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Foreign Relations Committee

Interview #6

The Dominican Republic and Gulf of Tonkin Affairs

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Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

RITCHIE: We were talking last week about the Kennedy administration and the beginning of the Johnson administration, and one name that has come up in several of our discussions is Thomas Mann from the State Department, who served in the Eisenhower and Johnson administrations as assistant secretary for Latin American Affairs. I wonder if you could specifically give me an assessment of him, what his role was, and what your relationship was?

HOLT: Well, I've known Tom Mann for a long time. I've forgotten when I first met him but I guess it was some time in the '50's. Career professional Foreign Service Officer, very professional. One of the Foreign Service's stars, so far as Latin America is concerned; one of the people who contributed to turning around the Eisenhower administration with respect to it; Jim and basically a rather perceptive observer of Latin American trends. He was assistant secretary for Economic Affairs, I guess, before he was assistant secretary for

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Latin America. He changed I think in 1960. With the Kennedy election, Herter was Secretary of State then, Kennedy appointed Mann as Ambassador to Mexico on the strong recommendation of Herter and maybe Eisenhower. Mann did not like the plans for the Bay of Pigs worth a damn, although he went along with them. After the thing occurred, Mann sort of shrugged and said to me, "Well, I voted for it." But I gather without a hell of a lot of enthusiasm. Mann now says that he went to Rusk before the Bay of Pigs and said, "I want out of this thing," but he was still assistant secretary at the time the thing was pulled off. He went to Mexico shortly thereafter.

He was brought back from Mexico to be assistant secretary again by Johnson, very soon after the Kennedy assassination. He was Johnson's guy with respect to Latin America. He had direct access to the president. The president made it known far and wide that when Mann said something it was the president talking, and he didn't want Mann taking any guff from the rest of the bureaucracy. And Mann made it work. United States policy with respect to Latin America has traditionally suffered, and still does, from the variety of agencies and departments who have a finger in the pie and who are usually squabbling with each other, and are not very well coordinated. Mann is one of the two assistant

Secretaries in my experience who was able to bring this under control – the other being

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Ed Martin, who was there during the Kennedy administration and who did it mainly because of the force of his personality and his skill at bureaucratic infighting. Mann had those attributes as well, plus the strong support of the president.

As a matter of fact, when Mann made the move from Mexico back to Washington, there was talk in the White House and around about up-grading the position of assistant secretary to Latin American under secretary, to give it more bureaucratic clout. Johnson never proposed that, although he toyed with the notion for a while. I think one reason he did not propose it was perhaps some advice he got from the Hill not to, it was not a popular idea up here, although later on at the behest of George Aiken the Senate did provide by law for that to happen, it failed in conference. The first thing Mann had to deal with, really, was the Panama riots in January 1964, he had not been on the job for very long at that point. He saw early on that the basis for United States-Panamanian relations had to be changed from the 1903 treaty, and was instrumental in moving Johnson to agree to the negotiations which began in the spring of '64.

In coming back to the State Department from Mexico, Mann was insistent on having the authority to run the shop, and one of the things he wanted, or that Johnson wanted to give him, was a letter from Johnson to Mann

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containing really a sort of job description with the authority to go with it. One Sunday afternoon, I guess this was just before Christmas in '63, Johnson phoned me at home and said that he had been talking to Fulbright and that Fulbright said I had some good ideas about it, and would I draft a letter that Johnson could send to Mann describing this, and then he went on at some length about what ought to be in the letter. As was typical of Johnson he wanted it fifteen minutes ago. He asked me to phone back and dictate it to somebody at the White House, and also to call Mann at Mann's hotel and talk to him about it. So I did this. I read my draft to Mann, Mann read his draft to me, they weren't all that different. As was typical of Johnson when he wanted something like this, or a speech, he would ask a number of people to do the same thing and then he or George Reedy would take scissors and paste and put the damn thing together, using the parts of each that appealed to him the most – that's what happened in this case.

