Force would never work. It was clear to most that the draft was probably the most costly system from a purely economic standpoint, by shifting people from high-paying civilian jobs to military earnings. The opportunity costs of a draft are clearly high. But the services would far rather have a draftee than face all the incentives necessary to attract an All Volunteer Force. Most of the services thought it would break their budgets to have to pay for what they were then getting cheaply—at least from a military budget standpoint. None of the services were keen on the All Volunteer Force, and thought there was little chance of it working out. But some people were doing some good analyses. Harold Wool in manpower was a consistently strong analyst.. I was very impressed with what people like Harold put together.

Goldberg: They were longtime manpower specialists who had been at it for many years.

Pursley: They convinced Laird that it was doable. But Laird knew we would have to do it. I know a couple of interesting vignettes about this. Part of the problem with the selective service laws was that General Hershey had been around so long. Laird tried to be effective in replacing Hershey with a younger man. The one he convinced to take it on, Charlie

Di Bona, was approved by Nixon and was all geared to go. He passed all the tests on the Hill until he got to Margaret Chase Smith. For whatever reason, Colonel Lewis, Smith's assistant, had taken a dislike to Charlie because Lewis thought Di Bona had left the Navy too soon. Charlie was a Naval Academy graduate, a Rhodes scholar, and had the obligation in Colonel Lewis' judgment to serve for a much longer time. Colonel Lewis convinced Smith that she should blackball Charlie, and she did. She put a stop on Di Bona's appointment and convinced Senator Stennis that Charlie was a nonstarter. That changed Mel Laird's attitude. A Laird protégé, Curtis Tarr, took over Selective Service for a while. Laird stayed active in trying to make the transition go as smoothly as it could.

Goldberg: Let's move ahead to the development and procurement side of the weapons. I presume much of that was left to Packard. Laird was satisfied to have Packard handle most of it.

Pursley: That's very true.

Goldberg: That's fairly typical, isn't it, except for someone like McNamara, who gets involved in everything?

Pursley: Laird had high confidence in David Packard. They were very close on issues. They often ate lunch together, frequently four times a week. Packard was a quick study. Laird stayed up to date on things, but I don't recall him ever countermanding anything that Packard wanted to do.

Goldberg: They set up the DSARC, and I guess both of them were inclined to give increased responsibility to the military departments to manage programs.

Pursley: Laird had trust, faith, and confidence in Systems Analysis, even though he would not go to the Hill and ask that the head of Systems Analysis be made an assistant secretary.

Laird felt that by agitating the Hill about Systems Analysis, the Congress might take much more restrictive steps against Systems Analysis. Laird needed Systems Analysis too much to take that risk. We lost Ivan Selin and Charlie Rossotti, very good talent, because of that. Laird liked their work, but knew they wouldn't be as effective on center stage. To go along with the DSARC, about 1972 Laird established the Cost Analysis Improvement Group, the CAIG. That's ongoing today, and doing exceptionally good work. It's probably the best costing work anywhere in government. The ability to do very effective costing is an achievement that doesn't get much attention. You may say, "How did the Department get so far off base on a program like the A-12?" It was simply because key officials didn't listen to the CAIG.

Goldberg: That's not unusual. If the services are going to push something hard, they will try to override.

Pursley: The Cost Analysis Improvement Group doesn't have sufficient political clout.

Goldberg: What do you think was the reason for the strong congressional adverse view of Systems Analysis, causing it to be difficult for Laird to keep it going? Was it because of Enthoven and McNamara, primarily?

Pursley: There were a number of factors. It stemmed, I think, to a large extent from the antipathy of the uniformed military to working with the Systems Analysis on key issues. Then the uniformed military would go to the Hill and say their views weren't being heard. The Hill would run into strong personalities like McNamara and Enthoven and would not be entirely reassured. Those personalities probably weren't "Mr. Charm" to a lot of politicians. Today, the secretary has more people handling protocol than McNamara had working in

Systems Analysis. Only twelve people in Systems Analysis had so much influence because they could talk McNamara's language.

Goldberg: They had superior people, too.

Pursley: Yes: John Deutch, Bill Niskanen, Russ Murray, a good group, stalwart folks in their own right. The fact was that the uniformed military didn't like the whole idea, even though the military couldn't compete with them on an analytical basis at all.

Goldberg: But they knew they had to try.

Pursley: They would run to the Hill and complain. That inflamed it a lot.

Goldberg: Enthoven got to be an assistant secretary; he had a much larger organization and he had McNamara's ear. I've seen him in action, been in meetings with him. He was arrogant with the military. Their complaints about him on that score were accurate, I think.

Pursley: They sensed that. I never thought that. I guess I just knew a different Alain Enthoven.

Goldberg: You knew him well. I did not know him that well. At meetings with military he was clearly skeptical of what he was hearing from them, and let them know it. He may not have been that way all the time.

Pursley: I have a couple of vignettes. I was working on the supersonic transport (SST) project because McNamara had been asked by President Johnson to head a 12-person executive panel that looked at whether the country should pursue the SST. There was a study group under the Department of Commerce deputy secretary advising the McNamara panel. I represented the Defense Department as a member of the study group. During that period I was still formally a member of the Systems Analysis staff. Alain Enthoven stayed deeply interested, even to the point of visiting me at Commerce on Saturday afternoon. He

would just wander in and sit and talk. That's the Alain Enthoven that I knew, a concerned and deeply interested man. A good leader.

Goldberg: There's no question that he had a broad and deep knowledge of what was happening. The military just didn't see him that way.

Pursley: He didn't have a strong appetite for folks who couldn't keep up with him. I would never have had the opportunity to serve McNamara, Clifford, or Laird if Enthoven hadn't gone to McNamara to recommend me for military assistant.

Goldberg: What about Laird's positions on major strategic issues, such as nuclear parity, superiority, sufficiency, etc.? Did he pay much attention to strategic thinking and planning?

Pursley: Yes. The defense reports of the Laird period, to go back and look at them now, are cast in strategic terms probably more than the annual reports of any other secretary. Part of that was a sincerity on Laird's part in wanting to think in strategic terms, and he did. But part of it was a political ploy, too—in part, one-upping the White House, sort of a competition with Henry Kissinger. In some ways Laird was talking even in broader strategic terms than the assistant to the president for national security affairs. Part of it was a play to Congress that DoD could get along with the level of resources that we were contemplating, telling them in strategic terms how certain strategies could work. Part of it was a pure extension of what Nixon put out as the Nixon Doctrine, trying aggressively to get resources from other nations, i.e., burden-sharing. Laird codified all of that. He met frequently with other ministers of defense on a bilateral basis, in effect going over and selling strategy. Laird was effective with Nakasone of Japan in selling burden-sharing. With the Koreans he argued strongly that the old strategic business of not spending more than five percent of the Korean GNP was a non sequitur, especially if the threat was as high as the South Koreans

claimed. If the threat was as high as they said it was, they had to be prepared to accept much greater sacrifices in their society. They couldn't have it both ways.

