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Mrs. Earle G. Wheeler
Donor
July 15, 1978

Jane O. O'Neill
Acting Archivist of the United States
August 1, 1978
M: General, we were discussing Vietnam at the end of our last interview, and I would like to conclude that subject with two events in 1968 which have had extensive coverage, the first being the Tet Offensive. I would like to ask you to tell me a little bit about Mr. Johnson's decisions arising from this event and how they were reached, and any disagreement that you might have with the extensive material that's been written about the subject.

W: Well, to start off with, the Tet Offensive began about 31 January 1968. We'd had a great deal of intelligence, captured documents, prisoners of war, defectors, which indicated that starting in early January something sizable was imminent. I recall receiving messages from General Westmoreland outlining various intelligence indicators, which led him to believe that the enemy was going to attempt something of a sizable nature.

First, he was thinking of after Tet; then as I recall it, he was thinking of before Tet, which had happened in previous years. I would say that no one really expected the enemy to launch the
attack during Tet, because, as you know, this is a very sacred time to all the Vietnamese, North and South. It is a sort of a combination of Christmas, New Year, and Easter. I've been told by Vietnamese or Southeast Asian experts that this period of family reunification or celebration hadn't been violated in over three-hundred years until 1968. So, while we knew something was going to happen, we didn't know exactly when, nor did we know how extensive the attack was going to be. As it turned out, the enemy launched very substantial attacks against most of the provincial capitals and against Saigon itself. They actually managed to introduce sizable forces into the environs of Saigon and into Hue, which is the old capital of Vietnam and in which is located the most sacred pagoda in all of Vietnam.

Now, the interesting part historically, it seems to me, of the Tet Offensive, is the fact that while it was militarily a very substantial defeat for the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong, it was turned into a propaganda victory for the North Vietnamese here in the United States. And I attribute this primarily to the press coverage at that time and to the dissident groups here in the United States, who were following the Hanoi line and had been before that.

I went out to Vietnam late in February, about the twenty-fourth, at the direction of President Johnson, to survey the situation and ascertain the facts and to make any recommendations that I saw fit to make. When I got there I conferred with General Westmoreland
and all of the senior commanders at various times. I, of course, conferred with Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker and the mission staff. As you recall, the embassy had been attacked, and, as an illustration of the accuracy of the press coverage, the allegation was made that the Viet Cong had actually entered the embassy, which they did not do. They got in the embassy grounds through the wall, but they did not get into the embassy at all. I also had long conversations with General [Cao Van] Vien, the Chief of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff, with President [Nguyen Van] Thieu, and with Vice President [Nguyen Cao] Ky.

Now, the situation I found was this: it being Tet, a substantial number of the South Vietnamese units were only at half strength, because, following the Vietnamese tradition, they had returned to their homes on leave for the Tet holidays. The propaganda put out by the enemy, the captured PWs, defectors, and captured documents made very clear what the enemy objectives were. And they apparently had believed they could achieve these objectives. First, they wanted to fragment and destroy the South Vietnamese armed forces. Secondly, they wanted to instigate uprisings in the major population areas against the government. Thirdly, they wanted to destroy our logistic base and our command and control system, and they had actually made a very sizable attack against Tan Son Nhut Air Base where our command headquarters was located.

The situation was complicated by the fact that, of course, we were holding the outpost up at Khe Sanh, and there had been a lot
of very adverse publicity about that here in the United States, with comparisons being made to Dien Bien Phu and things like that.

Now, General Westmoreland was well aware of the very, very heavy casualties that had been inflicted on the enemy. He was aware that the Vietnamese forces in general had remained intact and had fought extremely well. This included even some of the regional forces, of the popular forces, who are paramilitary and not regular forces. He was also aware that up until that time, about February 24-26, the Vietnamese government had not fallen apart at all. However, the enemy was propagandizing that they were going to undertake a so-called second wave of attacks. What he didn't know was: one, whether the South Vietnamese government would remain stable, could retain control if there was a second wave of attacks; secondly, whether the South Vietnamese armed forces would remain intact and able to fight; and, of course, thirdly, he had on his mind the problems connected with Khe Sanh, Northern I Corps, the battle that was going on in Hue, and so on.

