Matloff: This is part III of an oral history interview with Dr. James R. Schlesinger held in Washington, D.C., on May 28, 1991, at 10:00 a.m. Again representing the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff.

Dr. Schlesinger, at our last meeting we discussed some aspects of your service as Secretary of Defense. This morning we would like first to turn to the question of interservice competition and rivalry. How serious a problem was interservice rivalry for you as Secretary of Defense?

Schlesinger: I think that the notion of interservice rivalry as somehow or other being a debilitating thing for the Department is grossly exaggerated--it makes good journalistic copy. Of course, there is competition. When we think of the favorable aspects, we always talk about competition; when we think about the unfavorable aspects, rivalry is the word that is employed. Sure there is competition; some of it is healthy, and some of it is not so healthy. But one can think of different patterns in which this competition would express itself, possibly more healthfully. In fact, I think that we achieved some of that with the reforms in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. But the notion of this as somehow debilitating is, I think, a

gross notion in journalism. True, in some respects, the money is not as well spent as it could be; there is duplication; and perhaps more important than duplication, there has been in the communications area an attempt to prevent interservice communication as a way of keeping the services separate. That is not particularly healthy, but I think those things are being overcome, some of them in the light of Goldwater-Nichols.

Goldberg: Who tried to keep the services from communicating with each other?

Schlesinger: The services themselves preferred that. That was one of the less healthy parts of the competition. They wanted to keep their communications secure from their rivals. You can cite many examples that are less than healthy, but the main thing is that the competition between the tactical air of the Navy and the tactical air of the Air Force resulted in having the capabilities available when they were necessary that were quite effective. People can deal with models of perfection, and in dealing with those models of perfection obviously the U.S. military services fall short. But when you examine the equipments that are acquired by other nations, sometimes at much greater costs, then some of the criticism of the services begins to diminish. I think

that internal criticism is always a good thing to the extent that it is designed to improve performance. To the extent that it is designed to make the services whipping boys, it is bad news.

Goldberg: You can have that intra-service, too. Inside the service itself you have competing interests and rivalry and keeping information from each other, too.

Schlesinger: Let me add to that--that's the way that God made the human being. It's very hard to get two people to agree on anything, and when you have an organization of three million or so employees, the notion that they can work harmoniously like clockwork is a false standard. You are going to have rivalries amongst individuals, amongst suborganizations, and amongst principal organizations. Some of it is unhealthy, and some of it is quite healthy.

Matloff: Let me quote your words of April 1974 about the Pentagon. You said, "There are too many competing interests, and too many institutional elements here. . . the power of resistance is formidable. You've got to elicit responses by pulling them along, making them understand the mission." How did you pull them along? Can you give some examples?

Schlesinger: That goes back to the issue of the incentivizing of the services. I have indicated how much

I had learned from Bob McNamara's activities in the 1960s. He thought he had command over these institutions, and he didn't. When the Nixon administration came along, I watched David Packard, and found that very interesting. David believed that this was a closely held corporation, like Hewlett-Packard, and that when he told the Air Force to go out and do "X," it was going to go out and do it. That just isn't the way things work, because these are not only suborganizations that may have objectives that diverge somewhat from those of the head office, but these are also institutional entities in and of themselves that can be rivals, in some respects, of the OSD. They don't like taking directives from the OSD and they have internal values, internal esprit de corps, which we admire when we come to war, but then in peacetime one does not destroy that esprit de corps. McNamara thought he would give orders and David Packard thought that he would pass the word. That is just not the way these organizations work; you have got to incentivize them. What I did was to hold out the promise of more resources and larger force structure if they could operate more efficiently. Specifically, there were the arrangements that I reached with Gen. Abrams when he was Chief of Staff of the Army--that was the lead ship, as it were. He discovered that he

could convert resources into additional force structure rather than shrinking force structure. At that time we were moving towards a conventional defense in NATO, shifting forces back towards the European sector. When he discovered that he could better accomplish the American mission and the Army's mission by becoming efficient, it was remarkable how much he discovered. He came in with units in Japan that had been there since World War II and had served no function now that the occupation was over. The basic point is that one has got to convey to the services that one is not their opponent, and that one is going to help them become more efficient, because they can do the job of efficiency far better than can the OSD.

Matloff: Let me quote one of Secretary McNamara's statements in this area. In his book, The Essence of Security, he said, "Every hour of every day the Secretary [of Defense] is confronted by a conflict between the national interest and the parochial interests of particular industries, individual services or local areas." How serious a problem were "the parochial interests of particular industries" or "local areas"? Was that your experience?

Schlesinger: I think that you have some of that conflict. Secretary Richardson was obliged to shrink the base

structure of the military, and he left me with the obligation, among other things, to shut Newport, Rhode Island. We had the Rhode Islanders coming in regularly, and no doubt that was time consuming at that particular junction, but the notion that Bob comes up with, that every hour of every day one is confronted with this, seems to me to be a little bit of poetic fancy. There is an element of truth, of course, in the fact that because it is so hard to close bases, secretaries' administrations tend to shy away from it. I will add, however, that the fault there does not lie with the services. The services are quite willing to shut bases. They are not eager, but they are willing. The problem there comes from the Congress. Under this constitutional government there is separation of powers, and base closure is a major problem. With regard to the first part of McNamara's statement, I think the hardest issue is to define the national interest. Indeed, he just passes over it and assumes it is given. It is not clear to me what the national interest is.

Goldberg: Whatever he says it is, that's what it is.

Schlesinger: That was his way. The maintenance of the defense mobilization base was long regarded as a problem of the national interest. One has to make tradeoffs in

that area, whether or not one shrinks the defense base in order to sustain existing force structure, or shrinks the force structure. It is not easy to define the national interest, and depending on one's definition of the threat that will be a great problem. In any event, it is very hard to define the national interests. The services define them in their own way. That goes back to the philosophical problems at the time of the Middle Ages and whether or not the nominalist view is correct that the definition of the national interest comes up from all of these smaller interests. The Air Force, the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, are part of the national interest.

Goldberg: But he must have been very much impressed by his experience. In World War II, for instance, people like Somervell, who ran the Army Service Forces, was a power in the land during the war effort. He was always saying the same sort of thing about the amount of time that he had to give to dealing with the Congress on these issues, dealing with individual industries, industrialists, and the services, too. Apparently most of his time was spent doing exactly this sort of thing. Of course, it was wartime, and the pressure was different then; it was constant, it was there all the time.

Schlesinger: The fact that the diversity of national opinion and interests requires negotiations, which requires politics, should come as no surprise in this democratic institution.

Goldberg: It didn't. The only thing that annoyed him about it was that it took most of his time and he couldn't concentrate on other things which he considered also of great national interest and importance, such as getting ahead with winning the war more directly, from his standpoint.

Schlesinger: I feel I share that view, on account of I have invested much of my time, not so much as Secretary of Defense, but as Secretary of Energy, continuously being up on Capitol Hill soothing this and that interest group. That is part of democracy. Happily, when I was Secretary there was greater protection for the Secretary, so that I could spend more of my time on internal matters. It is a fact of life that people in very senior positions have their time chewed up in all sorts of unruly ways, and if they don't allow their time to be chewed up, their various constituencies are angry with them and won't support them. If I may go back to the original question, that is part of the game of keeping people on your side, keeping them moving. You have to show your face to them, to seem to be

understanding of their interests. It is regrettable, in some ways, but not in other ways, that you can't just say, "We're going to shut down the PXs, because they are uneconomic." That is part of the morale of the million men in the Army and the Air Force that will would be adversely affected. Snapping one's fingers and saying, "Away with the PXs because they are no longer economic and the government will be better off to send people to the A&P to buy supplies," is all very well in theory, but in practice there is going to be great unsettlement, and wise leaders pay attention to the attitudes of their followers or supporters. If they fail to do so, they are going to be in trouble.

Matloff: On the question of the budget, you inherited a system of formulations. McNamara had made many changes in the management reforms he introduced. Laird had made some modifications. Did you change the process in anyway? For example, did you give the JCS and the services more of a role in budget formation?

Schlesinger: I did, indeed. I said that I would fight for a package of resources for them. As you will recall, we were in the period of declining budgets and the Soviets' were going up. I didn't have any problem when there was a visible threat, at least in my judgment, in

fighting for money for them, and that they would have a larger role in deciding how those monies would be allocated. However, they were going to face a budget constraint. In the case of the Navy, it had its choice of whether to build nuclear vessels or non-nuclear vessels. If it wanted to build nuclear vessels, however, it would field a smaller force. Even though I had come out of the Atomic Energy Commission, I was not a proponent of nuclear power, and if the Navy felt that it was less expensive and more efficient to have non-nuclear ships and we could buy more of them as a result, that would be fine. That was not the Navy's attitude, but I certainly was not pushing nuclear power. At the time of the discussions of the next carrier, I specifically said they could get about one and three-quarters or two non-nuclear carriers for the price of a nuclear carrier. The Navy decided for the nuclear carrier, probably because the Navy has the view that sooner or later it will get what it wants from Capitol Hill.

Goldberg: How much did you rely on the judgment of the systems analysis people and the PA&E people at this time vis-a-vis the services, what you got from them? Their job, obviously, was to keep you informed, independently if

possible, of what the services were doing, what they wanted, and what the programs were about.

