

Pat M. Holt

Chief of Staff
Foreign Relations Committee

Interview #3
George, Dulles, and Eisenhower
(Monday, September 29, 1980)
Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

HOLT: In connection with the committee's relationship with the CIA I neglected to say anything about the role that Senator Mansfield played in that. Very soon after he came on the committee, which I guess was in 1953 or thereabouts, he began urging that Congress establish an oversight mechanism for the CIA, analogous to what it had done for the Atomic Energy Commission, through the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. He introduced a succession of resolutions to that effect, most of which died the lingering death in the Senate Rules Committee. I think along about '56 or so he did get a Senate vote on one of them and it was rejected. He had considerable support for this in the Foreign Relations Committee, but the thing was unsuccessful until very much later.

RITCHIE: Why was it so unsuccessful?

HOLT: Well I think there just weren't very many senators--or certainly not enough senators--who shared the Mansfield uneasiness about the relationship Of Congress to the intelligence community as a whole, but particularly in those days it was the CIA that people

page 70

were worried about. This view held that most intelligence operations, if not all of them, certainly most of them involved political questions of foreign policy and if unsuccessful, or if uncovered, would have political consequences in foreign policy, and that therefore the political judgment of Congress ought to bear, in Vandenberg's figure of speech, on the take-off as well as the crash landing. But most senators weren't all that concerned about it and were content to leave the existing mechanism alone.

RITCHIE: The existing mechanism was the Armed Services Committee?

HOLT: The Armed Services and Appropriations subcommittee.

RITCHIE: Did the Foreign Relations Committee ever get any information from the Armed Services and Appropriations committees?

HOLT: In the period of the 1950's which we're talking about, no. Now, very much later, towards the end of the 1960's that situation changed.

RITCHIE: I know that Senator Richard Russell was particularly opposed to sharing jurisdiction over the CIA.

page 71

HOLT: He was.

RITCHIE: Do you think that was just a jurisdictional issue?

HOLT: Well, to a degree it was a jurisdictional issue. Hell, the Senate is full of jurisdictional issues between committees and people feel very strongly about them. I think in connection with the CIA there was a more subtle and very largely unspoken--certainly unspoken publicly--difference or conflict at work. This was that when you came right down to it the people on the Foreign Relations Committee, such as Mansfield, did not fully trust the people on the Armed Services Committee with respect to the CIA. And the people on the Armed Services Committee, such as Russell, did not fully trust the people on the Foreign Relations Committee, such as Mansfield.

RITCHIE: There does seem to be a distinction: the more liberal, internationalist senators wind up, on the Foreign Relations Committee, and the more conservative senators seem to gravitate toward the Armed Services Committee.

HOLT: Well, that was true in the '40's and the early '50's. It began to change a little bit at some point during the '50's with the adoption of the policy on the part of Senate Democrats that every

page 72

senator would have a major committee before any senator had two major committees. This resulted in the appointment of people like Frank Lausche to the Foreign Relations committee. And Lausche was a pretty conservative senator on these matters.

RITCHIE: But Lausche and Homer Capehart were always very much in the minority on the committee.

HOLT: Yes, and the Vandenberg Republicans (Vandenberg was dead by now), his wing of the party went to some considerable length to keep their representation on the Foreign Relations Committee pretty generally in the Vandenberg tradition. As a matter of fact, the reason George Aiken came on the Foreign Relations Committee was to keep Joe McCarthy off.

RITCHIE: Was McCarthy making a real attempt to get on?

HOLT: Yes. I'm trying to think of which vacancy it was that created this. I suppose that Taft died in 1953.

RITCHIE: Charles Tobey died then too; wasn't Tobey on the committee?

HOLT: Tobey was on the committee. As a matter of fact I think one reason why Tobey came

page 73

on the committee was to keep McCarthy or people like him off it. And then I guess it was when Tobey died that Aiken came on, to preserve that.

RITCHIE: Wasn't Aiken only peripherally interested in foreign policy?

HOLT: Well, that was the general impression at the time he came on the committee. But during the period he served, which my God was twenty years or close to it, he developed a considerable interest in it, particularly in Latin America.

RITCHIE: He also saw the international connections to agriculture.

HOLT: Oh, yes he did. And Bourke Hickenlooper even more so. And Hubert Humphrey even more so yet!