This situation was further compounded by the fact that he did not know what had happened to the pacification program out in the hinterlands. We were getting very gloomy reports based upon what we learned later to be fragmentary information, in most instances greatly exaggerated and inaccurate because the enemy did not target the pacification program. He was going after the main population centers. He had already set his objectives, and this
is probably where he made a mistake, a mistake at least.

General Westmoreland had had to move forces from the South, that is from Second and Third Corps, to the north, up into the Danang and Hue area, and along into the DMZ area—this is in "I" [First] Corps—in order to get a proper balance of force within the country. And he had absolutely no reserve, none. He had not a single American unit, nor was there a single Vietnamese unit that was not committed. Therefore if there came a second wave of attacks and if the Vietnamese forces began to disintegrate, he would have been left in a rather precarious position.

One further point that's perfectly clear: His troop ceiling at that time was 525,000. He had never received over 500,000, and we still owed him, you might say, another 25,000 troops. We had started to reinforce him in early February, with the Third Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, and with the 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team. And, of course, when they arrived it gave him additional flexibility.

So we discussed the situation at some length. Now, I had in the back of my mind a couple of other things. One, we had had an attack on the Blue House, the President's Palace in South Korea, in January. We'd had the capture of the [USS] Pueblo in late January, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff here were greatly concerned about those incidents, which had required us to deploy a very substantial number of American fighter bomber units, tactical
aircraft, to Korea in order to redress the imbalance between the South Korean Air Force and North Korean Air Force. And we were unaware of what was going to happen.

Our strategic reserve here in the United States was completely depleted. We had not a single unit that, under the criteria that we had established, that is, one year in country, two to two and a half years back here in the United States, was deployable. Not one that could be sent to Vietnam. The one that was closest to being ready was the Fifth Mechanized Division, Army, and it couldn't be ready even with one brigade for a period of about, oh, six to eight [or] ten weeks. They were still in training.

In discussing the situation with General Westmoreland and, as I say, his commanders and staff, we worked up a proposal in terms of units now, because we weren't thinking in terms of men and numbers that would have provided him as soon as we could get it to him. He said he would like to have it in May—one division. And then we should prepare ourselves for future eventualities by having another division which would be deployable sometime in early September. And, as a matter of prudence, we would have a third division, which possibly could have been deployed, in, let's say, December of 1968.

Those are the proposals that I brought back with me from South Vietnam. I stopped in Honolulu and conferred with Admiral [U.S.G.] Sharp [commander-in-chief, Pacific] and his people. We went over
the whole program. I had told General Westmoreland that I did not believe it was humanly possible to provide him a full division as early as May, this could not be done, that we didn't have the forces to do it, but that we would see what we could provide. I stopped in Honolulu, as I say, to confer with Admiral Sharp and his people, and we began to work the problem then, as to units, call-up of reserves, increases in the draft, and all the rest of it.

Then when I got back here, I gave the Joint Chiefs of Staff a briefing, and we began to work the problem. I also briefed the President and the pertinent members of his Cabinet and certain congressional leaders.

Now, President Johnson at that time decided to establish this review group, a committee, or whatever you want to call it, which would be headed by Mr. Clark Clifford, who was then the secretary-designate of Defense, and which would have as members, of course, Mr. McNamara, as long as he remained around, Secretary Rusk, Mr. Helms of the CIA, myself, General Max Taylor, and there were two or three others. I think Nick Katzenbach sat in from time to time, also.

As I say, we on the Joint Chiefs of Staff began to work out the details of how to provide or where to get the forces which General Westmoreland and I had conferred about on the time schedule that we had conferred about.