Goldberg: Who wrote the annual reports for Laird?

Pursley: It was somewhat of a collegial thing, but Bill Baroody probably did most of the actual writing. He developed that kind of litany of strategic words—strategic sufficiency and all that sort of thing. I always felt that some of that was a little hokey, quite frankly, and Laird knew that. He came at that from two or three different standpoints. One—he thought in those terms; two—a little bit of competition with the White House, using some of the White House's own doctrine; three—he could use it in the field to really be developing stronger ties and a more legitimate kind of strategic sufficiency; and fourth—it helped in keeping the department together. It gave them a rallying cry, something they could put a handle on.

Goldberg: Some kind of guidance. How about the ABM and his position on it?

Pursley: He sincerely believed it was important to have an ABM treaty. For all intents and purposes, if there were not some kind of limits on strategic defenses, particularly with the introduction of MIRVs, the situation would invite and promote the multiplication of offensive weapons. The fact was that we (both the Soviets and the U.S.) could build offensive weapons so much faster and easier than we could defensive weaponry. If we got into that kind of competitive routine we would have not only a strategic nightmare but a budgetary problem, as well. How could the risks be controlled if we got started down that road? I think we probably thought at that time, with the Soviet experience and the defenses around Moscow, that they had a bit of a defensive lead on us. We were probably wrong on that. My guess is that their Tallinn system was never as effective as any of us thought. But we always acted as though, particularly when developing bomber projects and so on, that the

Soviets must have an effective defensive system. We probably would have been fighting the worst of all worlds if we had started down the road of trying to compete with the Soviets on defensive systems, and inviting large multiplications of offensive weapons. The Soviets showed a pretty clear, not comparative advantage to us, but comparative advantage within their own system. They could crank those weapons out to a fare-thee-well in all kinds of modes, large and small, but they had the penchant for very large systems with large payloads. I think Laird firmly believed that it would not be sound U.S. or international policy to start down that road. A way to put the quietus on that was to agree to two defensive sites and to agree with the Soviets that we would limit our defensive systems, giving us some opportunity to at least level out and moderate the offensive system. Maybe ultimately, somewhere way down the road, the U.S. and the Soviet Union could start to reduce offensive weapons. That's the way it has evolved. There would be many, and I would have to say that I would be among the group, to say today, when we are looking today for systems to destroy incoming weapons, that the ABM treaty has destroyed far more missiles than anything else either the U.S. or the former Soviet Union/Russia has done.

Goldberg: It wasn't necessary to continue to develop and produce them.

Pursley: Absolutely. So we all pulled back; the Soviets from about 15,000 to closer to 7,000 or 8,000 nuclear weapons, with a strong chance, if we could ever get START II ratified all the way around, to around 3,000. Those are huge reductions. There would be those who would say, "we won the Cold War, why worry about it? Most of theirs don't work, anyway." I wouldn't be too sure about that.

Goldberg: It doesn't matter, only a few have to work.



Pursley: The Russians have very little to hang on to now as a world power. Nuclear weaponry is probably the single largest "power factor" they have; they will not let that go completely. They will probably risk major economic trauma to hang onto nuclear weaponry as their major foreign policy reed and claim to major power status.

Goldberg: There are indications of that, aren't there?

Pursley: I wouldn't be so sure that the Russians in this day and age are going to be as quick to let that weaponry decay, become ineffective, and disappear so that we can dismiss it as a threat, as many people seem to believe. I would worry about that and my point would be that continuing to pursue the processes of arms control through START or whatever to follow on to the old SALT and ABM treaties, is still very important to legitimize the destruction of those weapons and make it more difficult for people to hang on to those in a formal way.

Goldberg: What would be the effect if we pursue an antiballistic missile defense system?

Pursley: I think it's going to be very difficult. We would have to be very artful in the way we went about that not to destroy the value of what the ABM treaty has provided. There may be ways to do that, but this administration, in my judgment, has not seemed very alert to what the niceties of all that are. For example, NATO expansion was a direct slap in the face to the Duma, at the very time we were asking them to ratify START II. For the Clinton administration's domestic-political purposes it was apparently more important to have NATO expansion than to have START II ratified. That is a judgment call, but those are among the tradeoffs. It seems to me we may be too ready to dismiss the gravity of the Russians hanging onto all those weapons and ultimately perhaps doing something, even reversing the whole thing and starting up on the offensive side again. We could find a lot of people

who would say that was the last thing they need or could do now, given that society's present structure, but given its importance to the Russians as a power status indicator, I wouldn't be so certain that the old Slavic nationalistic mentality wouldn't want to give it a try.

Goldberg: It wasn't always in the best interest of the country or the people to do a lot of things they did over the years.

Pursley: I would say that the ABM treaty has been pretty durable and has been a valuable vehicle. There have been those, like Senator Helms and others, who say it is the worst thing to have happened. The fact is that the levels of weapons, far lower now, seem to be more manageable and under some kind of control. It works to our advantage because of the diminished threat, and economically it is valuable because it frees up resources to do other things within our budget. I think it has been a huge success. I think Laird saw all that; I don't think there were any surprises that he didn't foresee.

Goldberg: Laird paid a good bit of attention to NATO, didn't he?

Pursley: Yes, he did.

Goldberg: He became involved with NATO policies. You pointed out that he had bilateral talks with NATO defense ministers. What did he see as NATO's major problems during this period?

Pursley: Curiously, one of the biggest problems was that we focused too much on NATO. There was an orientation in our foreign policy and national security establishment that would concentrate far more on NATO and NATO issues than might have been deserved.

Goldberg: We may still be doing it, too.

Pursley: Probably. During the Cold War you could say, "how can that be?" because the principal place we could expect a Soviet invasion would be into that arena. But if you pick a

broader, worldwide view, you could say, "does it have to be either-or?" Why can't we have a proper amount of attention to NATO and NATO issues and fighting the Soviet Union/Russia in that arena but at the same time recognize that most of the people in the world live somewhere else? If you put China and India together you have 45 to 50 percent of the human race with possibilities of all sorts of security issues. Northeast Asia is the only place in the world where there is a direct juxtaposition of all the major powers. There, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Japan, and the United States, are all lumped together with a real powder keg stuck in the middle in the form of Korea. Perhaps we should spend more time and attention on that. Obviously indicative of that to some degree was the opening of a relationship with China. Laird would be the first to applaud that. The fact was, too, that we had the Southeast Asia conflict eating at us. Perhaps one of the charges that could have been made against prior secretaries of defense at a time when we had a major war where we were using maybe one-third of our budget, was that the secretaries themselves were not spending as much of their individual time on that Southeast Asia effort as they should have. That sounds curious, but the charge made by the military over and over again that they were being micromanaged by civilians was not true. The civilians may have meddled in it, but they didn't spend enough time trying to get their arms around it. Secretary McNamara addresses such charges in his books on Southeast Asia.

Goldberg: He accepts that.