At some point in early '65, I guess, Mann moved from being assistant secretary for Latin America to being under secretary for Economic Affairs at the State Department, but he continued to be the fellow that Johnson talked to the most about Latin America, and when the Dominican Republic crisis

developed in late April of '65, Mann was the guy in the State Department who dealt with it most, although United

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States policy in that crisis was really run out of the White House. It was really run by Lyndon Johnson, who in effect acted as the Dominican Republic desk officer for about three months. I was in Asuncion, Paraguay, of all places, attending a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank when the Dominican revolution, which led to United States intervention, erupted. I read the Paraguayan press with growing incredulity as these events unfolded. After the Inter-American Bank meeting I went to Argentina for about a week. So it was a couple of weeks or so in to the Dominican situation before I got back to Washington. My impression is that in the beginning of that crisis there were no real consultations between the Executive Branch and the Senate. Some things were done to keep the Foreign Relations Committee informed. Mann came up two or three times, there were leadership meetings in the White House, that kind of thing. But I am not aware of any senatorial input into, or dissent from, the policy that was followed. However, as events unfolded there seemed to develop a discrepancy between what the Johnson administration was saying about the situation and what the press was reporting from the Dominican Republic.

Towards the end of May, I guess, at one of the meetings of the committee when Mann came up to inform them, he encountered some skepticism and reacted to this by saying, "If you knew what we know you wouldn't have

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any doubts about the correctness of the policy we're following." And he was a little taken aback when the committee, I've forgotten which senator it was, said to him, "Well, why don't you tell us what you know?" He said, I'd like to do that, but I've got to check it out." Well, he went back and checked it out, I guess with McGeorge Bundy, maybe with the president himself, and came back or called up and said, "Okay." I went down to his office, they gave me a little room with a filing cabinet in his suite as under secretary, and I spent about two or three weeks reading a file drawer or two of reporting from Santo Domingo. That was the first time I ever saw raw CIA reports – I guess also the last!

I read through this and concluded that sure enough the way the situation had been presented by the Johnson administration really did not jive with the reports that the administration was getting from State and CIA, and reported this back to Fulbright. I wrote a long memorandum about it, which served as the basis for extensive hearings by the committee that were scattered out over a period of about six weeks. Different members of the committee came to different conclusions as a consequence of these

hearings and there was never a committee report. It seemed the committee was so damned split about it that no meaningful report would have been possible. Fulbright pondered the situation for a while and

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asked the staff to draft a speech about it. This, I guess, was by early August, and I was going off on vacation. Seth Tillman drafted the speech, drawing heavily on the memorandum I had written which started the whole thing. He sent it to me while I was on vacation. Fulbright made one important change, which placed the responsibility for what he perceived to be the misguided American policy on Johnson's advisors rather than the president himself. Seth and I argued with him about this because it was perfectly clear that Johnson was the guy who was calling the shots on this. In any event, Johnson was the guy who in our system was responsible for it, whether he was calling the shots or not! I remember making the point that one of John Kennedy's finest hours was when he took responsibility for the Bay of Pigs.

Fulbright was thinking in terms of his own relationship with Johnson and his ability to continue to have some influence there, and thought that he would weaken this relationship with Johnson less if he did not put the responsibility directly on the president. Well, that was a vain thought as it turned out, but anyway that was his rationale for doing it. He agonized over whether to do anything for quite a while. I don't know what eventually influenced him to go ahead. He got conflicting advice from the staff. I said I thought it would be useful for the American pos-

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ition in the rest of Latin America to have an indication that the United States Government was not totally monolithic about this thing, and to let the liberals in Latin America know that there was at least somebody reasonably high up in the government who disapproved of it. I think that argument appealed to Fulbright. Anyway, when he finally decided to go ahead with the thing, I was back from vacation, we were into late August or early September, and an interim president was about to be inaugurated in the Dominican Republic, a step which was expected to lead to the beginning of the withdrawal of the force that was there. Fulbright didn't want to do anything to rock that particular boat, so he said, "Well, we'll wait until after this event and then do it."