Schlesinger: Once again, I had in mind some of the conflicts that had developed between the OSD staffs and the services during the '60s and I did not want to have those kinds of confrontations. My instructions to the various staffs were to persuade the services, to reason with the services, but not to get into downright confrontations. Take the case of Stealth as an example. Stealth came out of ARPA in 1974-75. George Heilmeier came into my office one day and said, "How would you like to see an aircraft?" He gave me a list of things.

Goldberg: Yes, we do have that. In capsule form it should fit in here, too.

Schlesinger: The main point for this purpose is that ARPA was not supposed to be an independent operation. It was my judgment that if ARPA could not sell a weapon system concept, or an intelligence system concept, to the relevant service, then it wasn't going to fly anyway, because it would be beaten someplace else in the system. Therefore, the instructions were for ARPA to work with something, but to get the service engaged, and ultimately Dave Jones, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, turned to his head of systems command to find money for Stealth. The

point was that we were not going to have a competing empire in the OSD that was developing systems that, because they were developed by OSD, the services would never touch, and would kill as soon as possible. With regard to the program analysis staff, I had come out of the Rand operation and was a fan, up to a point, of program analysis. I thought that analysis was useful, but did not want them to get into deep-seated fights with the services. So we tried to keep things relatively harmonious. I received advice from them.but the services submitted their POMs. I would make adjustments of the POMs, or Clements would make adjustments of the POMs. Certain issues would come to my attention. Things worked out reasonably well. I think that the PA&E people were happy. With regard to DDR&E, there was extended discussion on what we called the "lightweight fighter," which ultimately led to the choice of the F-16, and which was part of this parcel of persuading the services to buy equipment with cheaper unit costs. The services did that. When Dave Jones was Chief of Staff of the Air Force, he embraced the F-16, which meant that we could go up to a number of tactical air fighters. When George Brown was Chief, he resisted it. He had been in systems command when they developed the F-15.

Matloff: You made two references in connection with Congress's move to cut force levels, one in August 1973, that Congress was in the period of "post-war follies." You also stated that same summer, "It is not easy to explain why peace must cost more than war." How did you try to explain that, and with what success?

Schlesinger: I think that we had reasonable success with it. We stemmed the tide of massive reductions. You will remember that when we went to war, the Defense Department budget was on the order of $70 or $75 billion, and maybe even less than that.

Goldberg: So it was two-thirds of the total national budget. Johnson had the first $100 billion budget.

Schlesinger: That was fakery, and was, I think, the '64 budget. By the time we got well into the war, we were up in the $200 billion range. The general view on Capitol Hill was that we could go back to those lower levels of spending. A great deal of inflation had taken place, partly because of the war. Many of the people, particularly the senior members of Congress, did not understand the concept of real spending. They suffered from what J.M. Keynes had called "the money illusion." When I began to develop those notions of real spending and deflated by the rate of inflation and I persuaded the OMB

to go along with that so that they built in an inflation factor for the next year's budget, we began to make the accommodations that were necessary. We had shrunk the manpower levels significantly lower than they had been prior to going into the war. They could understand that. They could understand that the equipment levels had risen per man; that the cost of a Marine rifle company in 1965 was substantially higher than it had been in 1945, but was vastly lower than it was going to be in 1975, simply because we were providing equipments to the Marines that we did not think were necessary when they landed on Okinawa, or when they originally went into Vietnam. So one had to go through in some detail manpower levels, the complexity and cost of individual equipment items, and gradually it became understood, it seems to me, that we were not going back to those lower levels of spending. We were up in the $100 billion range. I think the pre-war spending was about $50 billion. Was that it?

Goldberg: At least that.

Matloff: In connection with congressional resistance to increasing defense spending in real terms while Soviet military power was increasing, as you saw it, you once remarked, and this is quoted in the Congressional Record of November 5, 1975, that you were "an analytical

pessimist and a spiritual optimist." Do these words ring a bell at this late date?

Schlesinger: I think that the analytical pessimist was kind of clear. It was a reflection of the times, which were not entirely happy for the country, and to the trends with regard to defense spending. It looked to be and certainly was a major defense effort on the part of the Soviet Union. Their forces looked to be perhaps more formidable than they turned out to be. The growth of the Soviet force posture, the growth of their units of production each year, the growth of what we estimated to be their spending in dollar terms, were certainly causes of analytical pessimism in relation to the United States. As a spiritual optimist, I think that one has always got to recognize that there are things that turn around these kinds of underlying statistical trends. Indeed, we have seen that, in the course of the last 20 years. I can recall the case of France, with all of its discontents in the 1890s, and then starting around 1900 what was referred to as the good epoch. You remember all of the controversies of the '90s, the Dreyfus case, the conservatives battling the secularists, etc. All of a sudden there was an era of good feeling and everything worked again. It, I believe, is the nature of democracies

that for some unaccountable reason what is a period of ill will and bad feelings suddenly is transformed; these problems don't disappear, but they do recede, and there is a lot of good will and harmony expressed. I think over time that one has got to rely on that.

Goldberg: The cyclical theory of history.

Schlesinger: That's right, and it has been said in counterpoise to analysis--analysts are there to look for problems and if you simply look for the problems, you will be a pessimist. On the other hand, if you look at the human spirit and the cyclical tendencies of history, there is no reason not to be optimistic.

Matloff: That was FDR's philosophy on the progress of the human race.

Schlesinger: I didn't know that.

Matloff: He wrote this in a letter to his former mentor, Doctor Peabody.

Schlesinger: The headmaster of Groton.

Goldberg: Endicott Peabody.

Matloff: Were you surprised that soon after you left office there was an increase in the defense budget, the first real increase, really, since 1968?

Schlesinger: No, we had a substantial increase in the 1975 or '76 budget.

Matloff: In 1976 you were having problems with Congress. It was in 1975 that you made your declaration about the "deep, savage, arbitrary cuts" of Congress.

Schlesinger: We had substantial growth in the 1975 budget. The reason was that we had persuaded the OMB to make allowances for inflation and it turned out that our estimates about the prospective inflation was somewhat on the generous side. As a result, there was real growth in budget authority for FY 1975. I was not surprised that things continued in that path, because we had pushed things down to the minimum.

Goldberg: Were you accused of exaggerating the inflation factor?

Schlesinger: I think that we were probably accused of that, certainly after the event. I had not deliberately done that, but when I went down to the Comptroller's office and talked to the man who had done the estimate, he said that he had been very careful to be generous in his estimate, so it may have been built in that we had a big protection for that 1975 budget. With regard to the 1976 budget, I think I mentioned that I knew and orchestrated it by my behavior that Jerry Ford was going to have to turn around with regard to that big decrease that he had planned, pulling the budget down from $115 billion to $105

billion. Given the controversy that my departure generated, it was plain that Rummy was going to be able to get most of that money back, which occurred. That did not surprise me; I rather took some pride in it.

Matloff: On the question of the all-volunteer force versus the draft, how did you stand on that?

Schlesinger: I had been an opponent of the all-volunteer force when I was in the Bureau of the Budget. Al Haig and I had been among the last people to get the word on where the President stood. Haig, of course, had a good deal more clout in the Executive office. It was plain that Nixon had made up his mind. Whether it was for political reasons or that he was persuaded by the ideology of the economists, one does not know. I suspect that for political reasons he felt that by ending the draft he was going to ease his problems with regard to Vietnam. Four or five years ago Nixon said about the all-volunteer force, "It was a mistake." I regard that as a very interesting point. He didn't engage in the historic rationalizations of presidents that say, "If you had understood the pressures that I was under, etc." He just said it was a mistake. The reason that it was a mistake, in my judgment, was that we should have just terminated the draft calls. That would have achieved the political

objectives. We didn't have to develop this ideology about the all-volunteer force. But, of course, that decision had been made when I became Secretary of Defense, and it was not going to be reversed, so I was under obligation to make the all-volunteer force work, and I did what I could. You will notice that in all my congressional testimony I never praised the concept of the all-volunteer force. I may have issued a few reports that said that it was going well, but in testimony, when they asked me, I would always look at the Chairman and say, "It's going a great deal better than I thought it would." That was taken to be a very positive comment about the all-volunteer force, when basically what they should have asked me was, "What's your base line?" I thought it was going to be something of a disaster.

Matloff: On the question of conventional forces, what levels were you trying to achieve?

Schlesinger: My initial target was to get the Army up to 16 divisions, with Air Force capabilities to match, in order to build that conventional posture in NATO. The Europeans at that time felt very strongly that we were going to withdraw entirely because of pressure from the Mansfield amendment. I would assure them that that was not going to be the case and in order, in part, to

demonstrate to them to maintain their morale and maintain their belief that we could have a conventional force posture that was a stalwart deterrent, I began to move those forces toward Europe and to build them up. We've been over, I think, the brigade to the north that was just outside of Bremen, and so forth.

Matloff: Were you trying to get them back to the 1964 levels before the commitment of ground combat troops to Vietnam?

Schlesinger: Yes. My initial objective was to have a force structure that was of that size. You will recall that we could thin out those forces that were scheduled for one of the two and a half wars that was to be carried out against China. So with somewhat reduced manpower and force structure we could have a deterrent against the Soviet Union that was equal to the 1964 level. That was my objective.

Goldberg: Did you think we had a hollow army during the '70s, after the war? This is the allegation one encounters all the time--by contrast with today, about the army of the late '70s and early '80s until we got all that money. Army leaders said it, and others said it, too. This was a volunteer army, by this time, too.