It soon became apparent, from the JCS point of view, that
the only way these forces could be provided in a timely fashion would be by a very substantial call-up of reserves. I believe that this ultimately became the sticking point. Because we called up some reserves but not nearly as many as would have been required to produce the forces we were contemplating, which would have been used: one, to reinforce in Vietnam; two, to re-establish the strategic reserve here in the United States, so that we could meet contingencies either in Vietnam or in Korea or elsewhere—we were having problems in the Middle East, as well, at that time, as you know—and would give us some flexibility.

There were a number of meetings at the White House. Mr. Clifford and I conferred with congressional leadership at great length. The matter of the reserve call-up was very, very onerous for any of these gentlemen to accept, because of the political problem of considerable dimensions and heat. And progressively, what was proposed was whittled down. Now one of the problems, of course, was the fact that certain individuals right here in the Pentagon, at a very early date, leaked all the details of this to the *New York Times*, as you probably recall. This generated the usual reaction that you get here in the United States, generated by people who are attempting to pre-empt the President and his decisions. And, of course, this put Mr. Johnson under tremendous political pressure from various pressure groups. I don't think it tied his hands by any manner or means, but certainly must have had some influence on the decisions that were eventually made.
M: Would you care to give the names of those people?
W: No, I happen to know the name of at least one that I have on good authority, but I'm not going to name him. I'll let the son-of-a-bitch stew in his own juice, if you'll excuse the expression. He has been very forthcoming with his own ideas on this subject, I might add.

So, anyway, we looked over the whole package. And after much discussion at the higher levels of government, it was decided that we simply could not go as far down the road for political and for fiscal reasons as would have been required to meet the overall program that had been laid out.

Now in military parlance, what I brought back was a contingency plan. In other words, the only firm request that Westmoreland really made was for the first increment; the second and third increments would have been deployed only on the decision of the President, in the light of circumstances that prevailed at the time.

So, we finally came down with the thought that what we should do was, one, to give him the troop units that we still owed him; in other words, bring him up to 525,000. In addition, we worked out a package that amounted to another 24,500 support troops of various kinds, which would have made his troop ceiling 549,500. Then, I flew out to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines on the twenty-fourth of March, and I met with General Westmoreland and discussed this whole thing with him most of one night.
He told me that this was entirely satisfactory to him, recognizing the problems here in the United States. And his reasons were these: first, the second wave of attacks had not eventuated. What had happened was that the North Vietnamese and the VC [Viet Cong] had taken, really, a terrific military defeat. Their losses had been tremendous. Moreover, in the process of generating this offensive, they had surfaced a considerable number, in fact the majority, of the VC infrastructure, the political leaders and the military leaders and so on, and they had either been killed or captured during the course of the offensive. The pacification program had suffered a setback in several areas, but nothing nearly as bad as had been reported and feared at the time. The ARVN [Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam] was stronger; they had gained assurance from the fact that they had withstood the North Vietnamese. And the Vietnamese government was in a stronger position than they had ever been. And this was evidenced by the fact that we had been urging upon them a general mobilization before this and they had never felt politically strong enough to do it.

Westmoreland likened the Tet Offensive to being the Battle of the Bulge insofar as the North Vietnamese and VC were concerned; in other words, they shot their wad on that. Militarily, they were never able to do anything much of a sizable nature after that. And he said, as far as the South Vietnamese were concerned, it was sort of like Pearl Harbor, because it really awakened the people
and the government and got them off the dime and moving ahead
in order to, you might say, protect themselves. The South
Vietnamese people also were extremely angry at the VC, because
they had violated Tet, and [also at] the North Vietnamese. You
see, this was really a traumatic experience for them from the reli-
gious point of view, the family point of view, and so on. Also,
whereas in the past the VC had posed as being the great liberators
and protectors of the people, they murdered people right and left,
as you probably know. At least three thousand civilians were lined
up, up near Hue, and either killed or buried alive in mass graves.
We found them, and the South Vietnamese knew all of this, and many
people who before had either been lukewarm or had given credence
of the VC playing to be the protectors of the people no longer
believed them.

So that's the story of the Tet Offensive. In other words,
Westmoreland said he was perfectly satisfied with the 549,500,
that he could do the job, and he could carry on because of the
changed situation.