Once he decided to go ahead, he went over that speech with a fine-tooth comb and in effect said to the staff, "I don't want to hear any more argument about whether to do it, I just want to be sure that it is factually accurate." I remember a long session in his office one afternoon in which he was going over it for about the last time and the point he kept harping on with respect to almost every sentence in it was: "is this so? Is it the truth? Can it be documented and supported?" And we said, "yea, it is." "Well, that's all I care about," he said. He

sent a copy of it to Johnson in advance with a letter saying, all want you to know this is what I'm going to say in the

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Senate this afternoon," or tomorrow, or whatever. "It pains me to do this. I'm doing it in the spirit of being helpful to you in case things like this arise in the future (this is a paraphrase--not a direct quote). The tone of the thing was more in sorrow than in anger, and his-hurts-me-more-than-it-does-you, and so on. Well, it was not received in that spirit in the White House! Indeed, rather than using it as Fulbright had hoped as a means of learning from past mistakes, and so on, Johnson inspired some of his friends in the Senate to be prepared to respond to it and to give Fulbright hell when he made it, and this happened. It had the reaction I had foreseen in Latin America. Eduardo Frei was then President of Chile and the morning after the speech there arrived to Fulbright a telegram from Frei congratulating him on it. The Peruvian Congress--they had one then--passed a resolution commending Fulbright, and various things like this happened, which were very encouraging to Fulbright, but really sort of increased the irritation of the administration. This sort of soured my relationship with Mann for a considerable time. We're still cordial with each other, as a matter of fact I had a very pleasant lunch with him in Austin last spring (he's living in retirement down there now). But we never quite got back to the intimacies which we had had before. Mann continued to maintain

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that there were some things, some reports which had been that held back from us. He was still on this kick, you know, you don't really know as much about it as we do. Well, don't think that was so. I checked the serial numbers of the telegrams that I was looking at! Although one has to leave open the possibility that there is some back-channel stuff that I didn't see. Anyway, we saw enough. That affair had more profound effect up here than just with respect to the Dominican Republic, or even to Latin America. It ruptured the Johnson-Fulbright relationship, but even more profoundly than that I think it opened the first crack in what later came to be the "credibility gap" over Vietnam. It demonstrated to Fulbright and others that things were not always as Johnson and the administration were portraying them. This became very important in cultivating the seeds of doubt which already existed about the policy in Vietnam. As a matter of fact, somebody said at the time that if he--meaning Johnson--is this impetuous and dissembling with respect to a little old country like the Dominican Republic, why the hell should we trust him with respect to a major operation like Vietnam? I think this contributed to doubts about what really happened in the Gulf of Tonkin the year before, and--although there's no direct relationship--encouraged the committee to reopen the Gulf of Tonkin affair. You know, things were generally downhill in Executive-Legislative relations from that point forward!

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I mentioned the Gulf of Tonkin, this might be a good time to talk about the Senate's role or lack of a role in that. It occurred in early August of '64. Johnson produced the famous Tonkin Resolution, which he wanted. George Ball or somebody from the State Department came up to a meeting in Mansfield's offices as majority leader one afternoon. Mansfield was there, Fulbright, Russell, Saltonstall of Armed Services, I don't remember who else from Foreign Relations. I was acting chief of staff then because Marcy was out of the country. I was there; Bill Darden, the staff director of the Armed Services Committee, was there. There was some fiddling around with words in the resolution but there wasn't any real discussion of substance. Most of the conversation was about procedure and scheduling and so on. It was decided that the resolution would be introduced that afternoon by Fulbright and co-sponsored by Russell, Hickenlooper, and Saltonstall, and that it would be referred jointly to Foreign Relations and Armed Services, that they would have a hearing on it the following morning, and attempt to report it to the Senate that day, with floor action promptly following. In the light of all of the soul-searching that had gone on over similar resolutions with respect to Formosa and the Middle East in the 1950's, Bill Darden and I listened to this with growing incredulity. I remember Darden

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and I whispering to each other during the meeting, there's no way they're going to get this thing done that fast." Well, it turned out that they did--to their later bitter regret. I have frequently thought since then that I should have at least raised a caution that this thing had implications that maybe ought to be considered at greater length, but the reason I didn't was that I was absolutely sure that the damn committee would do it without any prompting from me. Well, it turned out I was wrong. I don't know if it would have made any difference if I had raised it. One of the things that appealed to Fulbright and others was what looked like the measured, moderate response which Johnson was taking to the alleged provocation in the Gulf. Goldwater had been nominated by the Republicans back in July of that year. The Democratic convention was not until later but everybody knew who the nominee was going to be. Compared to Goldwater the Johnson reaction looked moderate. There was also a desire up here, on the part of the Democrats, to support the president in the political situation that existed in the United States. So it was done. There really wasn't much concern about--much vocal concern, anyway--about Vietnam in the committee for some months thereafter. The Dominican Republic, as I said, opened the first crack in what came to be the credibility gap.