Schlesinger: My concern about the volunteer army was that we would not get the appropriate levels of manpower given the demographics. But from time to time we had a helpful recession that permitted us to move in that direction. I don't think that that issue came up during my tenure. It was plain to the Army people that the Secretary of Defense was fighting tooth and nail to sustain the force structure, to prevent a Congress that was bent upon getting substantial cuts for the purpose of the Vietnam dividend out of the Department of Defense and that I was asking for money for additional ammo for Europe, and things of that sort. So we avoided that. I think that the issue came up during the Carter period, and I think that Gen. Meyer used the phrase, "the hollow army,"which had been used back in the 1950s by Maxwell Taylor. There was a very thin backup in some of those Carter years with regard to the number of the ammunition stocks, the missile stocks, and so forth, so that the military establishment had less sustainability than one would have liked. I don't think that that was a problem during my tenure, partly because we were attempting to build the stocks and we were emphasizing readiness. I had a great to-do with the Congress over the FY 1974 budget about the readiness issue, and I was harassed by some of the members of

Congress because they thought that military readiness sounded aggressive on the U.S. part. I said that the great defender of readiness was likely to be the President of the United States, because he might be called upon either to deter attack by the apparent readiness of his forces or, alternatively, to use those forces quickly to repel an attack. I said that the services might be more interested in modernization. After it was all over, Gen. Brown came over and said, "I'd like to modify what you said about the military not being supporters of readiness." He didn't argue about the fact that the services, because of their obligations, might want to acquire equipment and let readiness slide, but he said that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who might have the obligation to fight wars, would do that.

Goldberg: That was George Brown?

Schlesinger: Yes.

Matloff: In connection with the Army, I gather you did support the M-1 program, and the SAM-D program as well?

Schlesinger: I supported the M-1 and the SAM-D programs. In the SAM-D program there were lots of problems. I asked Augenstein about this the other day, and he said, "You told us to get the damn thing straightened out." This is part of the general picture. I did not want to be in a

position in which I was allocating the services' resources, for the most part because I thought that that would bring out all sorts of pernicious disincentives on their part. For the most part I would urge them to go in a particular direction. I would provide reasons, and sometimes I would countermand them, but that was not a daily occurrence. With that kind of thing they would go along with where we were going. I think that we took some money out of the SAM-D program until they got it straightened out.

Matloff: You mentioned the Navy and some opposition within it to the idea of low cost surface ships, that you were apparently favorably disposed toward. Where was the opposition coming from? Certainly Adm. Zumwalt wanted low cost surface ships.

Schlesinger: Zumwalt was a great patron of the high-low mix, given his budgets, and he wanted to have a fleet. I think that the chief vocal opposition came from Rickover. That's kind of an amusing story. It was more than Rick; it was all of the people in the nuclear Navy; and it was a Navy tradition to get the best ship that you can.

Matloff: How about the naval aviators?

Schlesinger: The naval aviators tended to go in that direction, because they believed in nuclear carriers.

Matloff: Zumwalt was an exception.

Schlesinger: An exception, and, because of the widespread unpopularity of Zumwalt within the Navy because of his radical tendencies, the Z-grams. These ideas were not embraced as readily as would have been the case, if the Navy officers felt that they had a CNO who was just their model of a CNO. But given the budget pressures, the high-low mix was appealing. In the case of Rick, I had known him since my days at the Bureau of the Budget. Nominally, he worked for me when I was at the AEC, and then nominally he worked for me when I was Secretary of Defense. I said that I was the only person for whom Rickover worked in three different capacities. That was the way it was on the organization charts, if you believed the organization charts. One day I went down to see Senator Pastore when I was Secretary of Defense. I had known him quite well when I was chairman of the AEC and I was down as SecDef to ask for his vote on Diego Garcia. They asked me to wait for a few minutes, and I was sitting there in the outer office. The door swung open to his office and Rickover marched out. I said, 'I see you are up here lobbying on your own." He was terribly embarrassed, because that was exactly what he was doing. He denied it: "No, sir, I don't know how you could think such a thing."

Goldberg: I'm surprised he bothered to deny it.

Schlesinger: He was always very careful with me--ever since the days of the AEC, when I had gotten him his new reactor--I think it was the model reactor for the Trident. I had gotten $150 million above budget. He was always very supportive, and very gracious to my wife, while we were in and out of office, which was not always to be encountered. One day in 1974 he came in and as the interview was closing I said, "I am going to support all of the items that you have requested, and I expect you to support all of the items at the low end of the mix, which call for non-nuclear, and that you use your persuasiveness on Capitol Hill in that direction." I had picked up the word that he had been up there bad-mouthing all the things that came from Zumwalt, partly because they came from Zumwalt. Rick looked over at me and said, "Are you attempting to bribe me, sir?" I looked at him and said, "There is a very narrow line between bribery and blackmail, Rick. Are you attempting to blackmail me?" That was where the resistance came to the low end of the mix.

Matloff: Apparently Congress was successful in beating down the request for the sea control ship, for which

Zumwalt was arguing--the small non-nuclear carrier--and he got very few of those patrol ships that he wanted.

Schlesinger: PFs?

Matloff: Very few of those patrol frigates were granted.

Schlesinger: That's interesting. I was not particularly a patron of the sea control ship, but I was a senior patron of the patrol frigate. The reason was that I wanted to have the American presence around the world so that these things could be seen, for example, off the east coast of Africa. You remember our problems with the movement of the Soviet navy, which had many more ships than we did. I think that the patrol frigate program languished later on partly because the costs of the frigate kept escalating, and, partly, I suspect, with my departure there was no longer a tendency to push those PFs.

I want to make a general point. I have always found it a bit ironical that the Navy would press its case, as I sometimes did also in public discussion, pointing out the number of ships that we had at the close of World War II, and that as late as the Kennedy administration we had 900 ships and we were down to 450 ships. Meanwhile, the Soviets' number of days at sea were increasing, and so on. The only way that one could deal with the numbers issue,

or the ship days at sea issue, was to sustain or increase the number of ships in the U.S. Navy. One would have expected, given the pointing to those phenomena, that the Navy would be quite supportive of the program of the high-low mix that was designed to hold the Navy to its level. The phrase "600-ship Navy" came during my tenure. We were not going to get to 600 ships by having all sorts of expensive ships, however. That tended to drop away, because I did not want to be in a position in which I was regularly designing the service for the service. When Holloway succeeded Zumwalt, I laid out to him the same sets of arrangements that I had held out to Abrams, Brown, and Jones, with regard to cheaper equipments meaning larger force structure. He went away and came back and said he was going to support the nuclear carrier. I said, "If that's the decision of the Navy, so be it." I was not going to get into any squabbles about that, because they were presumably the specialists in how best to apply firepower to a prospective enemy.

Matloff: You touched on the Trident. Do you want to add anything to your position on the B-1 bomber?

Schlesinger: I was a strong proponent of the B-1 for the reasons that I gave in a speech that I gave at the roll-out of the B-1 and remained a proponent of the B-1 and,

for that matter, of the B-2. I never expected that when the price tag of the B-1 went over $100 million a copy that we would be prepared as a country to pay for it. I told that to the Air Force. I was assured that it was not going to go over $100 million a copy, but it went well over that. Of course, the dollar continued to deteriorate and times changed. I was quite distressed when Carter killed the B-1 program and I wasn't that happy when Reagan revived it, because it seemed to me that it would take five or six years and the loss of momentum in the program meant that it was going to be less valuable in our overall deterrent posture. What was a good program in 1975-76-77 was not necessarily a good program in 1983-84-85.

With regard to the Trident, I had reservations about the Trident simply because of its cost effectiveness; that one was putting all of those eggs in one basket and was reducing the number of boats at sea. The Trident had become the symbol, however, of American strength. It was so described on Capitol Hill by Scoop Jackson and others who were strong supporters of the Department. So it seemed to me that, whatever the merits or demerits of the Trident in terms of cost effectiveness, it was too late to unmake that decision. I did feel, though, that we had made an immense investment in a very

large boat with a large hole, and it was for that reason that I pushed very hard for the D-5, and had to push the Navy in the direction of greater accuracy, the global positioning system, and all of that. The admiral in charge of the Poseidon program had to be pushed because he thought of the Polaris-Poseidon fleet as the ultimate city-busting deterrent that would not be used so you didn't need accuracy in there. I said that we had enough weapons to kill any soft target in the Soviet Union, that our problem was that there was a growing target list of hard targets that we could not kill, and that we should build accuracy into that program. The fact that the Trident program was ongoing, that the Trident boats had very large holes that would accommodate a larger missile, meant that we could build in sufficient accuracy and yield into the Trident force so that it would represent a threat to their hard targets. So, given the fact that we were well launched on what was a very costly program, I was determined to make the most of it.

Matloff: How about your attitude toward the cruise missile?

Schlesinger: I was a great defender of the cruise missile, and that defense led to some bitter discussions later on in 1974-75 about the future of the non-nuclear

cruise missile. I was enthusiastic about the cruise missile because of its non-nuclear role, curiously enough. The reason was that I thought that we had more than enough nuclear firepower to take care of any soft targets around the world, and that while this added a different basing mode, which was desirable, the real potential for the cruise missile lay in the non-nuclear area. For example, cited I, we had this problem with the Russians because they had overwhelming conventional strength across the border from northern Norway, and that at that time we had to rely upon general deterrence, which meant nuclear deterrence. But they had all of these assets on the Russian side of the border and the Norwegians had very few assets on their side of the border. They had the North Sea fleet, they had Murmansk, they had headquarters of their northern air force and army, and so on. The beauty of the conventional cruise missile, it seemed to me, was that you could pluck out all of these high value targets on the Soviet side and that if you had those conventional cruise missiles, a similar thing would occur down in Turkey. As I said, the problems of NATO and shoring up conventional deterrence were central to my concern as Secretary of Defense, but we were always focussing on the central front, and not on the flanks. The cruise missile

was part of my strategy for strengthening conventional deterrence on the flanks, and I was a great advocate of it.