Pursley: Laird took the opposite view. He needed to be personally involved. He set up a Vietnam task group that met daily. This gets back to NATO in the sense that one of his first concerns was that we spent so much time on NATO, but a lot of other things were important for the national security of the country. We needed to organize our time, efforts, and

management differently, so that we didn't just enjoy the pleasing protocols. NATO is a huge bureaucratic machine that won't quit, it just keeps on going. The ministries, the defense committee--

Goldberg: There will be a big celebration here in April.

Pursley: And adjuncts from all of that. It's like eating abalone, it gets bigger and bigger the more you chew on it.

Landa: Did Laird have strong feelings about burdensharing in NATO?

Pursley: Yes, but he also addressed burden-sharing in a lot of other places. I shouldn't dismiss NATO too quickly, because he spent a lot of time with Helmut Schmidt on those kinds of issues, and a lot of time with the British. I don't recall him spending lots of time with others just on burdensharing, the Turks, Greeks, etc. The issue was probably a nonstarter. Burdensharing was to Laird a very important issue. To get away from NATO for a second, Laird pulled a division out of Korea pretty much on his own, almost before the White House really understood what was going on. It was a onetime event, but he made it sound like it was part of the Nixon Doctrine and would be part of an ongoing process that would be continued. President Carter tried to couch it in those terms and bring another increment of U.S. forces out.

Goldberg: It blew up in his face.

Pursley: It sure did. But Laird pulled it off pretty smoothly. He had advised a lot of people, certainly the Koreans and the Japanese, that this was what we were up to. The Koreans were going to have to accept a bigger part of the load or tell us that the threat wasn't as severe as they said it was. There's a non sequitur there for the Koreans. The threat couldn't be what they said it was and still refuse to provide the resources needed to address

the threat. Laird used that argument to pull a division out of there and reduced the force by about one-third, from 60,000 to about 40,000 people, in one fell swoop.

Goldberg: That's where it still is.

Pursley: Exactly. It's interesting that emphasis on burden-sharing is where that process started.

Goldberg: Central in the Laird period was Vietnam. That apparently occupied more of his attention than anything else.

Pursley: I wouldn't say more than anything else, but he did it in a more effective way, because he systematized how he used his time on those things.

Goldberg: At any rate, it was certainly one of the most important things that he gave time and attention to and accomplished during this period. What was his attitude about Southeast Asia when he took over as secretary of defense? Did he come in with some real important possible changes in mind, or did he develop them?

Pursley: Both. He came in with some very clear things in mind, and there were others he would have to develop because there was no way of knowing the circumstances, people, and how everything would pull together. One thing Laird knew, a surprise to me, was that while Nixon was campaigning with the claim that he had a strategy for resolving Southeast Asia, he (Nixon) had no such thing. Laird knew that if he (Laird) was going to do anything worthwhile concerning Southeast Asia he would have to move quickly. Laird made a very early trip to Vietnam in March 1969. He seemed to indicate that he knew early on that if the objective in 1969 was for the United States to foster self-determination on the part of the South Vietnamese and for the U.S. to stop trying to shoulder all of the military, economic, and political burden in Southeast Asia, then we needed to find a transition strategy as fast

as possible. There was no way we could take over and impose self-determination, it is a non sequitur. Laird was looking for a way to develop among the South Vietnamese the capability to handle their economic, military, and political affairs. That was very much in his mind even in January 1969. He set out to find out if his analysis was correct and get a feel from the military commanders about whether we could pull off a Vietnamization program—a transition aimed at providing the means for true self-determination. Abrams reassured him that we could do that. That's not entirely surprising, because Abrams, when he was number two under Westmoreland, had had the job of developing a better and stronger capability on the part of the Vietnamese. If Abrams said we could not pursue Vietnamization, he would have had to argue that he had failed in his task. Laird had in mind that from a political standpoint we needed to start a pullout of troops. It didn't matter what the number was, it was necessary to show that people were leaving. That would help to buy time with various U.S. constituencies strongly opposed to any continued U.S. involvement in the war. Laird was strongly opposed, as could be seen when we started such things as the B-52 drops over Cambodia, to anything that would be characterized as a widening of the war and that could give him problems on the Hill. He knew he would have to fight Senator Fulbright and others unless strong initiatives were shown changing U.S. strategy. He came in with attitudes on those things and stayed with them.

Goldberg: Who were the people who were chiefly advising him on Vietnam, to whom he was willing to listen and who could presumably influence him and his positions?

Pursley: He listened to the military. He would listen to the chiefs, and Buz Wheeler, the chairman. He listened to Adm. McCain, then the CINCPAC. But it was also in that listening process that Secretary Laird became convinced the military had no winnable strategy. It

was very evident that there was no strategy coming out of the chairman's office, JCS, CINCPAC, or even out of Southeast Asia. This was influence in a negative way.

Goldberg: Was there opposition from the military and the JCS?

Pursley: Yes, a resounding resistance from the JCS. They resisted the Laird approach to self-determination, and to adopting plans and programs that fit logically with the idea of self-determination. They resisted the shift in objectives, i.e., that Vietnamization was now the chief mission.

Goldberg: How are you using self-determination?

Pursley: That the Vietnamese would be responsible for their own fate. If they determined they wanted to join the North, fine; but if the Republic of Vietnam wanted its independence, it had to build and fight for the institutions necessary to sustain that independence. Even President Kennedy had used that same thinking and terminology back in 1962-1963. As McNamara points out over and over again, he felt that up until the time the Diems were assassinated Kennedy was close to announcing a systematic withdrawal of U.S. troops and units. We were going to turn the whole thing over to the Vietnamese. That all blew up there and here with the 1963 assassination. We had a bit of a hiatus and a very different route with President Johnson. This was before Indonesia, in 1965, when it became clear that the Chinese weren't capable of establishing hegemony in Southeast Asia. It wasn't as clear in 1963, given both the deep and irreparable schism between the Soviet Union and China and the Cuban missile crisis, what kind of reaction the Soviets would have if we took a more active military role ourselves. We needed some kind of an exit strategy to get out from under all that. Self-determination got blended in with a lot of other things during the period

1964 – 1969. A U.S. military victory was at least implicitly one U.S. goal during that period.

By 1969 Vietnamization was about the only objective we had left that made much sense.

Landa: On the issue of Vietnam, was Laird at all inclined to call in outsiders for advice, elder statesmen, or anybody in particular?

Pursley: Yes, he tried to stay close to prior secretaries of defense. He talked to Clifford more than McNamara. Clifford made himself more accessible.

Goldberg: Clifford was also more politically oriented and aware than McNamara.

Pursley: He was a lot closer to and had more detailed discussions with people such as Dick Helms, to get a feel about how the CIA and their analysts truly felt about things. He talked to outsiders like Herman Kahn. I think the term "Vietnamization" got started because Herman used that term in a Saturday afternoon discussion with Secretary Laird in Laird's office. A discussion with Herman, as you know, was a multi-hour affair.

Goldberg: His famous briefing was six or eight hours.