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RITCHIE: This has been a very wide over-view of that period. I have some specific questions to go back to. Going back first to the Dominican Republic

intervention, Johnson made a lot of very broad statements. He talked about beheading of people, and the ambassador was being shot at in his home, quite inflammatory statements. From what you are saying, you found that the documentation did not support these statements. What was your reaction when you looked at the documents, and where did you see the conflict between what the president was saying and what you were reading?

HOLT: Well, there just wasn't anything in the documents to support that thing. I think Johnson had said at a press conference or some place that fifteen hundred people had their heads cut off and stuck on poles and so on. There was just no evidence that this was the case. He said the ambassador phoned him from under his desk, for God's sake, while bullets were going into the American embassy. Well, we asked the ambassador himself if he was ever under his desk: No!

RITCHIE: Why do you think the administration felt the need to create this incredible picture that its own documents didn't bear out?

HOLT: Well, in the first place, Johnson was a man given to exaggeration and hyperbole anyway.

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the second place, well, let me back up a little bit. one of the things which became clear in the course of this review, and one of the points Fulbright made in his speech, was that the situation of disorder and the extent of Communist involvement were the pretext rather than the real reason for the Johnson intervention. The real reason being that Johnson did not want Juan Bosch to return to power in the Dominican Republic. Bosch had been strongly supported by the Kennedy administration--indeed, Johnson as vice president had gone to Bosch's inauguration in '62, I guess it was, or '63. But he had turned out to be a weak, indecisive president and Johnson didn't want him back. Well, this would not have been a persuasive reason for the drastic action which Johnson took. Therefore it became necessary for the Johnson White House to create reasons which in their view would be persuasive, not only with the Congress and the American public but especially with the OAS and the other countries of Latin America, and one way to do this was to present a picture of public disorder so great that it was threatening the safety of foreigners generally in the Dominican Republic, not just Americans.

One of the pretexts on which the 82nd Airborne and later the Inter-American police force, whatever the hell they called it, went into the Dominican Republic was the evacuation of foreigners. Most of them happened to be

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Americans, but there were other foreigners who were evacuated as well. As a matter of fact, Art Buchwald wrote a brilliant column about the last American left in the Dominican Republic who kept pleading with them to evacuate him, and they refused because if we do that we don't have any excuse to stay here any longer!

Beyond this, it was important to the administration that the intervention be in collaboration with the beleaguered Dominican government. The military officers comprising that government had several times asked for United States support and had been turned down. They were told, in effect, that the United States would intervene only if the Dominican formally stated that they could no longer assure the safety of foreigners. The Dominicans interpreted this, correctly, as meaning that if they did make such a statement, then intervention would follow. And that's what happened.

RITCHIE: The fact that they opened the documents to you, the raw intelligence material, would indicate that they assumed that you were going to come to pretty much the same interpretation of them that they did.

HOLT: That's right, and that's one thing that irritated Tom Mann so damn much when I didn't, and when the committee didn't.

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RITCHIE: Do you think they had just gotten into a mind-set where they believed their own exaggerations?

HOLT: I don't think Mann ever really believed this business about fifteen hundred people having their heads cut off. The committee pressed him about that at some length and he was evasive and clammed up.

RITCHIE: In his memoirs, Johnson only claims one person had his head cut off, and he makes a big thing out of that.

HOLT: No, Johnson might well have persuaded him self of this. I don't really think he fooled Mann, but one of Mann's characteristics is absolute loyalty to whoever was president.