Goldberg: That was Eisenhower's original strategy for NATO--the NIKEs.

Schlesinger: You mean with the nuclear Jupiters and what not?

Goldberg: No, I'm talking about when he was Supreme Commander in 1951-52. His original strategy for NATO was to strengthen the flanks and use them.

Schlesinger: That's something I had not known. Since I was a great patron of the non-nuclear missile, when Ford and Kissinger went to Vladivostok and signed an agreement that limited the U.S. to only nuclear-armed cruise missiles, that would be flown on U.S. bombers, I was distressed, to say the least, and I argued with that decision. The position taken by Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt, and others of the NSC, was that there was no way of verifying whether a cruise missile was nuclear or non-nuclear. I thought that that was too great a sacrifice to make, that what we were doing was to weaken the potential for conventional defense in the name of arms control; that we were making it more likely that we would have to resort to nuclear war, and that that was not central to the

spirit of arms control. So I pushed along the cruise missile as much as I possibly could and I attempted, not with initial, but with ultimate, success to protect the non-nuclear version, as the recent war in Iraq demonstrates.

Matloff: According to Ford's book, A Time to Heal, he argues that as Secretary of Defense you had opposed funding research and development for it, and that Kissinger had intervened and persuaded Nixon to override you. Then he goes on to say that you became the greatest advocate before the Helsinki meeting in 1975. Is that accurate, from your standpoint?

Schlesinger: I think that that is wrong in several respects. First of all, I was an advocate of it all along, before and after the Helsinki meeting; and notably after Vladivostok, in which they had moved in the direction, somewhat to my surprise, of limiting the non-nuclear missile. I think that Ford probably just listened to something that Henry had said to him. It is true that during the Nixon years the Department of Defense was a reluctant supporter of the cruise missile, when Mel Laird was Secretary, and that Henry did a great deal to push the cruise missile along at that time against some resistance from the Navy and the DoD. They forget that the Bureau of

the Budget and then the OMB was Henry's ally in that, that we strongly supported that missile, partly for the reason that I mentioned and partly because of a long time concern about the flanks that goes back to my days at the Rand Corporation. What Henry probably said, as he always said, was, "Those people at the Pentagon, they opposed the cruise missile, and now that we are trying to limit it they have suddenly fallen in love with it." It is true that there was resistance at the Pentagon, but it hadn't come from me. Henry tended, whenever he got into arguments within the White House, to turn to the President and make some kind of broad bureaucratic argument of that sort. But Ford was just misinformed on that particular issue.

Matloff: How about the question of withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Western Europe? Again, Ford maintains that you were arguing for the withdrawal of significant numbers.

Schlesinger: Absolutely right.

Matloff: Why were you arguing for that?

Schlesinger: For several reasons. First, many of the weapons in our stockpile in Europe were totally obsolete. They had been overtaken by events and were there because McNamara had said there were ***[words redacted]*** weapons in Europe.

They no longer served the purpose and they had become, rather than a form of reassurance to the Europeans, as was the case in the McNamara period, a source of disturbance. Not only were they obsolete, but they were also costly to sustain in Europe, so I was in favor of pulling some of them out in exchange, in the MBFR negotiations, for a withdrawal of Soviet tank divisions. I ran into resistance from Haig, in particular, who was then SACEUR, and from Kissinger. Neither of them argued whether or not these weapons would have any military utility whatsoever. That argument was too lopsided, because some of those weapons simply ought to have been withdrawn because they were obsolete; they were not obsolescent. Haig, in particular, argued that NATO would come apart if we ever had numbers less than ***[words redacted]***. I was in favor of withdrawing 1,000, which, incidentally, was Kissinger's position from time to time, if we could get the Soviets to pull down their number of tank divisions in the center of Europe. So he was, in principle, in support of that, if we could get something out of it. Subsequently, we proceeded to draw down those numbers of nuclear weapons, and not only didn't NATO fall apart, NATO was happier to draw them down. You realize, also, that it was not only the European attitude that had changed, but that I was

under great pressure from Capitol Hill with regard to the deployment forward, from people like Howard Baker on the Republican side, as well as some of the Democrats. And that as Secretary of Defense I had been obliged by legislation to put forward a report on the purpose of our nuclear stockpile in Europe and its modernization. I said that we had to modernize the stockpile and that in exchange for that modernization we could reduce the level of weapons. That was necessary, it seemed to me, to get the requisite support on Capitol Hill for modernization. So here you had a stock of weapons that was admittedly obsolete, that served no military purpose, and that had been put there originally as a morale booster during the McNamara period. It was not supported by the Europeans in the way that it once had been as a token of the U.S. nuclear commitment. It was not supported by the Congress any longer. It was a good move from the standpoint of cost effectiveness to reduce them, particularly if we could get the Soviets to reduce their tank forces. I thought it was a remarkably rational position, and I was astonished at the resistance that I got, particularly from Haig, but to a lesser extent from Kissinger.

Goldberg: Were the obsolete nuclear weapons in a particular category?

Schlesinger: The air defense weapons were notably obsolete, it seemed to me. There were certain weapons that the Germans would not allow us to use, and they represented a substantial part of our stock.

Goldberg: Such as the ADMs, for instance?

Schlesinger: They represented a substantial part of the stockpile. The Montreal agreement under Reagan has reduced the levels in Europe far below ***[words redacted]***. I think Haig may have actually been Secretary of State when that occurred. Anyhow, that was the kind of issue that was dragged up at the time of my departure to justify actions that probably were taken more for personal reasons. Matloff: It's interesting to read the Ford version. He argues that he didn't want those obsolete weapons removed without using them as bargaining chips both for SALT and for MBFR.

Schlesinger: I agreed with him there. The problem was that we had offered them to the Soviets in Vienna and they had said something like "We are not giving up anything for that stuff."

Matloff: Had you introduced any changes in the structure or procedures in the development and procurement of new weapons systems, the kind of thing that the Secretaries of

Defense sometimes get involved in? Certainly the last few have gotten involved in this business.

Schlesinger: I think I covered that earlier. As compared to the McNamara period, I gave the services greater latitude, but at the same time there was a strict budget limit so that they would be the beneficiaries of developing cheaper weapon systems. I interested myself in a number of weapons systems, to insure that they were in conformity with my general views on strategy. For example, the AWACS was designed for continental air defense. The Soviets had a very weak bomber force, they were able to hit any target with their missiles, so the continental air defense played a relatively small role in our strategic concept. But there was an organization to support air defense for the U.S. and there were the AWACS, that had been designed for that purpose. I said I wasn't going to buy any such weapons for continental air defense, that if the Air Force wanted that system, it had to be designed for the forward deployed strategy of the United States. So the Air Force went back and modified the AWACS and it became our weapon for Europe, for looking out into the Warsaw Pact regions, into East Germany, several hundred miles across that border, for that first flight that might take place in an attack on Western Europe. It

also became a weapon that we could deploy for the purposes of showing the flag. In retrospect, one of my happier decisions with regard to equipment was the AWACS system that has been useful overseas, and we have no need for continental air defense.

Another weapons system in which I was involved deeply was the F-16, which I worked on very carefully in terms of air defense. We had a very careful study that was done by Gen. Stewart, who was commander of the Aeronautical Systems Division at Wright-Patterson. It turned out that while the Congress had wanted, for some reason or another, to have a biservice plane that would serve both the Air Force and land on carrier decks, by going the F-16 route we could have a plane that was overall cheaper for the United States and more effective for the Air Force. The Navy could go off, if it wanted, and buy its own plane, which turned out to be the F/A-18, a fairly costly aircraft, much more costly than the F-16. I was persuaded that the notion of a cheaper fighter than the F-15 was desirable, and that as a result of the systems analytical work that had been done the F-16, that is, the General Dynamics version, was the appropriate fighter. So we announced that General Dynamics had won the competition and that the F-16, rather than the Northrup F-17, would be

it. We ran into endless troubles over that with the Congress, which was being lobbied by Northrup to the effect that the F-17 was the superior weapons system, and that the Secretary of Defense had violated the congressional ordinance in seeking a biservice fighter. My attitude was: Is this the same Congress that slashed up McNamara because of the F-111 and his attempts to have a biservice fighter? I said, "I have no commitment about uniservice fighter, biservice fighter; as an intellectual matter, all I want to do is to get the greatest cost effectiveness. I don't want to pay more money in order to have a biservice fighter, which neither of the services wants, and by going in the F-16 direction, which is a much cheaper aircraft, we can reduce the costs both for the nation overall and this would permit us to have a larger force structure for the Air Force." I thought it was an overwhelming case.

Most of the other programs I followed with a greater degree of detachment, unless they came to my attention. Some of the worries about the Aegis program and some of the SAM-D worries tended to come to my attention.