Pursley: Like Castro, if you get him wound up you couldn't turn him off. But Laird reached out in a variety of ways. From a military standpoint, though, it is hard to know. You'd have to ask him who he thought was most influential. Quite frankly, I always found him receptive to ideas. If I had some thoughts I could either talk to him or put them in writing. He was very amenable to those. I found myself in the position of almost always preparing the secretary's memos to the president on Southeast Asian issues. The person who writes has a bit of one-upmanship simply because he has a pen in his hand and can pick what to include and what to exclude.

Goldberg: The White House, of course, was very much involved in this. Laird got reactions from the White House on the Vietnamization business. Both Nixon and Kissinger obviously



had differences with Laird during the whole period of Laird's incumbency. He wanted to proceed more rapidly with Vietnamization than the White House did, is that correct?

Pursley: I think so.

Goldberg: That was one of the sources of his difficulties.

Pursley: As you recall, in the papers we were looking at earlier, the NSSM 3 for example, the White House approach in January 1969 was to go back and start over to see where we were in Vietnam and to study alternatives. Then we would try to work with the Nixon staff on strategic steps and what to tell the American people. In the meantime, the White House had some other things they were working on, especially to make an impression on Moscow that we, the U.S., were a force to be contended with. I think they thought that being tough and militarily strong in Vietnam and effectively prosecuting that war, as opposed to Vietnamizing, was a way of sending a signal that we were a tough group and they, the Soviets, should pay attention to us. As you recall, that was one of the personality traits of the Nixon White House that Laird had to put up with. Laird wasn't ready to sit and study the thing to death, but did come in with predilections and wanted to get down the road to doing things. He wanted to set up stronger Vietnamization programs. He changed the mission statement of MACV, without the White House being really alert to that. He worked up to it and changed it in August 1969, when the first withdrawal increment was underway. During the time when the White House really wanted to study and work out an array of alternatives, Laird had a program being put in place--Vietnamization, withdrawals, changed mission statement; Laird was getting down the road with a strategy. The decision had been made and was being implemented. That created great consternation and very large problems between the Pentagon and the White House.

Goldberg: I gather that you were in agreement with Laird on this approach.

Pursley: Very much so. By 1969 we had used just about all our political capital on the Hill and with the American people. I thought the absence of any coherent strategy or the fitting of what we were doing in Vietnam into any broader national security strategy were matters of great concern. We were spending upwards of \$20 to \$25 billion of a \$75 billion military budget on Southeast Asia. What that was doing to us from a national security standpoint around the world was cause for substantial concern. If we believed that the number one enemy we were facing was the Soviet Union, then applying such much of our resources to Southeast Asia was giving them an advantage. It was allowing the USSR to play catchup, particularly on the strategic side. Since we were just coming into the era of MIRV, providing such advantages to the USSR did not make sense. If we were just going to look at Southeast Asia myopically, and be oblivious to what it meant from a national security standpoint, we were saying that there were more important issues than the Soviet Union. Such a position did not track with other security-political realities. It was a matter of grave concern, and we didn't seem to want to come to grips with that. A counter argument was that we didn't want to bail out of Southeast Asia, or appear to be bailing out, because allies our various alliances couldn't then trust us. In reality the alliances were watching us pulling supplies and units out of NATO and other areas to ship to Southeast Asia. We were draining the capacity to fulfill our alliance obligations. They were thinking we were not acting rationally. In Northeast Asia, as another example, we were eroding the strength of a bilateral relationship with the Japanese by persisting in carrying the main military burden in Southeast Asia. One of the great strengths of Bob McNamara's tenure was that he had built a strong and capable Department of Defense. With that military capability we could

ease our way into a sizeable conflict without seeming to have to choose between "guns and butter." From roughly 1963 to 1967 we used that substantial capability that had been made available. But with the introduction of the Great Society on top of the Defense burden, we had some serious economic problems in this country. For us to go back to the people and say we could discharge ourselves in Southeast Asia and keep up with the Soviets, we would have to increase the defense budget by substantial increments. That was a tall order. All these things had to be considered when thinking about Southeast Asia. If you consider all of those factors and then refocus on the objective of self-determination, it seems clear that we should go down the road Mel Laird offered. We would be testing the South Vietnamese. If they had the wherewithal and the willingness to pursue self-determination, they would not only achieve a major goal for themselves but also place long-term pressure on the North Vietnamese. It seems to me that that lined up better as a strategy for us or as a set of programs, than any other alternatives.

Goldberg: How did you and Laird react to the military initiatives and operations that continued to take place, including some secret ones that didn't go well?

Pursley: Laird resisted many of those that, as you say, did not go well. He was willing to go along with the B-52 strikes in Cambodia, when they were still being characterized as bombing the COSVN—supposedly the headquarters of the North Vietnamese military outside the borders of North Vietnam. Laird supported using B-52s as long as we made it public. His central theme all the way through was to be candid with Congress and the American people. A corollary theme was not to spread the war and allow the U.S. public to learn of such activity by leaks. He didn't think the B-52 strikes against COSVN would amount to much; but if Abrams thought it was worthwhile, Laird would support it. A key,

however, was to make it public. He was always for making everything public, and the White House almost never was.

Goldberg: How about bombing North Vietnam, mining the harbors in 1972?

Pursley: Laird resisted that. He thought it would not be decisive in any way. It was another one of the signals, in a sense. It was something Adm. Tom Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had been pushing for endlessly and relentlessly back in his Navy days. Moorer finally got it adopted pretty much by going around Laird to the White House.

Goldberg: How did this affect Laird's relationship with these people?

Pursley: It was a consistent point of difficulty for both the White House and the Department of Defense. The White House didn't know how to handle Laird.

Goldberg: I was thinking about the military, specifically.

Pursley: The military knew that it was very difficult to get these programs approved.

Moorer's way of doing this, particularly when the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) was established, was working through such a group. It is instructive to note that the WSAG did not include the secretary of defense as a member. Admittedly, the WSAG did include the deputy secretary of defense, but the White House considered the deputy secretary of defense more manageable.

Goldberg: Kissinger in particular.

Pursley: Exactly. That's a set of issues we talked about, what were the processes, procedures, and organizational environments in which all this took place? There were the National Security Council arrangements with endless numbers of committees and different interdepartmental groups, WSAGs and so on.

Goldberg: That was Kissinger's doing, mostly, wasn't it?

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Pursley: To a great extent, but the chairman came away with a fairly large advantage from the standpoint of getting things like the mining approved, because the main representative you would find on every one of those groups was not OSD but, I believe, the chairman or his representative. He was the one person throughout Washington who had a representative at virtually every National Security Council committee or group. That gave the chairman a big advantage in policy and action determinations.

Goldberg: It gave him a direct connection around Laird, which is what he was looking for.

Pursley: Absolutely.

Goldberg: Was Laird involved to any extent in the Paris negotiations with the North Vietnamese?