RITCHIE: When you were looking at these documents, over a couple of weeks time, did anyone in the administration--Mann or anyone else--try to influence your thinking or your interpretation of the documents?

HOLT: No.

RITCHIE: They just left you to yourself?

HOLT: Yes.

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RITCHIE: Did you work in the White House?

HOLT: No, in the State Department. In Mann's office.

RITCHIE: And did they keep bringing things out? Was it a body of papers, or did you keep requesting more material?

HOLT: They had them, as I recall they had them assembled when I went down there. The guy I dealt with on a day to day basis was a fellow named Bob Adams, who was Mann's special assistant, or something like that, held been with him in Mexico and I'd known Adams for a number of years. He at one point was chief of the political section of the American embassy in Mexico. He was available if I had a question about something, but it was basically just reading what they provided, and making extensive notes.

RITCHIE: I've heard that Dean Rusk was particularly outraged at your report, in fact he took it as sort of a personal affront. Did you ever get any feeling of that from him? Did he ever respond or comment to you?

HOLT: I don't recall that he did. It was quite clear that he didn't like it worth a damn.

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I don't now remember the precise way in which that dislike was manifested. Some third parties reported to me some sort of snide remarks which Rusk made to them from time to time about "that Pat Holt," and such. I don't remember that he ever said anything to me about it. You know, for the duration of the Johnson administration relations with us, as I said, got steadily worse, and there was a frigid chill between the committee and Rusk just in general. But after Rusk left the State Department I have seen him several times. He's been quite cordial and pleasant. I think he's mellowed.

RITCHIE: The speech that Fulbright made in September of '65 on the Dominican Republic, he agonized over it because the rest of the committee was too divided to agree to act--what was the response of the rest of the committee to your report and who did you feel was more convinced by it? Can you remember what the breakdown was?

HOLT: Not in any completeness. When Fulbright made the speech I think Morse made some comment to me to the effect that it's about time that somebody said this. I suppressed an urge to ask him, "Well, why haven't you said it before now?"

Morse was not normally reluctant to voice his views on any damn thing. I think Hickenlooper was pretty quiet through

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out that affair. Lausche I think was supportive of the administration. I know [George] Smathers and Russell Long were, but I'm not sure they were on the committee then.

RITCHIE: Russell Long left the committee about that time, didn't he?

HOLT: I don't remember the dates, but I remember he was one of those who supported the president in the Senate when they were debating.

RITCHIE: Eugene McCarthy called for an investigation of the CIA in response to the reports on the Dominican Republic, I think in 1966.

HOLT: Yes, I guess so, I don't recall that there was any connection, but there might have been. As a matter of fact, one of the things that developed in the course of this review of the Dominican situation was that the CIA was rather more accurate in its reporting than the State Department. We also had that impression as we got more involved in the-Vietnam affair later on. The Dominican affair erupted at a time when the CIA had a new director, Admiral Raborn, who had been there only a few days, and I heard from somebody, I've forgotten the source, that in the early stages of the Dominican thing Johnson asked Raborn for evidence of Communist involvement. Raborn being very new to the job didn't know enough

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about it, and said held go back and check. He went back to Langley and they told him there weren't any communists. Johnson didn't like this worth a damn and called in J. Edgar Hoover and said, "Find me some Communists in the Dominican Republic." This led to a great infusion of FBI agents into the damn country, and Johnson did produce a list of fifty-seven or something Communists, some of whom turned out to be dead and others were out of the country and what not. That was the source of much bureaucratic unhappiness as between the FBI and CIA, the two agencies which never have gotten along very well anyway. And it took years to get the last FBI people out of the Dominican Republic.

RITCHIE: Also getting back to Tom Mann, he has come under a lot of criticism, especially from Diplomatic historians, for what they call the "Mann Doctrine" on Latin America, which was supporting anti-communism in Latin American countries through economic assistance without regard to the particular type of regime that was there. In other words, they would continue to support military regimes, which was perceived as a change in the Alliance for Progress that the

Kennedy administration had been attempting to work towards. Is that an accurate view of Mann? Or is he coming under unfair criticism?