Matloff: To go on to area problems and crises, you have already mentioned your strong interest in NATO and your desire for a conventional deterrent. How optimistic were

you that the allies could counter a Soviet conventional force attack?

Schlesinger: In principle, we could counter it. NATO intelligence, partly because of the proclivities of the member states, tended to exaggerate Soviet forces. The Turks, in order to justify their position, would add to the number of Soviet divisions opposite Turkey; the Germans would do the same. So we tended to exaggerate their force structure. At the time that I was Nixon's special envoy, after I had gone to the Pentagon but before my confirmation. At the North Atlantic Council meeting of the Defense Secretaries I announced that we should move in the direction of a stalwart conventional capability; that it was doable, and that we could stop them. I don't know whether I was an analytic pessimist or a spiritual optimist at that moment, but I was convinced that we could do it if we worked at it. The problem was getting others to take it as seriously as we took it, and to overcome their reluctance to move in that direction for a variety of reasons. The first problem was doubts in the U.S. military establishment itself. But those doubts were overcome, because Gen. Abrams became a believer. I think that he was going to be a believer anyhow, but the future

of the United States Army was tied to the conventional mission in NATO.

Goldberg: So they were Eurocentric.

Schlesinger: They became Eurocentric as they came out of Vietnam. I discussed in my first meeting my budget strategy, which was that we were going to use NATO not only for the right substantive reasons, but for budget reasons as well, to sustain the defense budget as we came out of Southeast Asia, when there were pressures from Capitol Hill to slash away. The Army people knew that just to hold to 13 divisions, let alone go up to 16, they had to get with that program. Gen. Abrams was aboard, and that meant that the Army was aboard. Some officers may have had reservations about the doability in practice, but they didn't have reservations about the doability conceptually. Abrams tended to carry the arguments to his German counterparts.

The next aspect was the attitudes of the allies, most particularly the Germans. The other allies counted for less. Some were dubious, such as the British, who tended to be nuclear proponents, and some were enthusiastic but not helpful, such as the Dutch, who did not want to rely on the nuclear threat. But the Germans were critical. As you will remember from the Adenauer period, when McNamara

first broached the notion of a nuclear defense, the Germans have been quite adamant. That was one of the causes of tension between Adenauer and Kennedy. Adenauer did not think that Kennedy was a serious person, a weighty person. He was too junior, and too inclined to wisecracks. One of the major reasons was the issue of whether we should rely on the nuclear deterrent or whether, in the German view, we should weaken the nuclear deterrent by moving in the direction of conventional forces, and they thought that the Kennedy administration's rhetoric did that. I very carefully learned from this experience, and from the beginning stressed that the various legs, of what I called the NATO triad, were mutually reinforcing. Once the Germans understood that we were trying to strengthen the strategic leg of the NATO triad by tying U.S. strategic forces to the defense of Europe, that we were moving in the direction of modernization of the technical nuclear stockpile, and that strengthening the conventional forces would not weaken nuclear deterrents but would add to the overall deterrents, much of the kind of resistance that existed in the Eisenhower period was reduced. My colleague, George Leber, with whom I had a splendid relationship, became a

believer in the nuclear deterrent, and as a result we all believed that it could be done.

We all believed that there was a tendency to exaggerate Soviet capability. Most of our military commanders understood that. It was plain that U.S. air forces were superior to the Soviets, but you would never get that out of NATO intelligence, because they said the Soviets had 5,000 aircraft and we only had 1,500. That was all an error, or a calculated attempt to scare parliaments in Europe into more expenditures. Whether or not we could have achieved this in practice was dubious, because the allies kept very low stockpiles of ammunition, and when Bernie Rogers said he would have to turn to nuclear weapons after two weeks, or whatever, he was primarily talking about running out of conventional ammunition by that time. You could not achieve the full deterrent instantaneously, but you could build a force structure that would be sufficient, if you had sustainable capabilities that could fight. The next problem would have been to sustain those capabilities. The Europeans always felt that they would have ample warning time and they could turn up their production lines. The Europeans also tended to regard the Soviets as less of a threat than we did. So getting there, in concept, was relatively

simple. Getting everybody to work all of the dimensions of the problem to get there was harder.

Goldberg: What about our own estimates of Soviet capabilities during this period? You talked about NATO overestimating. Weren't our services doing the same thing all along? What did they really think, as distinct from what their intelligence people were telling them and what they wanted to hear?

Schlesinger: That's an interesting question. One of the things that I did early on--I had moved from Langley to the Pentagon--was to give a briefing on the Soviets to my fellow ministers which was somewhat controversial. Some of them tended to accept what I said, because they knew that I had just come out of the intelligence structure. I showed the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet forces as best we understood them. Those intelligence estimates tended to be national intelligence estimates, and our services would not dispute those. In fact, the services tended to operate on the basis of the number of units on the other side. They did not generally tend to evaluate the quality of those units. This was a problem, not only in the services, but in the OSD firepower models, in which they just counted the weapons and units on the other side and they would grind us up gradually as we retreated

towards the Rhine. But the kind of exaggerated fear, a pathological fear of the Soviet -Warsaw Pact force structure that one found in NATO circles, did not exist in the U.S. military. They exaggerated in terms of the qualitative strengths, because they simply assessed number of units, as in the case of the Navy, or in firepower, as in case of Army units, and they did not examine the underlying quality. I was always a little restless about that, because we were spending a lot of money to introduce quality into our units and we weren't getting any credit for that. I would say, "If it costs us six times as much to produce an aircraft as the Soviets and we think that it's worth it, why don't we think that our aircraft are more combat capable, and why do we simply look at numbers?" Some did look at numbers; for example, Dave Jones, who was head of USAFE before he became Chief of Staff. He very carefully looked at the number of days that the Soviet pilots had to train, one or two days every ninety days, or whatever it was. Our people were flying 18 hours a month. Their planes had the most primitive avionics aboard; we had very expensive avionic suits. We were equipping our aircraft for all weather operations, night and day combat. Theirs had to be day aircraft, and they were not all weather combat capable. So when you get

all through looking, even though NATO intelligence tended to say the Soviets had more aircraft, they were much more primitive aircraft compared to the U.S. military establishment. So, once we were in a position to say we could shelter our aircraft, that they were survivable, and that we could bring additional aircraft from the United States, it was plain that the West had a very discernible edge over the Soviet Union in the air. And yet, you never got that from NATO intelligence.

It's quite natural for any military establishment to assess one's opponent in a conservative way, and therefore likely overstate his capabilities, but our people were very carefully within the bounds of reason. The recent affair in Iraq shows some considerable conservatism in the assessment of Iraqi capabilities. That's a natural tendency; I am not criticizing that. Military people have got to be conservative; on the other hand, they have got to appreciate that they are being conservative. In the case of the European military establishments, they were not being conservative, in my judgment. They were developing the kinds of fears of the Warsaw Pact military capabilities that weakened support for their military establishments rather than strengthened it, because if the only thing you said to your parliament was that it was

presently hopeless, the parliamentary reaction would be, "Why spend any more money on something that is fundamentally hopeless?"

Goldberg: They were also telling them at the same time that they were not going to attack, anyway.

Schlesinger: The parliaments were so persuaded.

Matloff: Had you looked forward in your thinking to the time when there might be a decoupling of the United States from NATO, when the U.S. role might not be a permanent one?

Schlesinger: I regarded it as permanent, because I did not see an end to the Warsaw Pact threat, and did not anticipate what happened in 1989-90, essentially the end of the Warsaw Pact threat, as classically defined. I thought that the Soviet threat to the Western World was more or less permanent, and that the European countries could not stand up to the Soviet Union, which was a superpower, on their own, and that it required a continued American presence to provide that backbone. I might add that that was the basis for my steadfast defense against measures like the Mansfield amendment. As you recall, the purpose of much of the strategic changes was to recouple the United States to the defense of Europe. Whether or not that was wise, I was entirely on the opposite side.

As you remember, Eisenhower kept saying that if we failed to withdraw after some variable period of time, it would be a mistake. I did not regard it as a mistake. I regarded the security integration of the Western World as permanent, as far as I was concerned, and I was going to work to sustain it, and anybody who was opposed to that was an opponent, and I was going to work to defeat him. The people in the late 1940s and 1950s did not understand, in my judgment, what I have just said. They tended to think of Europe as destroyed by World War II and that it was just a question of getting these nations back on their feet. They did not, at that time, understand--particularly Truman, Eisenhower to a lesser extent--the incredible shift in the balance of power that had taken place, that what had previously been great powers--Germany, France, Britain, even Italy--were no longer in the same league with the U.S. and the USSR. And the whole concept of the Marshall Plan era, that one was going to help these countries restore themselves and that ultimately they would be able to stand on their own feet and we could go home, was fundamentally wrong. It was understandable, but it was the halo effect of the great power status prior to 1945. We and the British only very slowly came to understand that Britain's power position

was not one of the big three, but not much better than France.

Matloff: Did you think that the balance of power was shifting against the United States? Some have argued that this was Kissinger's belief.

Schlesinger: Henry tended to be Spenglerian, you know. He had these periods of great gloom in which he said we had to strike a deal now because the Soviet Union was on the ascendance.

Matloff: Therefore, let's make the best deal we can get in arms control while we can .