Pursley: Not directly. He would receive briefings. He visited Paris occasionally to get an update on exactly where things stood. One other thing--Laird was better informed about

[REDACTED]

OSD 3.3(b)(1)

Goldberg: They weren't very imaginative, were they, about that sort of thing?

Pursley: They underestimated Mel Laird, his ability, and what he could contribute.

Goldberg: They must have underestimated [REDACTED]

OSD 3.3(b)(1)

Pursley: Maybe so.

Goldberg: With reference to Vietnamization, was Laird satisfied with the progress that they made during those years?

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Pursley: He was disappointed, because one would have hoped the South Vietnamese would undertake more of the burden; but I think he felt we carried our part of it as far as we could and did as well as we could with the raw material there. The classic argument about this is that the South Vietnamese were beaten badly when they were given the job of substantial operations in northern South Vietnam, on the Laotian border. That would have been in 1971 or early 1972. The South Vietnamese had a difficult time. But Laird had gone over all that with Abrams on a trip prior to the operations. Abrams had said the South Vietnamese had to be turned loose sometime. He thought that they would handle themselves reasonably well. There was some disappointment, but it may be that they tried the operation a little bit too early. I would say that Laird was satisfied that Vietnamization worked about as well as it could have. The great sin was that we had taken over the war in 1965-66 and had not really pursued Vietnamization the way President Kennedy had outlined in 1963. Even Henry Kissinger would agree with that privately today. He has told me that, but I doubt if he will say it publicly. Henry's words to me were "you and Mel were right all the way through." In part, that was in the course of a conversation when he was trying to find out what Sy Hersh was going to write about him in The Price of Power. There may have been a bit of hyperbole in what Kissinger was saying to me.

Goldberg: It's too bad you couldn't tape that.

Pursley: That would have been ironic, if I had recorded that.

Goldberg: On the matter of Vietnamization, in his final report in 1973, Laird said, "Vietnamization today is virtually completed. As a consequence of the success of the military aspects of Vietnamization, the South Vietnamese today in my view are fully capable

of providing their own in-country security against the North Vietnamese." Do you think that was an accurate statement of what he really believed at that time, or was it wishful thinking?

Pursley: It could be both. I don't know the answer to that.

Goldberg: He must have had his doubts about what would happen in the long run if we pulled out completely. We all did, I think.

Pursley: Absolutely; but we had no alternative. We had to pursue Vietnamization and do the best job we could. It was in the broad interest of the U.S. national security. Do you think there was any alternative?

Goldberg: No; we should have done it a lot earlier.

Pursley: That was the great crime in all this, that we didn't provide the South Vietnamese more time and opportunity, particularly if we could have ever demonstrated to Hanoi that the South Vietnamese were dedicated to and capable of a long, long struggle. That would have changed the whole dynamic of the war.

Goldberg: They knew that.

Pursley: Yes, but to look at the political posture, if we had been in a conflict where the American people were providing just resources to the South Vietnamese, we might have been able to sustain that approach for some time. Maybe the U.S. would have tired of that after a while; but it would arguably have provided a better platform for success than such a large and direct combat involvement. It seems to me it's a lot different than allowing Hanoi to know on the one hand that they have the persistence to stay endlessly and take large casualties, and on the other hand that the U.S. is under political fire and can't sustain an appetite for a long conflict. However, if Hanoi is looking at a South Vietnamese capability that may be able to hold out, the war could go on and on. That confronts Hanoi with a

different proposition. We would have a stalemate except that the U.S. could supply the South Vietnamese a lot better than the Soviets could supply the North. It seems to me that strategically it may look a bit different.

Goldberg: On the other hand, if we hadn't been there it could have been much more successful for the North Vietnamese.

Pursley: Perhaps. But if we had been Vietnamizing from 1963 up to 1968, the outcome might have been different. At least the objective of self-determination would have been tried. Hanoi would have been looking at a different set of circumstances from those they were looking at where they knew they could stay for a long period and they knew that the U.S. couldn't.

Goldberg: The South didn't have the unity and force that the North had in this. The North was driven. After all, for them it became a 30-year war. They weren't going to give up.

I think the press played a big role in the war and exercised considerable influence with the public and with the government. Laird was pretty successful in dealing with the press, wasn't he?

Pursley: Very much so. When Laird left, the press awarded him a football inscribed "Laird 198-press 0." The point was that in 198 official media contacts Laird had prevailed almost universally. Laird had very good relations with the press. He was candid. Laird was always in favor of openness.

Goldberg: One of the interesting things he did during the Vietnam War was to emphasize the matter of the prisoners of war. He devoted considerable time to that and was the driving force to eventually bringing about the release. He made certain that the POW issue was



always a significant one in the Paris negotiations, or any other negotiations with the North Vietnamese.

Pursley: That's a good point. Laird turned the POW policy totally around. The position had been that we couldn't address POW matters because the topic might interfere with negotiations and the prisoners might be used as political ploys. Laird said that was baloney, and we would make the issue a huge one and do everything we could to get them back. Changing the policy was a major step, and Laird did that almost all by himself.

Goldberg: And he followed through all the way.

Pursley: He did things like the Son Tay operations. He put Roger Shields in charge of POW policy, and Laird met frequently with him.

Goldberg: I saw Shields the other day in the Pentagon. We presented the secretary with our new book on the prisoners of war. We have another due next year dealing with the policy aspect and giving Laird his due in this matter.

Pursley: That was a gutsy call for Laird to change POW policy. It was not easy to sell.

Goldberg: Did Laird do much with reference to China?

Pursley: I think the answer to that is "no."

Goldberg: Did he or his staff do anything in connection with the India-Pakistan war?

Pursley: Not except through the WSAG and discussions, group aid and assistance, but not policy.

Goldberg: He did play some role in the EC-121 shootdown.

Pursley: A very large and dominant role. That incident, because it came so early in the Nixon administration, April 1969, was a defining incident in many ways about how the White House and Laird's group were going to work together.

Goldberg: Laird took considerable initiative.

Pursley: Yes, in a lot of ways. One, in holding up any planning for B-52 strikes against North Korean power plants and that sort of thing; secondly, Laird shut down for a time the reconnaissance activity of some of the older aircraft without the White House even knowing about that. It caused great distress in the White House when they found out. Laird reasoned that the utility of reconnaissance should be assessed against the risks. If risks were high, as evidenced by the EC-121 shootdown, and the incremental benefits were low, we should reassess the missions. Laird wanted that done for some of our other new efforts before we lost another aircraft.

Goldberg: Kissinger was really strong on some kind of retaliation. And Haig was pushing for it.

Pursley: Those were days before Haig had the influence he had later, but he would be a big one pushing for that. The chiefs wanted to do something too. One problem was that we couldn't do anything with carrier aircraft; there were no carriers nearby. And we didn't have the B-52s in place to run a bomber stream across North Korea. We would probably have to cycle them through Japan, and consulting with Japan would not be easy. Laird's point was that by the time we got retaliation in place, it would be like initiating a brand new strike. It was a question of whether there was a perishability to the whole concept of retaliation. What if the North Koreans would re-retaliate? What would we do for our second act? We could predicate air strikes on the premise that that would end it; but that might not. Then what would we do? Any continued military action in Korea would have required a national mobilization. We had diligently stayed away from that. How could we pull that off in the

existing political and economic climate? Finally the White House decided not to retaliate. It left a bitter taste for some time between the White House and DoD.