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HOLT: Well. I don't think I ever heard of the "Mann Doctrine." I think that the way you describe it probably overstates the business. What strikes me more strongly about the Mann-Johnson policy towards Latin America was the support of American business, American investment, and of regimes which created a favorable climate for foreign business to operate. This was most clear, I guess, in the case of Brazil, which also occurred early on in the Johnson administration, the end of March, the beginning of April in 1964 when Joao Goulart was forced to resign. The situation in Brazil had been deteriorating for some time. Goulart was sort of a fuzzy radical, but also a rather weak president and the source of much concern in Washington by Mann and just about everybody else.

When the Brazilian revolution or coup d'etat began, I think it was in the end of March, Mann on his initiative came up to talk to the subcommittee on Latin America about it. The overthrow of Goulart at that time was a fait accompli, what was uncertain at that time was whether there would be an orderly transition or whether Goulart's successor would be confronted with violent opposition in the country. Mann felt that it was important that the revolution succeed and told the subcommittee that a Naval taskforce consisting of an aircraft carrier and I don't know what else was on its way to stand off the coast of Brazil

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so as to be in a position to respond to requests for help if the new Brazilian government made them. The subcommittee, and I'm talking mainly about Morse now, I don't remember who else was present, did not shed any tears over the departure of Goulart. It was concerned that the transition be accomplished according to Brazilian constitutional processes. There was at least the facade that Goulart had resigned, and under the Brazilian constitution his successor was supposed to be elected by the Congress, and the president of Congress was supposed to be elected by the Congress, and the president of Congress was supposed to act as the interim president in the meantime.

This pretty much is the script that was followed, for about ten days anyway, but Mann was sort of contemptuous of the Brazilian Congress. I remember he said, "They have no troops." Morse said, "That doesn't mean they're unimportant." Well, anyway, after about ten days or so General Castello Branco became president of Brazil and Brazil entered a period of draconian suppression of opposition people, and also a period of dramatic economic growth, which was good for business. And for a number of years following the revolution of 1964 members of the committee from time to time would complain about the

repressive character of the Brazilian government, which the Johnson administration didn't really deny, it just sort of apol-

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ogized for it. It said these reports were exaggerated and changed the subject to the Brazilian economy, and that sort of thing.

Finally, in the Nixon administration, when [Frank] Church was chairman of that subcommittee, he got sufficiently exercised to have some hearings on it, although the immediate focus of his concern was the AID public safety program, which he was worried about generally, and we selected Brazil as the case study for it. Bob Dockery and I went to Brazil and spent two or three weeks looking at it down there, which laid the basis for some hearings, I guess this must have been about 1971. And those hearings in turn laid the basis for a movement which developed and which eventually led to the abolition of the public safety program by law. But I guess that's about all the Brazilian part of the story.

RITCHIE: Well, do you see that there is a continuum of policy from the late Eisenhower years when they began to recognize Latin America in a different way through the Kennedy Alliance for Progress and through the Johnson administration? Or do you think that the administrations were responding differently and there were really sharp changes?

HOLT: Well, there was a continuum for say about ten years. There was a change in emphasis,

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I think, in the Johnson administration, Brazil being a good example. But I think the biggest change perhaps was that the Johnson administration was more ad hoc in its approach to Latin America. It didn't really buy the grand design of the Alliance for Progress the way the Kennedy administration had. You know, I cited the case of Brazil, well, on the other side of this is Chile. The Johnson administration, with Mann as assistant secretary, gave substantial covert assistance to the Christian Democrats in Chile and to Eduardo Frei. And they were at one point the showcase for the Alliance for Progress, they were certainly the epitome of liberal democratic non-military civilian government.

RITCHIE: One diplomatic textbook that I looked at said that when Mann became the assistant secretary in charge of the Alliance for Progress that he allowed it to "wither on the vine" from neglect. Is that a fair assessment?