Schlesinger: That was his underlying position, and it came from this Spenglerian gloom.that I have just described. I was not given to that; I was a spiritual optimist. I may have used that phrase partly in reaction to Henry's tendency to be a long-run pessimist. I thought the balance power was moving against the United States--nothing that was inevitable, nothing that couldn't be changed, if the Congress would cooperate, if we put together the right force structure. I never said that the Soviets had achieved an advantage, particularly with regard to hard target kill capabilities in their nuclear forces, but that the adverse trends in budgetary spending would at some point, which I could not define, mean that

we were at a disadvantage relative to the Soviets. So the balance of power was moving against us, but not because of some inevitable, irreversible tendency, as, I suppose the Soviets, following Marx, thought, but as a reflection of decisions taken here in the U.S. to reduce our military establishment. I thought that some of the distrust that existed within NATO could be eliminated and I took it upon myself, by and large, to reduce that distrust and to make the Europeans feel that they could count on the Americans, something they hadn't felt during the Vietnam period.

Goldberg: I had an obvious thought: simply that the notion has existed here for decades that the Europeans were capable of a great deal more than they actually did by way of military strength; that we carried more of the burden than we should have. What you say about Truman and Eisenhower and their notions about Europe in the '40s and '50s is, I think, correct. At the same time, they did have some basis for believing that an economically restored Europe could do much more than it actually did.

Schlesinger: Absolutely right, a very interesting and complicated point. There was great ambivalence on the American side. During the '50s and the '60s, for the most part, since the United States was paying the bulk of the expenses, we established strategy and the other people

deferred to us. And we kind of liked it that way. Part of the reason that we didn't press the Europeans very hard, was that if the Europeans were doing a lot more, their voices would count for a lot more, and we would find that disquieting. To press the Europeans meant that you had to give them a larger say in where the overall organization was going, and many Americans didn't feel inclined to that. They liked the position in which we provided the nuclear deterrent, we decided on policy, and they fell into line. As soon as they began to feel that they were providing a large share, they began to assert themselves, as Germany did under Schmidt, in the 1970s. Particularly during the Carter period, there was a great tension between Schmidt and Carter. Not only could the Europeans provide more, but they should provide more, and it was essential that they provide more, if we were going to have a serious conventional deterrent. If we were going to have a serious conventional deterrent, they had to provide more. There was resistance on that side, because it cost money. I pressed them continuously. I said, "We are prepared, not only to maintain our present forces post-Vietnam in Europe, but I'm going to rebuild them. But that has to be part of a larger building effort in which we jointly work towards a conventional

capability, and that means that you are going to have to pay more than you have been paying." They didn't like to hear that message, but they did move slowly in that direction. Yes, the United States has been paying more, on balance, than it should have after the return of European prosperity, but we were not without ambivalence as a country on that subject. To the extent that we pressed hard the Europeans would do more, but we had to recognize and accept that they didn't necessarily accept our assessment of the strategic risks. They never agreed with us that the Soviets were prepared to initiate hostilities. They thought that the risks from the East were lower than we thought. They tended to think that a deterrent was sufficient, that you did not have to have a real warfighting capability. To the extent that we were going jointly to build such a conventional deterrent, we had to take their views into account. We could not simply state a declaratory position and they would acquiesce.

Goldberg: And they thought that our continued presence insured the deterrent. We were the insurance policy.

Schlesinger: Yes, the fact of the matter was that for many years the underlying European strategy was to put up the minimum that was necessary to keep the Americans engaged and that was sufficient for deterrence. My

position, and I suspect the position of other Secretaries, was that the minimum we were prepared to accept was rising.

Matloff: Your service as Secretary of Defense coincided with the final stages of the war in Vietnam. How much of your attention as Secretary of Defense was taken up with problems involving Vietnam?

Schlesinger: Within the Department, relatively little. I came into the Department after combat had ceased in Vietnam. We were withdrawing the balance of our forces, if we hadn't totally withdrawn them, down to some minimal residual force. About the time I was sworn in as Secretary of Defense, and probably before then, but when I was over at the Pentagon, Congress had adopted legislation that specified that after some cutoff date no combat could take place in the nations of Southeast Asia. Originally that had been Vietnam, but it became the nations of Southeast Asia, which meant that we were cut off from Cambodia and Laos. Because of the Watergate problems, Nixon was obliged to accept that legislation. Indeed, that legislation, I think, had been engineered by Mel Laird, to bring to an end our role in that area. Nixon was persuaded by Jerry Ford, amongst others, to accept that legislation as the best that could be gotten from the

Congress. So militarily we were more or less through in Southeast Asia and on the way out. We had an obligation, which I took quite seriously, to sustain the armed forces of Vietnam, but that was not a question of programming so much as it was a question of getting money out of Congress. Within the building I spent relatively little time on it, and I would spend an increasing amount of time on Capitol Hill trying to get money out of it toward the end.

Matloff: Had you agreed, by and large, with United States foreign and military policy toward Vietnam in the Nixon administration and the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces?

Schlesinger: I am not sure I was an advocate of that policy. It was announced to me when I was the Assistant Director of the old Bureau of the Budget, that we were going to withdraw our forces, and that the budgets for the DoD should be drawn up on that basis. It was not an issue on which I was consulted. With regard to the agreement that was ultimately reached in 1973, I was concerned about the lack of strategic depth, because the North Vietnamese were permitted to have little islands in the south, and therefore there was a lack of strategic depth, which ultimately became a problem for us. But once again, that was not my issue; those things were established. I had

been a supporter of Nixon's efforts to win the war in the period 1969-71. When he made the decision to go into Cambodia, I had been a supporter of that decision. I think that you have to deal with details. In general, I supported the administration's attempts to permit South Vietnam to win. I was worried that the exact configuration of the cease-fire agreement permitted the North Vietnamese to have a position that they could exploit ultimately, which they did.

Matloff: Had you gone along the policy of Vietnamization that Laird had introduced?

Schlesinger: I had no choice about that, that was already decided. I certainly was prepared and eager to have America live up to its side of the bargain, which was to continue to provide the necessary hardware and support to the RVN.

Matloff: On the question of continued military aid to South Vietnam, you were very much involved in that, weren't you?

Schlesinger: Yes, and I said that the problem was not the time I spent within the Pentagon, but the time I spent on the Hill lobbying for that aid.

Matloff: Did you, the presidents, and Kissinger, then Secretary of State, see eye to eye on the question of the

amount of military aid? This was one of the problems you were having with Congress. In many ways you were the point man, as I recall it.

Schlesinger: I was the point man, indeed. I also became the aide for Cambodia before its collapse. It went through the State Department budget but I wound up having to defend that too, because Henry was not prepared to invest much of his own political standing in fighting for what he regarded an uphill fight, if not a lost cause. But I thought that it was the obligation of the United States to support Vietnam and Cambodia, and I took that on as well. I was the point man for Vietnam in particular, because the aid flowed through the Department of Defense budget. I was less than successful in that than I was in some other things. The Congress proceeded to slice that budget, and in the year prior to the collapse in 1975, or the FY 74 budget, I think it was, they sliced it to $700 million dollars, which was not enough to sustain the RVN in the habits that we had taught them.

Matloff: On this question, did you feel that Kissinger and President Ford were backing your position, or not?

Schlesinger: That's a very complicated question, because certainly the President backed the position in the sense that he was a supporter of the position. I don't think

that they were enormously interested or concerned at that time, until the collapse started west of Saigon, towards the Parrot's Beak, and until that time they didn't pay much attention to it. When the collapse started, they got much more concerned and I had their full backing. I denounced the Kennedy amendment and Proxmire's tendencies to cut, and I had their full backing on that. Henry had the Cambodia aid budget in the State Department budget, but he didn't do very much to support that and left it to me, somewhat to my chagrin. At that stage I had good conceptual backing, but not necessarily full lobbying support. After the collapse in the north, I turned around. It was about that time that the President sent Freddy Weyand out to Vietnam and Fred came back with the position that the government could survive. I had urged Fred not to make up fanciful tales for the purpose of optimism. After the collapse in the north, I said that it was hopeless, given the constraints that had been elaborated by the Congress. We could not go in, although many of our military people wanted to go back in and save the country, including, I suspect, Fred Weyand and George Brown. Some time after Fred's return we had a meeting of the National Security Council on whether or not we would request additional aid, and I said, "Mr. President, it is

all over. The North Vietnamese have destroyed the best divisions in the ARVN. The divisions around Saigon are political divisions. There is nothing much left in the south." Colby, oddly enough for an intelligence head, had developed the thesis that a southern redoubt could survive, and in response to that I said that it was all over. We had lost all of our best divisions in the north; the central highlands was gone; there was only a handful of divisions in Saigon and the south; North Vietnam was pouring in additional divisions, they were up to 16 at the moment of that meeting, they finally moved in about 18 divisions; it was just a matter of time. Ford got mad at that, and he seemed to imply that this was a matter not of analysis of where we were going, but the right spirit, and that we were going to go on. I had urged him not to go to the Hill to ask for additional aid, but he did, so I was obligated to go up there and support that. But after the collapse in the central highlands and the north, it was my view that the administration was simply pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp. At that point, at least, they felt that my support was not as strong as it should have been, whereas previous to the collapse I might have felt that I was pulling more of the weight for that war. The military had this proclivity to go back in, and I had to pull them back

regularly, during that whole period of the collapse. George Brown was off in Djakarta at the time, and he was at a press conference. He was asked what he would do about Vietnam. He pointed to a map and started to say where he would land, and the ambassador looked at him with consternation and got him off the stage telling him it was forbidden by law. I was worried about that at the time, but, happily, there was some other disaster that took that out of the headlines, so nobody paid much attention to it. But when the collapse was coming in the north I had to keep insisting that the Congress precluded our getting back into combat. While we could take people off the beach, we were not to get engaged in the fight. My message to some of the military who wanted to get back in was, "No, we are not going to jump on that tar baby again." That required as much effort as anything I did in the years I was Secretary of Defense, because for most purposes I had the total support in policy terms and in emotional terms of the services, but that time I just had to say we couldn't get involved again.