Goldberg: How about Nixon? He made the final decision.

Pursley: Yes, but he pretty much sided with Kissinger. His inclination was to hit North Korea. But Laird raised many potent and meaningful questions and the White House didn't have good answers.

Goldberg: He had support from the military on this, didn't he?

Pursley: He developed it, because the military kept coming up with plans that couldn't be carried out.

Goldberg: Did Moorer go along with this?

Pursley: Buz Wheeler was there then. Moorer would have been for it. He would have been particularly keen about using the Navy.

Goldberg: I want to talk about arms control and disarmament and Laird's views and role in this and differences with the White House, Nixon and Kissinger particularly, starting with the SALT I agreement in 1972. Was he in favor of it?

Pursley: Yes. Laird had a personal representative at those negotiations, all the way through—Paul Nitze. That's a pretty potent combination, Laird and Nitze--a man with the profound foreign policy background that Paul Nitze has and the political inclinations of Melvin Laird. They worked together very well.

Goldberg: The Joint Chiefs had a representative there also, didn't they? Roy Allison?

Pursley: Yes, Allison's a good man, but he's in a different league than Paul Nitze.

Goldberg: He ran afoul of Kissinger, unfortunately for him.

Pursley: He was working under different kinds of edicts, constraints, etc. That was such a complex negotiation, just on our side alone, quite apart from whatever the Soviets were doing. How many sides do you suppose were really represented there? On the one hand there was Henry Kissinger, who thought that he was the negotiator and he may very well have been. Then there was Gerry Smith, who was appointed officially as the U.S. negotiator. So we had two number one negotiators, to make it a bit complex for starters. Henry wouldn't share everything with Smith, and Smith would know there were things better not shared with Henry. Then there was the secretary of defense, who has to be fairly substantially involved, and Paul Nitze, a high-powered man who had been involved with the Soviets and arms control for much of his adult life. Then you have the JCS and Roy Allison, and probably several other people coming from different groups within the State Department. That's gets to be a complex organizational arrangement. It's surprising we ever got far enough down the road to get an agreement.

Goldberg: That's the way with most big international agreements, with all the players and organizations involved.

Pursley: This was even more so, by the level of the persons involved and the inability or unwillingness of a lot of them to talk to each other. Henry would never level with Mel Laird on what was really going on, but Laird would find out through other ways. Paul Nitze would be having a hard time trying to find out information in order to give Laird an accurate picture of what was happening.

Goldberg: Kissinger often got his way by getting rid of people. He got rid of both Smith and Allison so he wouldn't have to worry about anyone else being the negotiator with him.

Pursley: Laird was a strong arms control advocate, but arms control in his mind did not equate with disarmament. He thought of arms control as really controlling. As a matter of fact, arms control even under a buildup situation is not a logical inconsistency. We were actually at the very dawning of the MIRV era, but we could say we were going into arms limitation at the time when the proliferation of real weaponry had an ominous ring to it. It sounds like a non sequitur, but Laird's view was that arms control should be taken just the way it sounds, not just disarming, but really controlling.

Goldberg: So he played a major role in that; how about the ABM treaty?

Pursley: I think SALT, strategic arms limitation, was a necessary concomitant. The two of those things go together and it would not have passed if Laird hadn't been really working in Congress for it. The swing vote in that was Margaret Chase Smith, curiously enough. Laird swung her vote.

Goldberg: He probably promised to promote one of her friends.

Pursley: We've talked through that story. That's exactly what happened.

Goldberg: McNamara had an experience with her, too. He told us about it. The same business, in fact. How about the ABM system for the United States? We mentioned this earlier. How about at this particular time in connection with these particular events?

Pursley: I don't recall Laird really weighing in on that. I think he felt that it was very logical that we would go with restrictions for just the two defense sites. It turned out we went with just one, but the treaty allows two. Laird thought that was reasonable. It's a way of controlling the potential for rapid offensive buildup. We didn't have the capability to do anything on the defensive side, anyway, at that time, so we weren't giving up all that much.

Goldberg: In general, Laird took moderate positions, didn't he?

Pursley: Very much so, very logical positions. But he worked hard to get the votes so that they would pass.

Goldberg: So he was a major factor, as far as Congress was concerned, probably the most important from the administration's standpoint.

Pursley: Yes, the White House would never have been able to swing that without Laird really working hard on it. The fact that he had so much good will on both sides of the aisle was a major plus. Laird worked hard with the Democrats. Laird and Senator Gaylord Nelson, from Wisconsin, for example, were very close. They had served together in the Wisconsin Senate and had stayed very close friends. I remember coming in one morning and finding that Laird had not gone home, but had stayed in his office. He and Nelson had been out for dinner and were talking about the Military Command Center, and it had been obvious that Nelson didn't know anything about it. Laird asked him to stay overnight and learn about the National Command Center. They spent the better part of the night there. He was that kind of man, to spend that kind of time, and that's so rare.

Goldberg: He was still young enough, too.

Pursley: Yes. Those things go a long way.

Goldberg: I gather that you had a high regard for Laird as secretary of defense.

Pursley: I hope that comes through. I had a high regard for McNamara and Clifford as secretaries of defense, too.

Goldberg: How would you compare them?

Pursley: It's hard to compare them.

Goldberg: They were very different kinds of people. Laird was a people person.

Pursley: Very much so. Laird was far more analytical than some give him credit for. He developed a political style of seeming a little bit like a country bumpkin. That played very well in the seventh district in Wisconsin. Laird developed a playful flair that caused some people to underestimate him. One could almost count on Laird in any given talk to create a grammatical misconstruction somewhere along the line just for effect.

Goldberg: Eisenhower did that, at his press conferences. People made fun of him, but he knew what he was doing. He said, "Don't worry, when I finish, they won't know what I was talking about."

Pursley: Laird was a great media practitioner. It didn't make any difference what the question was, he would have a piece in mind that he was going to deliver--and the two didn't have to fit at all. It didn't bother him one iota. He had no concern with the fact that what he was delivering had nothing to do with the question. Laird was determined when it came to putting across his points. It drove Fulbright crazy. I remember, for example, after the Son Tay raid, Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee called Laird over a few days later for a hearing. Fulbright and the committee wanted to pursue the negative aspects. Laird had a set piece on the positive aspects. Fulbright finally called the whole thing off. He knew he wouldn't get any answers to his questions. Laird could pull that off--and with no recriminations from his questioners.

Goldberg: I gather that you would say that Laird's chief contributions were Vietnamization and the All Volunteer Army.