HOLT: It withered. I think it's more complicated than that textbook presented it. One of the things Mann did when he became assistant secretary early in the Johnson period was reorganize the Latin American bureaus of both State and

AID so that they were totally integrated, back-to-back was his phrase for it. This gave State more direct control over the AID program. It was one of the

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main things Mann did to coordinate the squabbling bureaucracies that I've talked about earlier. Mann, and Johnson too for that matter, believed in using AID as a part of the political policy of the United States in whatever country they were dealing with. In this they didn't really differ all that much in principle from numerous other people who've been involved with AID and foreign policy. The difference was more one of degree than of principle, the way they approached it.

RITCHIE: One other question about Latin America. You said you went down to Brazil later on in 1971, and that was the question about how the AID program had used its public safety training. What did you find in Brazil, and did it surprise you? Were AID programs being used to train secret police?

HOLT: The popular charge in those days was that AID public safety was training local police forces in techniques of torture and so on. We never found any evidence to support that, either in Brazil or I also went to Guatemala and the Dominican Republic and looked at it in some detail. What emerged from this was that the public safety program was a very great political liability in a public relations sense because the fact of its existence identified the United States with repressive police forces. These public safety people were imparting to

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these police forces the techniques of investigation, crime control, control of riots, and so on, which worked in Los Angeles. But they worked in the United States in a milieu in which the courts were independent and there was a free and inquiring press and public opinion was important. When these techniques were transferred to police in a country like Guatemala or Brazil as it was in the 1960's then the United States or nobody else had any control over the use they would be put to. You know, one of the things that was done in Brazil was technical assistance to the Brazilians in establishing a fingerprint identification system. All right, you can use that system either to find people who steal automobiles or to find people who don't like the government. In the United States it's used to find people that steal automobiles--sometimes--actually we didn't know it at the time but by 1971 the Nixon administration was going pretty damn far too! But I think that was the main point about the public safety program.

RITCHIE: Well, then you made a connection between the reaction of the committee and Senator Fulbright to the reports of the Dominican Republic to a reassessment of its role in the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, and what the administration was saying about Vietnam at that time. In the longer run the

Vietnam issue is the larger is sue, and yet the Dominican Republic served as sort of an

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introduction to it. A couple of questions. In your book, *Invitation to Struggle*, you said "Congress paid strikingly little attention to the steps taken by the Johnson administration in 1965 to convert the American role in Vietnam from support and advice to active participation." I was wondering if you could take that a step back further. Had the Congress and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee been particularly concerned about Vietnam in the days before the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, or was that a relatively back burner issue?

HOLT: It was a relatively back burner issue. It was a source of some concern and some doubt about what it might lead to, but it was not a very active item on the agenda. At some point in this period, I don't remember whether it was '64 or '65, there was a picture in the *Washington Post* of a captured Viet Cong being dragged through a little creek by his ankles, which were tied to a jeep or something, and the cut line said that this was happening in an effort to make him talk. Well, that really upset me. I drafted a letter, which Fulbright signed, to [Robert] McNamara asking him if this was the kind of technical assistance our training teams were giving the South Vietnamese, that if it was, then things really were worse in Vietnam than we had thought because the whole history since the persecution of the

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Christians by the Romans proved that this kind of crap didn't work and we were on a losing wicket out there. Then Fulbright went on to say that he had been increasingly troubled about the policy in Vietnam and had refrained from public criticism of it because frankly he could think of no alternative, but if this was the kind of thing we were getting involved in he thought we just ought to cut our losses and get out. I've forgotten what McNamara replied to the damn letter, I think it was something to the effect of, "oh, gee whiz, we aren't doing things like that!" But Fulbright did not make a public fuss over it, nor did anybody else. In private conversations Fulbright and a few other senators would voice doubts about it, but these were tempered--or public statements were tempered--by the argument of Johnson that the policy will work if we stay in it and if we give the impression of unity. So it took a while before anybody other than Morse and Gruening were willing to break the impression of unity that Johnson was trying so hard to create. But as I recall the sequence of events, You had the Gulf of Tonkin in August of '64, and then in February of '65 you had the response through bombing to Viet Cong bombing of an American garrison in Pleiku and that bothered some members of the committee, Albert Gore being one, but again there wasn't any great public fuss about it.