One further item, before I leave this: Also he was in the
process at the time--you see, Hue had been recaptured, liberated,
by that time--of mounting an operation to relieve Khe Sanh, which
he did in early April. Then he was going to move into the A Shau
Valley, which is a VC stronghold on the border of Laos in South
Vietnam, and clean it out, because it had been the source of a lot
of the supplies and many of the troops that had been used on
Northern I Corps against Hue.

So that is the story of the two-hundred-thousand of the Tet Offensive.

M: General, you've gone into part of my second question, which was the 1968 policy review. But I wanted to bring it up to the result of the review, which was President Johnson's March 31 speech, and the military decision at that time of the troop ceiling and the restriction of the bombing.

W: The troop ceiling was established at 549,500 I would say, about, oh, I met with Westmoreland on the twenty-fourth of March. The final decision on that troop ceiling and what we could and would provide was made perhaps the twentieth of March, or the nineteenth, something like that, before I went to Vietnam. I was only gone a day and a half. I flew out to the Philippines and flew right back. Then when I got back, I found that there was discussion going on about a partial bombing halt, to the 20th parallel. There's a great deal of discussion about this. From the military aspect, the JCS had to agree that insofar as affecting the situation in South Vietnam substantially, a bombing halt on March 31 would have very little influence on the battlefield operations in the South. The reason being that the weather at that time of the year in North Vietnam is atrocious, and you just can't do any decent bombing anyway. So it would have very little effect one way or the other. Now, what led President Johnson to this, I do not know.

M: Is there a great extreme here, sir, in polarization, between
the military and civilians?

W: Well, President Johnson has told me that Dean Rusk was the man who first advanced the idea of a partial bombing halt as an effort to get negotiations started. I know that other people have advanced the idea that they were the heroes who thought of this. I'll let anybody who wants to have the credit for it. I did not suggest it; this I know.

M: Did you see a great effort to sway the President's mind?

W: No, because I was gone during a part of the time that this was going on. I think that by the time I returned and it was first broached to me, he had already made up his mind that he would make this offer in his speech of March 31. Or, at least, [he] had almost made up his mind. The first time that I discussed it with him face to face was in company with General Abrams, whom I brought back with me from Clark Air Force Base, because he was going to relieve General Westmoreland when Westmoreland became chief of staff of the Army in July of 1968. President Johnson asked our opinion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Abrams and General Westmoreland, as to what the effect would be. And we had, in all honesty, to tell him it would have very little effect on what happened in South Vietnam.

M: I'm thinking of something else that went through my mind. Let me continue on with the last part of the President's speech, in which he withdrew from re-election. Did you have any indication of this before that announcement?
I can't honestly say that I did. The only thing that I recall that struck me at the time--because I was present at some of the drafting sessions on his speech, to include the night before he made it--I could tell that he was in more of a swivet than I had ever seen him before in my life. He was really very much concerned about something; his manner was completely different than it usually was. He was obviously upset emotionally and, I would say, mentally. As I say, this was not his usual demeanor, and I thought to myself at the time that he was just awfully tired. I knew he was tired; he was damn near exhausted, as a matter of fact. An interesting sidelight is that, I guess it was Sunday preceding his speech, they sent me the final draft, but it had no ending. The ending, he had reserved for himself to give; he told me this later. Reserved for himself to give. In other words, he had waited until the very last moment, so there would be no leaks, to put down on a piece of paper his statement that he would not seek re-election.

I know what I was thinking before, General, but it ties in with this. Do you think that this decision on the part of Mr. Johnson and the sort of turning the corner of the Vietnam War in the speech of March 31 in setting these various limitations or restrictions resulted from the propaganda victories of Tet? Or was it just the time sequence?

No, I'll tell you, I think his decision was something he had been considering for a long time. The reason is that you could actually
see him getting older by the month during the four years after he was elected president. He worked terrifically hard, and I mean this--terrific worker! Apparently he was greatly worried about the dissent in the country, what was going on in the country, the problems of dealing with various world situations that kept hitting him in the face. I also believe that Mrs. Johnson was worried about his health. As you know, he suffered a very serious heart attack in 1956, and he wasn't exactly leading the kind of life that a man who has had a serious heart attack should be leading. And I have an idea, in fact I know from what he has told me since that he had been giving consideration to this for well over a year. In other words, it was a recurring theme.