Pursley: I would say there were five. I think Laird knew when he came in what he was going to try to do. That is a constructive approach for a secretary of defense. He can't do a lot if he is totally reactive, and if he is going to try to spread himself across a very broad

range of issues he probably wouldn't find much success on any of them. Vietnamization, resolution of the Southeast Asia conflict, was clearly the paramount issue. The All Volunteer Force that evolved during that period was very important. Third, arms control, ABM, and SALT were very important. Fourth, I think the whole question of total force, the implementation of the Nixon doctrine in a broad sense, was a strategic concept that people could hang their hats on and feel like they were marching down the same road. Lastly, a whole range of people-oriented programs—progression of blacks, promotions, and particularly for women—Laird went out of his way to work hard on those and had major success right across the board. The whole four-year program was a little unusual in the breadth and depth of accomplishment. I'd be interested in your view on that. I would say Bill Perry came close in terms of real accomplishment to Laird; but I don't know the Perry period well enough to compare them. I think very highly of Bill Perry, he is a superb act. McNamara accomplished a tremendous amount; but his tenure was longer and the climate within the executive branch was more collegial.

Goldberg: He would have had all that experience before, sitting on the committees and listening to testimony. He must have had an instinct about what would work and also their ready acceptance of him.

Pursley: Absolutely.

Landa: Was there one area or issue in which you felt you had considerable influence on Secretary Laird?

Pursley: More than one. I wish you would talk with him about that, it makes me a little uncomfortable.



Goldberg: You did studies for McNamara that you thought were significant and helped make decisions; obviously you did work with Laird that contributed to major decisions.

Pursley: Far more with Laird, I was there longer and had the background. There were two or three places I would like to think I had influence. One is the Southeast Asia policy. Evidence of some influence was the fact that Chairmen Wheeler and Moorer complained to the White House that my influence was stronger than theirs. My reaction to that was that they had as much access as I had, and they had a large staff. The chairman could go to the secretary any time he wanted. I spent time with the secretary, but not simply because of my title. I earned my way in and out. I believe I had some influence on Southeast Asia policy. There were a number of other places. For example, people policy was probably one on which I had some impact. To take an individual, Bud Zumwalt probably would never have been CNO if I hadn't suggested him to Laird. Mel took a liking to him and ultimately put him in as CNO. That created ripples, because he was far down the list. There were manifold opportunities to have influence. It will be a grave disappointment if I didn't have some.

Goldberg: Did you know Zumwalt when he was working for Nitze?

Pursley: The first time I met Bud I believe he was working on some aspects of the F-111B (the Navy version) issue. I believe he and Charlie DiBona were working on the project together. They had come down to the secretary's office and I was very impressed with Bud. He was bright and very capable.

Goldberg: You left in the summer of 1972. What were the circumstances of your departure?

Pursley: The Air Force had been trying to get me out of the secretary's office for some time. It became clear that I should leave if I were to have any kind of future career in the Air

Force. When I came to serve McNamara in 1966 I was on the colonel promotions list. I was promoted to brigadier general under Clark Clifford's aegis, though I didn't put the star on until after Clifford left. I got my second star under Mel Laird, and my third out in Japan--essentially as part of the Laird period. So my promotions to senior grades in the Air Force had really come from civilian sponsorship.

Goldberg: That was right after you left, wasn't it?

Pursley: Not too long after. That would have had Laird's influence. But the job called for a three-star.

Goldberg: How long did you last, then?

Pursley: I stayed in Japan for about two years.

Goldberg: And then you retired?

Pursley: Yes, I retired because Phyllis and I had four children going to college at the same time and the pay of a lieutenant general then was about \$29,000. With all the other bits and pieces it came to around \$35,000. My net worth was negative at that time and I had run out of any possible way of sending those children to college. It was a trade-off. I thought I was in a reasonably good position to move up in the Air Force. The position in Japan was an excellent one. Both the family responsibilities took precedence in my judgment

Goldberg: What about Air Force feeling about you by this time?

Pursley: It was split. Some were not keen about my progression; others cheered. General John Ryan, the Air Force chief of staff during my tenure in Japan, became one of my strongest supporters, a major shift for him from my Pentagon days.

Goldberg: How did you stand with George Brown and Jones?

Pursley: I had a very good relationship with George Brown. The fact that I had not ever commanded a squadron, group, wing, or division bothered a lot of people. I tried to point out that there were many people above me who had never run anything, by Air Force standards. Neither Clark Clifford nor Laird had ever run anything big. Clifford had run a small law office. It helped too, that George Brown and I had a shared experience in serving Bob McNamara as military assistant.

Goldberg: So you don't feel that that was a factor in your departure?

Pursley: No. If anything, I was in a better position to move up in the Air Force. At the three and four-star level everything becomes very political. From that standpoint I had as many chits as anyone else in the Air Force. After Laird departed, he was still in the White House and still playing a significant role. He still had substantial influence at least until President Carter came into office. I had been very close with Jim Schlesinger. From the standpoint of career, I thought I was in a favorable position. But I was worried about getting my children through college. I could not do that and stay in the Air Force.

Goldberg: So in your military career, the role of military assistant was the most important?

Pursley: I think so, but not to diminish the role of commander, U.S. Forces Japan, or Fifth Air Force. But clearly, if a military career is aimed toward having some role in strategy, policy, or national security programs writ large, the job of military assistant is, or can be, the second best job in the whole military. The first would be as chairman. You can't compare anything in the military with that job.

Goldberg: Of course, military assistants are effective depending on how the secretary chooses to use them and the relationship they develop with the secretary. With some secretaries a special assistant played a major role even across the board.

Pursley: Even then, I don't think you would find three secretaries with a more widely varying range of personalities and talents than Bob McNamara, Clark Clifford, and Mel Laird. There is such a broad array of opportunities and ways in which to serve. Even if the secretary wants to use his special assistant for selected areas, there is still so much left. There is now, I notice in the Pentagon phone book, a new job of chief of staff. There was a day when the military assistant essentially performed that function.

Goldberg: Cohen just did that, for the first time. He picked a military man for it.

Pursley: I thought that was what the military assistant was there for, at least in part.

Goldberg: The military don't like the term "chief of staff" being used in the secretary's office.

Pursley: It's a parallel to the White House. Quite apart from the title, there are the functions of trying to keep the rest of OSD and the service secretaries and service chiefs reasonably in tune with the secretary. To do these things, an effective military assistant would have to think like the secretary. He would think ahead so he could map out for the secretary alternatives and ways to manage effectively. That's what I think a chief of staff does, whatever you may call it.

Goldberg: Should the military assistant also in a way be the secretary's link to the military services?

Pursley: It worked reasonably effectively that way, I thought.

Goldberg: Which of the secretaries you served do you think left the strongest imprint on the department?

Pursley: I think each had a very strong impact, but in very different ways. Bob McNamara's institution of the planning, programming, and budgeting system was a very large management change and contribution. The durability of a management process, to be used

in so many places, not just the DoD, is testimony to that. McNamara had the ability to play a positive role at key times like the Cuban missile crisis. Whether he handled it effectively or not, the fact was that he was a major player in some pretty dramatic times. I made the point before that his ability to increase the overall military effectiveness of the Defense Department during the early '60s was ultimately a factor that came back to bite us because it allowed us to ease our way into a very large conflict in an essentially painless way.