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Then in the summer of '65 came the first big injection of American ground troops into Vietnam, and like the Gulf of Tonkin Johnson handled this in a way that made it look moderate, because he went through a big process of considering what to do about it, calling in advisors here and there, the White House was leaking proposals for calling up the Army Reserves and asking for a tax increase and this, that and the other thing. And when all he did was send whatever number of troops over there it looked well, gee whiz, this isn't going as far as it might have. It was not really till towards the end of '65, if I remember it correctly, that Fulbright decided to go public with this. His immediate objective was to persuade the Johnson administration. This is what led to the first of the famous hearings which came along in early '66.

RITCHIE: Sort of an educational program?

HOLT: Yes. He was a great educator.

RITCHIE: Just one more question on the Gulf of Tonkin I once heard Wayne Morse give a speech after he had left the Senate, in which he said that the night before the resolution he got a call from a source of his in the Pentagon who told him to make sure that he saw the logs of the *Maddox* and the *C. Turner Joy*. The next day he asked McNamara about this and McNamara said, well, you know these

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ships are off in the Pacific. Apparently he later discovered that the logs had been flown in and were at the Pentagon at that time, but were kept back from the committee. It seems strange that, after the Eisenhower Doctrine and the Formosa Resolution, the only person on the committee who had any qualms was Wayne Morse, and that was only because he had gotten a tip from inside the Pentagon the night before. No one had any sense of the complications or implications involved in this? And Fulbright didn't express anything at the time?

HOLT: No. No. And as you say, it does seem damn strange.

RITCHIE: You attribute this basically to the tone that Senator Goldwater set in 1964?

HOLT: That was a part of it. That was a lot of it.

RITCHIE: In retrospect, do you see the Johnson administration as sort of setting it up for the resolution, or do you think they just took advantage of the resolution after it had been passed?

HOLT: Well, you know they had had drafts for the resolution lying around for quite a while. I don't know whether the resolution was the whole object of that exercise in the Gulf of Tonkin or not, really.

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RITCHIE: When George Ball met with the leaders that Sunday afternoon, was there any sense of the way that the administration planned to carry out the resolution? Did they give any assurances of limited action?

HOLT: It wasn't a Sunday afternoon, it was an afternoon but I don't remember the day of the week. But yes, as a matter of fact, I think the action either had already started or it had been announced. It was a very prompt reaction in terms of bombing North Vietnam.

RITCHIE: Johnson went on television to announce retaliatory bombing.

HOLT: Yes. Yes, there were assurances. I think maybe one thing that was involved in it was the fact that neither the Formosa Resolution nor the Middle East Resolution had resulted in the dire consequences that some of the skeptics feared at the time. You know, this was just another lot of language. One of the points that the Johnson administration made was that this would show national unity and support for the president and all of that. The idea being that if we were firm enough the Viet Cong would just give up. Somebody in a committee hearing at one point during the Vietnam thing said to Cabot Lodge

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when he was ambassador, "How do you think that this is, ever going to end?" He said, "It will end when those guys in the black pajamas out in the jungle wake up some morning and say we don't want to do this anymore."

RITCHIE: Given that J. William Fulbright was very close to Lyndon Johnson in the Senate--Johnson used to refer to him as "my Secretary of State" when Johnson was Majority Leader--and that Johnson tried to get Kennedy to appoint Fulbright as Secretary of State, and that they were close personal friends, why do you think that Johnson failed to listen to Fulbright, especially in those early years of '64 and '65 when Fulbright, though critical, was trying to win over support in the administration?

HOLT: Well, I don't really know. Of course, after the speech on the Dominican Republic Johnson sort of scratched Fulbright off his list. But prior to that I don't really know. Of course, prior to that there wasn't all that great an American involvement in Vietnam. The first big batch of ground troops didn't go over till the summer of '65. But you know, Johnson didn't listen to Mansfield either.

According to Johnson's memoirs, Mansfield was dissenting more strongly and earlier than Fulbright.

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RITCHIE: Do you think Johnson had just insulated himself in the White House, surrounded by people who automatically agreed with him?

HOLT: I just don't know.

RITCHIE: Well, I think this is probably a good break for us. We've gotten started with Vietnam, but it's a long war.

[End of Interview #6]