I think he may have even discussed it with certain of his very close friends. I also know that when General Westmoreland was back here I think it was late in November of 1967, he asked General Westmoreland if he were not re-elected president, would this have any ill effect on the morale of the troops. And Westmoreland said that he thought that the troops would understand, that it wouldn't have any profound effect. Of course, this was all conjectural; I mean, he was talking to Westmoreland, he didn't tell Westmoreland, "This is what I'm going to do." He was just talking about the morale of the troops in general and prospects of the future and things like that.

Before we close that subject, just quickly, are there any discrepancies you recall with what has now been written about these
subjects and as you saw them yourself?

W: Well, there certainly is a discrepancy about the number of troops and the terms in which the request was made. There is a very vast discrepancy there, of course.

M: Yes, you have made that one clear. I'm sorry. Are there any others?

W: Certainly, the stories that were written about what had happened in South Vietnam as compared to what had really happened. There is no resemblance of truth in the stories that were written and what actually went on. So that these are two areas that strike me as being within my own confidence to comment on.

M: Let me go a little bit forward, to Mr. Johnson himself on the presidency. Anything he might have told you on that? And then, if there is any other time, I might get back to another question.

What I am thinking of is in terms of how you saw the procedure that was followed at the White House and any comments Mr. Johnson made himself about the presidency or his presidency. It's a very broad question, and you can pick up where you see fit.

W: Mr. Johnson was used to operating in the congressional way. In other words, in dealing with a group, a relatively small group of senior senators, [he was used to dealing] by personal persuasion, and argumentation, and as he said, talking things out, arriving at a decision and then going ahead and pushing it through to legislation, as might be required. So he operated when he was President very much in that same manner. The National Security Council meetings were held, of course, but he never really presented
there or discussed there the major questions having to do with Vietnam. They were reserved, very generally, for the Tuesday Luncheons. And, as you probably know, the regular attendants at those luncheons were Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, later Secretary Clifford, myself, Dick Helms. Usually George Christian would sit in, but he was the press secretary, [and he met] purely so that he would be aware of what was going on. Walt Rostow, and, occasionally, Vice President Humphrey would attend. From time to time, Justice Fortas would attend. Before he was secretary of defense, occasionally, Clark Clifford would attend. And, occasionally, General Max Taylor would attend. As I say, the regular attendees were the smaller group that I've just mentioned. And it was there that we thrashed out, you might say, the details of and the decisions as to what was going to be done in regard to the war in Vietnam. Now, at that same time, however, at these same luncheons, he opened up much broader subjects than the war in Vietnam. He would discuss other problems, too, domestic and foreign affairs, because the Secretary of State was there. So that it would be a pretty wide ranging conversation. It was from these meetings, I think that he derived the information that gave him the bases for many of the decisions that he took.

M: Did this informality cause any difficulty in terms of the decision that was being reached, or had it been reached, or necessary information on the subject?
W: No, at least not on the military side. I always, of course, at the first opportunity after, which would be Wednesday, normally--the chiefs normally meet on Wednesday afternoon--I would always debrief them as to what went on insofar as it affected the military. I didn't get into other domestic problems and so on; it wasn't our business. If it had something to do with our business, why, of course I would mention it to him. So we had no problem in keeping up with him. It may have caused problems in the other departments of the government. I'm not so sure.

M: How would you rate is kind of a wrong word to use, but, in order of their recurrence, the subjects that were covered in the Tuesday Luncheons. I would assume Vietnam would be probably the one that was foremost.

W: Vietnam was foremost. We always talked about Vietnam. There's no question about that. The other subjects would range right across the board from domestic politics to domestic problems: the budget, foreign policy problems, such as those caused by the Arab-Israeli war or the Arab-Israeli confrontation before the Arab-Israeli war, the problems having to do with North Korea and South Korea. You name it; it was discussed.