Matloff: From your perspective, what were the differences, if any, among you, the President, and Kissinger, on the evacuation problem?

Schlesinger: I think the President backed Henry's position. We had endless arguments between Defense and State, between our staffs over there. I wanted to remove the dependents early on. That was resisted by the State Department. It was partly just the inherent difference in responsibilities of the two Departments. I had the responsibility of protecting these people. They wanted to show the flag. The view of the Secretary of State was that if we started to withdraw the dependents, that would show that we didn't have confidence that South Vietnam was going to survive, which was true enough, and that we shouldn't do that. My position was that it was not going to survive and we would be in great difficulty trying to get the people out under conditions of duress. I said we had to get virtually all of our people out before Tan Son Nhut fell. As you may recall, the North Vietnamese moved very quickly and began to shell Tan Son Nhut early on, so that from time to time we were only able to get aircraft off intermittently. Ultimately, they seized Tan Son Nhut, so we were driven back to the Embassy. That whole episode of our evacuation from the embassy, in my judgment, was unnecessary. We were driven to it by our having refused to withdraw our people at an appropriate point. I will develop that whole embassy evacuation in a moment. There

was a basic difference between the two Departments about when to start the evacuation. We were concerned about the security of Tan Son Nhut, and less concerned about the fact that we were signaling to the Vietnamese that we didn't have confidence that they were going to survive, because there was nobody in Vietnam, in my judgment, who thought that South Vietnam was going to survive. The only people who had that illusion were some of the Americans. Some of the South Vietnamese would play up to that American illusion from time to time, but it was clear from the time of the collapse in the north that Saigon was going to fall and that we ought to make our preparations to get out, and that leaving dependents or subsequently, the personnel in-country, would just lead to difficulties. When Tan Son Nhut fell we were driven back to this evacuation from the embassy. I was told that we had something on the order of 700-800 Americans to withdraw. The ambassador out there, Graham Martin , held the Americans back, in effect, and he kept putting more and more Vietnamese on the helicopters taking off from the roof. So the affair was drawn out. Ford called me during that period and asked why the evacuation was not being completed quickly. By the time we got through we had withdrawn nearly 2,000 people from the embassy roof. The

Marine Corps Navy pilots snaking up the river in their helicopters were dog tired. They had been flying endless hours on these missions. The North Vietnamese refrained from interfering. I think that they understood that we would react if they took action against us, and since we were in the process of withdrawal, the imposition of a military defeat and additional casualties on us was not in their interest. They may have been persuaded by the Russians--Henry was dealing with the Russians during that period. I was not eager to depend upon either Russian persuasiveness or North Vietnamese considerations. In any event, the evacuation went on and on and I finally sent a message to Graham Martin, saying that it must come to an end and the last helicopter would be flying out at a certain time and if he refused to leave by that time, he would be left behind. I terminated that operation. As I say, we were told that we were going to take out 700, but the process went on and on, and I had little support from the Department of State with regard to limiting the number of people coming aboard. They felt, quite rightly, that we had something of an obligation to many of the Vietnamese we were hauling out. But Kissinger was not telling the President that the numbers were gradually escalating and that, given the circumstances, it was going

to take longer than originally planned. The evacuation from the roof of the embassy was something that we should not have had to have done, because we should have pulled out for the most part before Tan Son Nhut fell.

Matloff: In retrospect, how do see the whole Vietnam experience? Do you see it as a failure, and, if so, as a failure of American national or military policy?

Schlesinger: Let me continue for one moment about the evacuation, because it it now accepted in the press and public mind that the United States was defeated militarily in Vietnam. We were not militarily defeated. We had withdrawn all of our forces; we had a very small mission in country that we had to withdraw as the North Vietnamese came down on Saigon, but there was not a military defeat of the United States. In the wake of the Gulf War, a contrast is drawn between military success and military failure. We were not defeated in Vietnam. One of the ironies is that I was responsible at the close for the liquidation of our activities in Southeast Asia, because I had not wanted to go in in 1965. I thought that it would divert attention from NATO and from the buildup of Soviet strategic forces, which I regarded in 1965 as more important. So I was hesitant, back in the Rand Corporation, to go in, and I had many arguments with

people that you know, Al. I said, 'This is going to take 300,000 troops." But I never dreamed that we were ultimately going to lose if we put in 300,000. Even though I was the most pessimistic around, at least in the economics department, I never dreamed that we would not succeed. I won a fair amount of money, actually, at the time, because most of my colleagues said it would be over by Christmas and would take 50,000 troops, that kind of thing. So it was a great irony that I was obliged to liquidate it. Of course, since we were engaged, I felt that our prestige and honor were engaged, that we had to do the best we could, and that's why I argued with the Congress about the money for the ARVN. But whether or not we should have been there in the first place was, at least to me, a dubious proposition. I always felt the the ideal thing was deterrence, that having to fight, normally, was less satisfactory, and that one should choose with care those places in which one fought. What does one learn from that? That if one is going to go into something, one should go in with the intention of winning, not with the intention of sending signals to the other side that it had best desist. There was a lot of that rubbish around in the late 1960s. War is not a joke or toy; you don't play around with it. If you go in, you go in with serious

intent. I don't think that we were serious enough at the beginning; the political leaders did not understand that. There is a tendency these days for the military to blame the civilian leadership. The civilian leadership has a lot to answer for, but the military does too, because they did not understand the war they were in. Even though we won the war of the big battalions while we were there with great regularity, there was the other war, the village war, which our senior military simply, for the most part, refused to focus on, and it was that village war that was ultimately to do in the side that we were supporting.

Matloff: How about the domino theory, in retrospect? Did you believe in it originally?

Schlesinger: I did not much use that, as I recall, but I used it somewhat. I had a somewhat complicated approach to that. The domino theory may be applicable some of the time and may not be applicable other parts of the time. It depends on the countries that one is dealing with. In some cases, the effect of a defeat here will be to stiffen the back of one's neighbors, and it is the evaluation of those neighbors and what their psychology is. It may be that resistance will increase after the fall of the first domino, because the other dominoes are more stalwart. The notion that inevitably resistance is weakened strikes me

as false. Take the case of Britain in 1940. The fall of France stiffened British spine; it did not weaken it. Of course, that domino did not fall. There may be truth in the domino theory. I tended to think at that time that the domino theory was likely to prevail in Laos, Thailand, and possibly Malaya, as well. I was unduly pessimistic in that regard. Going back to your prior question, I thought that even though we had not gone in, we had accomplished a great deal by going in; for example, the turnaround in Indonesia was a reflection of the fact that the United States had shown its determination to head off the ambitions stemming from Hanoi, and that the stability of Southeast Asia had been much improved in many ways by our involvement in South Vietnam. I tended to be a limited believer in the domino theory, insofar as Southeast Asia was concerned. I thought that Indonesia had been turned around; that the Philippines were solid; that Laos was going to go (Cambodia was gone at that point); that Thailand looked to be very shaky. We were continuously told these things, by the way, by Lee Quan U, who tended to be a great believer that the fall of South Vietnam meant the fall of all of Southeast Asia, including his own country. I think he was happy that he turned out to be disproved. I very carefully avoided the excesses of that.

I think I used it up on Capitol Hill. I remember one incident on Capitol Hill in which the term "bloodbath" was employed in a question. I never used that term, and carefully avoided it, as I recall. It was used by Henry, and perhaps by the President, himself. The question was put to me about a bloodbath by one of the Democrats, and I responded that I thought great penalties were going to be inflicted in Vietnam on those who had supported us. The headlines the next day said, "Schlesinger charges bloodbath." The fact was that the term was used in the question. I carefully avoided any such use of that term, but I did indicate that there would be grave consequences for many of the people that supported us, and from that the newspaper leaped to this conclusion. A qualified believer of the domino theory in Southeast Asia, I did not think it was the end of the world. It was a severe setback for us, and we did have to move quickly afterwards to stabilize much of the region and, most notably South Korea, subsequently. The reason I stress that is that immediately on the fall, in April, and, indeed, starting before the fall, Kim Il Sung began to have grandiose ideas that if South Vietnam was taken over by the North, South Korea should be taken over by the North. That was not in the cards. ***[one line of text redacted]***

[four and a half lines of text redacted] I subsequently visited Korea to firm up our position there and it was plain that there was great disbelief in the staying power of the United States in the region and that after the fall that image had to be reversed. It was successfully reversed, not only while I was there, but in all the subsequent years that followed.

Matloff: About the Mayaguez incident, in Ford's book, A Time to Heal, he refers to "some high level bumbling in the Defense Department" that disturbed him about the U.S. military handling of the affair. He's referring to four strikes that were projected. He said the first was not carried out.

Schlesinger: The reason that strike did not occur was that it was canceled by the White House. The President may have forgotten that.

Goldberg: He said, also, that the White House was told it had been completed.