Goldberg: I asked him if the substantial improvement could have played some role in the decision to go in on the large scale, and he said "no."

Pursley: I think it depends on how the question is asked. I can understand his saying "no," but in a way he is modest and won't take credit where credit is due, in terms of building a very strong capability.

Goldberg: Most people don't see him that way.

Pursley: Most people don't know Bob McNamara, they know a lot of myths about him. His capability is illustrated further by the fact that he was used in so many other areas. Johnson used him to handle the SST, and a lot of other issues that lots of others with lesser capabilities wouldn't be invited to manage or could not do very well anyway. I think history will ultimately treat him more kindly than present temperament would indicate. With Clifford, it's pretty hard to argue against accomplishments like a relationship with a president who is keenly interested in continuing in a presidency, but pointing out to him that the strengths and logic were all against that, and to literally talk him out of the thing he wanted more in life than anything else. You don't often find that kind of persuasiveness and strength. The effort Clifford put on trying to turn the Democratic party and the Democratic machine around in its thinking about Southeast Asia during 10½ months, I think was a real tour de force.

With Laird, too, the fact that he was so strong across the board in so many ways probably would rank him among the 20 secretaries to date as one of the strongest and most effective.

Goldberg: He is generally regarded as such. People said he did what he set out to do.

Let's get to other people you dealt with, other than the secretary. Which among them made a strong impression on you?

Pursley: Just a stream of consciousness--among, for example, top civilian officials, Dave Packard was one; Paul Nitze was probably one of the great people of this century in many ways. As a deputy secretary, Cy Vance stands out, also. Service secretaries--Harold Brown was exceptionally able and capable, so intensely bright; Stan Resor, more middle-of-the-road, intensely dedicated, bright, capable, and sincere. That's a diminishing breed of service secretary. My guess is that a century from now there won't be service secretaries. At other staff levels--Paul Warnke, so capable that Laird wanted him to stay on long enough to get us started down the road in getting Vietnam structured. John Foster was another. Much of the weaponry we point to today with such pride was initiated by Foster. Likewise, the genesis of the internet.

Goldberg: Nitze went after Warnke later, didn't he?

Pursley: Yes. That one got put back together a bit later. The Clifford-Warnke thing did not. Those two had a very bad split.

Goldberg: The Nitze split was more serious.

Pursley: It was in a way, but that was during the days of the first START treaty when Paul was our head negotiator. Nitze was heading this group--was it the Committee for the Present Danger--a group adamantly opposed to the START approach as it was being negotiated? Those were two very different positions. Both Pauls had a capability with

words that were a form of hyperbole. But I believe that rift was political. I thought very highly of Paul Warnke, he was an exceptional talent. Likewise, Paul Nitze.

Goldberg: How about military?

Pursley: Oddly enough, it gets harder. The types of leaders that I thought the military should have were so few and far between. Bruce Palmer is one I mentioned earlier. I thought exceptionally highly of him and still do. Andy Goodpaster was very thoughtful and reasoned.

Goldberg: A gentleman.

Pursley: Absolutely, no reason one can't be. Palmer fits into that same mold. Bud Zumwalt had the possibility of doing that; but it can be argued, he tried to go too far too quickly.

Goldberg: How about Abrams?

Pursley: I thought highly of him, particularly as a combat person. I think when it came to being a little different, as a strategic global thinker, someone who is trying to structure a broad range of strategy having in it economic verities, niceties, and political ramifications, that's not Abrams. Abrams would be the one you would want leading the troops.

Goldberg: He was a soldier's soldier.

Pursley: Absolutely. Abrams was a superb combat leader. He had integrity and courage rarely seen.

Goldberg: How about Westmoreland?

Pursley: I don't think as favorably of Westmoreland. He had so many limitations and refused to accept that they existed. He seized one approach to Southeast Asia and was oblivious to what was happening in the broader military context. If you have been following the Microsoft anti-trust situation, the lawyer for the Department of Justice was the one who

worked for CBS during the big Westmoreland -CBS thing. Talk about a sinister character, that Boies is really bad news. I admired McNamara for coming to Westmoreland's aid, exposing himself in a lot of ways, even though he didn't have much respect for Westmoreland. McNamara thought Westmoreland deserved better treatment. Boies was willing to do anything to use Westmoreland and chew him up. It was so bad. I worry about the government chewing up Gates the same way, if they can.

Goldberg: How about your post-military career, what were your main jobs?

Pursley: I went with the Insilco Corp initially. The acronym was derived from International Silver Company, the centerpiece for a Fortune 500 conglomerate. I went with Insilco mainly on the advice of Cy Vance. He had been on some boards with the then president and chief executive officer of Insilco, Randy Blatz. It was an opportunity characterized as one in which I could serve for two or three years and then move up to become the chief executive officer. It was, however, very clear to me after I was at Insilco about a year and a half that the chief executive officer was never going to leave. I don't think he had been intentionally dissembling with me. He simply didn't know how he felt. So I left Insilco after almost three years and went to J. H. Whitney, a venture capital firm. I joined the firm as a partner. J. H. Whitney was arguably the first venture capital firm, started back in 1946. The first managing partner curiously enough was Paul Nitze. Paul served one day and left of his own volition. He was needed in Washington and he responded to the call. I was with J. H. Whitney for nearly eight years. After serving with J. H. Whitney, I went on to do a variety of things. For one, I became vice chairman of USAA, the large financial services firm.

Goldberg: You went to USAA?



Pursley: I had joined the board of USAA in 1983; but I had spent a lot of time working with Bob McDermott at USAA on a variety of things. One was, interestingly enough, a succession plan for USAA.

I stayed with USAA until 1987, but I was doing some other things. I worked with Mel Laird in 1987 on the Moscow Assessment Review panel (MARP). Then I became president and CEO of the Logistics Management Institute (LMI). Paul Ignatius and Barry Shillito had asked me to join LMI. They were a little dissatisfied and annoyed that LMI had been started in 1961 and had been languishing until the late '80s and still hadn't amounted to very much and wasn't playing much of a role. They wanted to get it up and energized. I told them I would take the position for two years. I wasn't going to move to Washington, I would commute from Connecticut. I spent four years as LMI President and CEO, and I'm still serving on the LMI board and a number of committees. That's been pretty much it.

Goldberg: Of course, you've been serving on other commissions.

Pursley: The Intelligence Commission, that sort of thing. Also, as a board member of the Arms Control Association. I joined that group at Bob McNamara's request.

Goldberg: That concludes the interview. I thank you very much, this will be extremely useful for us and I enjoyed it very much.

Pursley: I enjoyed it, too. It seems to me that you ask very good questions; and then you provide more insight frequently than I can provide. You know the territory so well.