M: Okay. How would you describe the impact of the Vietnam War on Mr. Johnson?

W: Well, it was a very harrowing experience for him. For one thing, I am convinced that he wanted to go down in history as a "peace
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president" who devoted his time and his energies to development within the United States. This was absolutely sincere on his part. So he found himself a "war president" and, incidentally, in a very difficult time to be a war president, because of the dissent in the United States. This, of course, was particularly abrasive to him. It was not a congenial atmosphere for him to live in.

Now, I know that some people have doubted his sincerity on many things. I personally don't doubt his sincerity on this at all. And I must say that I spent more hours than I can remember of my life talking to him on subjects related to the war in Vietnam.

M: How would you describe Mr. Johnson's strengths and weaknesses?

W: Well, his strength is the fact that he is a very determined man, and actually a very dedicated individual, dedicated to the well-being of the United States. He also, due to his long service in Congress, understood precisely how to deal with the Congress. He not only knew many of them well, but had known them well for many years, they were personal friends. But, even more than that, he understood the sensitive spots in congressional-executive branch relationships and was able to deal with these very effectively. This was a tremendous advantage to him in getting his programs through. He took great pride, and I think rightly so, that, in the remnant of President John Kennedy's office, after Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, he, Johnson, put through all of the legislative programs which Mr. Kennedy had been unable to get
through the Congress during his tenure as president. And this, I believe, was due to his own political astuteness and political ability to deal with the Congress and the congressional leadership.

His greatest weakness will probably sound odd to you. This is the fact that he does not project well as a speaker. Either on the public platform, on the TV, or the radio. He simply cannot project his own sincerity and his firm beliefs in various things. They just don't come through. At least, they don't to me, and they don't to a great many other people that I have talked to.

M: Did he discuss that with you, sir?

W: Never, never. Except I know that he got to be a better speaker towards the end of his term than he was at the beginning, so I know that he was working at improving his ability to project. Now, the odd part of this is that in a small gathering—I'm speaking now of anywhere from four to twelve people—he made an entirely different impression, entirely different. You realized when you were in this small group listening to him that here was a man of character and strength. It just came right out and hit you in the face. And yet, over the TV tube, it didn't come out at all. He is a very remarkable man; he is an unusual man; he's a very sensitive man; and this is something a lot of people don't give him credit for, either. As I say, in my judgment, his greatest weakness was the fact that he just did not project when he spoke publicly.

M: Are there any conversations that you recall that were really in more of just a personal nature that particularly stand out and
describe the President to you?

M: I hope we didn't cover this before, but if we did, I'd rather do it again than not.

W: I may have told you this before, I'm not sure, Ms. McSweeny. But I was over in Vietnam in July of 1967, and I apparently suffered what they call a silent heart attack, climbing up a hill up near Pleiku one very hot afternoon when I was very tired. In fact, it was picked up on me on a routine physical that I was taking in August, about six or four or five weeks after it had happened.

Of course, I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks. They let me out on convalescent leave. When I got out, I went to see President Johnson. I told him what my physical condition was and what the prognosis was and so on, and the fact that I was going to be out of action for at least another six weeks, and it could be considerably more than that. I suggested to him that I should retire and that he should appoint somebody else as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Well, he talked to me about forty-five minutes, finally he said to me, "Now, Buz," he said, --Buz was what he always called me-- "You just go along and do what the doctors tell you to do to improve your health. I don't want anybody else as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff." He said, "But, on the other hand, I don't want you to kill yourself in that job. After you've had another checkup in about six weeks or so, if the doctors say you
can do the job," he said, "then I want you to stay on." Then--we were in his office, this was about seven-thirty or so at night--he got up, and walked to the door with me, and put his arm around my shoulder, and said, "I can't afford to lose you. You have never given me a bad piece of advice." I don't know whether that's about President Johnson or about Wheeler!

M: Either one is fine. General, I'm losing the time, of course, to go on. Do you think we better cut it here?