Schlesinger: That is totally in error. We had a dinner at the White House and while I was preparing to go to that dinner, there was an announcement on Phnom Penh radio that

they were prepared to negotiate. Kissinger, who to that point had been a vigorous hawk, suddenly turned around and said that we should be prepared to negotiate. While I was in the auto, they called the Pentagon and canceled the first strike. When I got to the White House, the first strike had been aborted by orders from the White House. I talked to the Command Post, and there was great hilarity and disgust there that they had been ordered by the White House to cancel that strike. It was ridiculed almost to the point of insubordination. They decided that the White House didn't know what it was prepared to do. I grabbed Henry and he explained to me about this announcement on the Phnom Penh radio. I said that the reason we had been successful is that we had been prepared to take military action. The military action that was decided on was to use a carrier for very precise strikes at the mainland. Henry had been an advocate of B-52 strikes, which would have caused great consternation around the world, but we were going to respond with great precision. We were going after discrete targets. We might or might not hit them, but it would not be a broad sweep of a number of areas. I said that we had to go on with the strikes, that otherwise we would look ludicrous. Henry and I conferred, and he was persuaded, one of those rare occasions in which I

persuaded him quickly of a point of view. I told Ford that the strikes had to be restored and Henry backed me up. So I went to the phone and told them to go ahead with the second strike. Sometime between the second, which had become the first, strike, and the third strike, they began to move the captives out towards the ship. I don't remember whether they had arrived or were on their way, but I said to go ahead with the third strike. Then we canceled the fourth strike. The only reason that we were able to achieve the results in the Mayaguez case was my insistence that we go ahead with the strikes after the first one had been canceled, and persuading Henry of that. With Henry's support Ford was brought around.

Matloff: What lessons, if any, did you take from this whole incident and the handling of it?

Schlesinger: A number of things. You will recall that this took place in the aftermath of the fall of Vietnam. I mentioned that we had to move to shore up our position so that people in the region believed that the United States was still a power. And here was a fourth-rate country seizing one of our ships. We had to take action to turn that around. There was a lot of talk about freedom of the seas, but my view was that they could not seize U.S. ships with impunity and should not be allowed

to get away with it without suffering severe punishment. That political message is the principal one, and on that point, at least until the moment of the hesitation in the White House that evening, there was unanimity on that--not about details of the combat, but about that fundamental proposition that the United States had to take action. I thought that that was right at that time, and I still think it was right. As fate would have it, George Brown was out of town at that time, so the responsibilities devolved to the acting chairman. That month the acting chairman was Dave Jones, of the Air Force, who put together the battle plan that we employed for the most part. Since the Chairman was out of town, and since Dave Jones tended to use the Air Staff rather than the Joint Staff to put things together, the Navy was disgruntled. There were complaints made to the White House by the Navy, which may have stirred some of the problem in the White House--your reference to "bumbling." There was a problem simply because of the absence of George Brown at that time, and some of that rivalry, that you referred to before, appeared on that occasion. That was a problem and it led to my conclusion that the Joint Chiefs of Staff should have a Deputy Chairman, which I advocated before the Armed Services Committees some years later. I

referred to the Mayaguez incident and the uncertainties that it produced because any chief of service is bound to use people that he is familiar with, that is, the staff of the service, rather than the joint staff. If one had a Deputy Chairman, in the absence of the Chairman he would employ the same people on the joint staff and there wouldn't be all of the emotional turmoil that goes with an acting chairman from one of the services being forced to take over. Of course, that was part of the Goldwater-Nichols, and I think it has demonstrated itself to be a very desirable change, even though it was resisted by the services. As it turned out, George Brown was back as we started the engagement in Southeast Asia. Whatever his weaknesses in terms of his public statements, intended or unintended--and he did tend to speak off the cuff too frequently--he was a superb commander. When he came back into that Command Post, he was received with delight. He took over with great aplomb. The situation unfolded. We had decided to attack on Koh Tang, which was where they had originally held the prisoners, because the prisoners might be free. We had noticed a boat departing the island, and I had received orders from the White House to sink any ships coming off Koh Tang. I passed those orders on to the Chairman with this limitation: that before they

sank any ship, any American pilot would sweep low over the ship to see who was on it. We reported to the White House a ship coming off the island. There was a Navy flier overhead--all of this was being managed out of Thailand. He swung low over the ship and reported back that there were Caucasians aboard.

Goldberg: Good eyesight.

Schlesinger: You can tell the difference between Cambodians and Caucasians, if you swing low enough and slow enough over those kinds of ships. Since I had carefully given the instructions that we were not to sink before seeing what we were sinking, we reported it to the White House with some confidence that the White House would cancel its orders, if it discovered that we were going to kill the people that we were out there to serve. It turned out that this was one of those moments of great stubbornness on the part of the President. Word came back to me that I was supposed to sink the ship as ordered. I decided that I was not going to sink that ship, and I delayed it for several hours under protest. It turned out that the ship included all of the Americans that had been taken from the Mayaguez. I kept getting calls from the White House asking if we had sunk the ship yet, and I kept saying we were consulting with the pilots. We asked the

pilots what they would do if ordered to sink it, and they said they wouldn't execute it, or words to that effect. So I filibustered, in effect, for some hours, rather than to sink the ship. It seems to me in retrospect, and it seemed to me at the time, that, given public opinion, if we were ourselves to kill the people that we were trying to save because of a direct order from the Commander in Chief, we and the President would have been in great trouble. We didn't know at the time how many Caucasians were aboard, but the actions that we took led ultimately to a solution which was quite satisfactory, as opposed to one which would have been a political disaster, both domestically and internationally, in the wake of the fall of Vietnam.

Goldberg: Do you think that Ford was making these decisions on his own?

Schlesinger: I think that the cancellation of the first strike was taken largely on Henry's urgings. Henry had heard this announcement from the Phnom Penh radio. With regard to the orders to sink all ships coming off the island, that was taken with the advice of all of his advisers, but it certainly was his inclination. I added to that something that had not come from the White House, which was that they should sweep low over the ship and

report if there were any of the crew aboard. They might not be able to see them, but if they could, to report it. I think, subsequent to my reporting to the White House that there were Caucasians aboard, that it probably was very much Jerry Ford's inclination to see to it that his orders were carried out, and he may have been encouraged in that by Brent Scowcroft, who was sitting at his right hand at that juncture. I think that Henry would have advised against that, but the fact that he was not to be seen on the scene at that point may have indicated that he didn't want any part of that particular controversy. I doubt that Henry would have urged him to go on to sink the boat with Americans on board, but I don't know. I think that was very much Jerry Ford wanting to see to it that having given those orders as commander in chief that they were carried out, and that he was not thinking through the unintended consequences, nor were the people with him in the White House at the time.

Another aspect of the Mayaguez incident which I think deserves some commentary involved CINCPAC Admiral Noel Gayler out in Hawaii. We had landed the Marines on Koh Tang, and the Cambodians delivered up all of our people. So I told George Brown we should break off the battle in Koh Tang and bring our people out. George, in his polite

way, said to Admiral Gayler that we were thinking of ending the battle. The response was, "We are not going to end this thing until we are victorious, and have wiped out the Cambodian forces on Koh Tang." This came back to me, and I said, "Get those people off the island. We have achieved our political objective of getting our people back. We are not engaged in destroying the Cambodian forces or in conquering Koh Tang." So George Brown again delivered this message to Noel Gayler, who said that he had to have a direct command. So I had to give a direct command to get our Marines off Koh Tang. That is one of those occasions that sometimes are ignored by people talking about the relationship between the civilians and the military. It is the responsibility and obligation of the civilians to set the political objectives for the use of military power. Our political objective in that case was to rescue our people, to establish that our vessels could not be seized on the high seas. We did not want to get into a fight that might be continuing to destroy Cambodian forces on Koh Tang. In fact, they were putting up a much stiffer resistance than we had initially anticipated. In those lectures in Kentucky I talked about the responsibility of the civilians to set the political objectives, the framework, and had in mind that episode

during the Mayaguez incident, because the inclination of the military might be to continue the battle until such time as they wiped out the opposite forces. Just as under the rules of the Congress, in Vietnam I had to set the rules that we were not getting engaged in that again, because most of the senior military people, who had invested much of their lives, wanted to go in there and whomp the North Vietnamese. The civilians have to take the responsibility for setting those political objectives. Implementation is primarily the responsibility of the military, but not entirely, because there is a gray area there in which the ideal implementation spills over into affecting the political objectives--the ideal implementation from a military standpoint.

Goldberg: And the leadership has to take the responsibility for the consequences after.

Schlesinger: That is exactly right.

Goldberg: That is happening now.

Matloff: The Secretary of Defense is first a civilian, and he is representing the administration in many ways, too.

Schlesinger: I always said that I would take the heat, because, as an amateur historian, I recall the incidents of 1951, when Truman fired MacArthur. The administration

had been politically weak at that point, and Truman was not at the height of his popularity, such as it was. The civilians in the administration did not take on the burden of defending the President's decision. They sent Gen. Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, up there to defend the administration's decisions to go in, to stop at the 38th parallel, to go forward, then to back up, to defend the firing of MacArthur. At that time, I thought that was a totally inappropriate use of the authority of the military people. The political decisions are taken by the civilian leadership and it is the responsibility of the civilian leadership to defend those decisions and not impose that additional burden upon the uniformed military. You have to defend them, but then again, you have to be prepared to take the decisions; you can't leave those decisions to the military. That was an aspect of the Mayaguez incident that I wanted to address.