W: What other questions do you have?

M: Of course, there's the military advice to the President. I was going to get in the broadest question I possibly could about the Middle East and the Dominican intervention.

W: I can answer both of those very quickly. Insofar as the Middle East goes, this is the war of 1967, of course, the Israelis, as you would expect, were pressing very hard for additional military assistance, in the form of aircraft, et cetera, and, you might say, commitment on the part of the United States that we were going to back them up to the hilt. Well, my part in this was relatively simple, because President Johnson asked me at the end of one of these meetings what our estimate was as to the relative ability of the two sides. I told him that our best estimate was that if there were a war, that the Israelis would win it in five to seven days. He asked me to go back and check this out and talk to him about it again. I did, and I came back and told him exactly the same thing—that there's just no question; that the way the two
sides lined up in the air and on the ground, the Israelis would win; that if the Israelis pre-empted the UAR, the war would be shorter and their losses would be less than if the contrary happened and the Arabs had pre-empted the Israelis. This turned out to be reasonably correct, as you probably recall.

On the Dominican Republic, there it was a question of whether or not we should intervene, and largely the problem centered around the political aspects, and also the intelligence, as to whether or not this was a Communist inspired movement, rather than being, as some people in the United States would have it, merely an uprising of honest citizens who were highly indignant at what was going on in their country. I took part in all of those discussions. The President finally made the decision to intervene, and then it was a matter of merely getting the forces, organizing them, moving them, getting them the proper orders, and so on. I recall there was some criticism, because we put about twenty thousand troops in there, which some people said was too many. My only response to that was that you could never have too many. If you can overawe the enemy by a show of force, your casualties are going to be less. We could have probably done the job with fewer forces, but it probably would have cost us more in terms of lives than it did.

M: So you did see evidence of some sort of Communist influence in the Dominican Republic?

W: No question about it.
M: What about the Soviet threat in the Middle East War?

W: Communist threat? Well, the Communist involvement in that was Soviet backing of the radical Arab states. You will recall that we, that is, the United States, were trying desperately to get a diplomatic solution to that war. We were meeting all sorts of resistance. There's no question but what the various, substantial Soviet backing given to the UAR, in particular, gave Nassar the feeling that he could push ahead.

M: Any worry about intervention on the part of the Soviet Union?

W: Not particularly. I never had any, because I didn't think that they would. It's contrary to their practice to intervene in things like that. Of course, this is something you have to take into account. But it wasn't anything that really worried me a great deal.

M: How did Mr. Johnson act under these two particular crisis situations, as you recall?

W: I would say that he was deeply concerned, he was very firm on both occasions, and knew very clearly what he was and was not going to do. In other words, he--

M: How had he reached that position?

W: Well, he had sat down and talked to various people. He's a great one, you know, for talking to people. He talks to people all over the country by telephone; he gets in groups of people in the White House and talks to them. He talks to all of his normal advisors, and he finally makes up his mind if this is the thing to
do, and he goes at it.

One other aspect, you asked me about strengths and weaknesses a while ago. I'll tell you another strength of his. He asks very intelligent questions and very difficult questions on occasion to answer. Because if you are talking to him and you are sort of dealing in generalities, he has a habit of waiting until you get through, and he says, "And so what?" In other words, "What is your conclusion? What is your recommendation?" So as I say, he asks very intelligent questions, and sometimes very difficult questions.

M: Do you recall any particular incidents of that?

W: On a number of occasions. Nothing specific. I mean, it was just that you could never get by with a generality. You had to come down and say, "This leads me to the following conclusion."

M: On the Middle East and the Dominican intervention, is there anything you could just conclude with on that? Or have we covered that?

W: No, I think that nothing stands out in my mind other than the fact that Mr. Johnson was determined, if possible, to avert a war in the Middle East. And he was also determined, as far as the Dominican Republic goes, that he was not going to see another island in the Caribbean become communist. Those two things.

M: General, I must thank you very much for your help and conclude here.

W: Okay, not at all.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]