RITCHIE: Looking over the last interview, there was one other area that I wanted to ask You about, and that was to get your impression on the relationship between the Foreign Relations Committee and the administrations that it was dealing with. We talked about the Truman years, and you mentioned how Tom Connally felt that as a Democrat his function was to be a good soldier for the president's foreign policies. Would you say that

page 74

was a feeling that was shared by other members of the Foreign Relations Committee? How did they see their relationship to the administration's foreign policy, especially in those earlier days?

HOLT: I think the most important thing to be said about that in the Truman administration, and carrying on into the early years of the Eisenhower administration, is that the question never really arose very much in the sharp form in which you just posed it. The significant thing about that particular period was that quite apart from how anybody viewed his role or his relationship there was a pretty broad consensus of the direction in which foreign policy ought to move. And given that consensus, given the general agreement and the fact that the committee was on a parallel track with the administration, you just avoided a lot of the difficulties that flow from disagreements and role reappraisals and all that kind of thing.

RITCHIE: But there were a lot of shocks in those years, the collapse of Chiang-Kai-shek in China, and Truman's firing of MacArthur, and all of that.

HOLT: It's an extraordinary thing that there was the very bitter Republican attack on Acheson and the China hands in the Foreign Service and so on over the debacle in China, did not spill over at all--or to a

page 75

very limited degree onto things like the Marshall Plan and NATO and so on. There was a "great debate" I guess in 1951 over Truman's proposal to send additional American ground troops to Europe. The Republicans, led by [Kenneth] Wherry of Nebraska and Taft, opposed this but the debate really revolved more around the relative powers of the president and Congress than it did over the substance of the issue. Connally and the committee as a whole took the view that the president as commander-in-chief had the authority to send the troops without reference to Congress. Taft and Wherry were arguing that if they were going to be sent, Congress ought to participate in the decision. That particular point of constitutional law was considerably muddled by the fact that a great many people up here felt that the troops ought to be sent, regardless of the legal underpinning for sending them.

As a matter of fact, there were some people, Connally being one, who didn't like very much even the notion that the Senate should endorse what the president was doing, because in this view such an action would carry with it the implication that the Senate had a constitutional role in the matter, which they didn't see. Of course, the whole, climate up here changed very dramatically on that point over the next twenty years. The Senate became much more assertive of its constitutional prerogatives, but again the constitutional or legal questions were muddled by

page 76

people's views of the substance of the policy involved. When they thought the troops ought to be sent to Europe, most of them were content to let the president send them; when they thought the troops should not have been sent to Vietnam then they began to use various devices available to Congress to bring them home.

RITCHIE: I'm also interested in your evaluation of Dean Acheson and his relations with the committee. How well did he get along with the Foreign Relations Committee in those days?

HOLT: Well, with the committee I suppose one would have to say that on the balance he got along pretty well. He got along with the committee certainly a whole lot better than he got along with the Senate or the Congress as a whole. Acheson sometimes had a rather acerbic or even arrogant manner, and therefore offended or alienated a good many people. But he never really came under attack in or by the Foreign Relations Committee in the way that John Foster Dulles did later or Dean Rusk, or even Bill Rogers or Henry Kissinger. You know, he came under very bitter attack from Senate sources outside the Foreign Relations Committee, but I don't recall the committee having that kind of disagreement or

relationship with him. And again I think it was mainly because the committee generally was in agreement

page 77

with the main thrust of Acheson's policy. For a lot of members of the committee this extended to China policy.

China policy was so damn controversial in those days that politicians weren't leading any parades to defend this particular thing, which of course Acheson and Truman had to do, they were stuck with it anyway. But privately, and to a degree publicly, people like Connally and George would say "the administration is right about China." Connally in public was quite acerbic in his comments about Chiang-Kai-shek. I remember him telling a press conference once that Chiang is a Generalissimo, but the trouble is he doesn't generalize, he's no leader. He once said in a Senate debate that Chiang had run off to Formosa and had taken X million dollars of gold with him. He was challenged on this by Knowland, and came back the next day and said he wanted to apologize, that Chiang had not taken X million dollars worth of gold with him, that Connally had been mistaken and in fact Chiang had taken 3X million dollars worth of gold.

RITCHIE: That was Connally that said that?

HOLT: Yes. Connally privately referred to Knowland as the "senator from Formosa" and once in an unrelated debate over statehood for Hawaii, which Knowland was supporting and Connally was opposing, Connally said "I'm opposed to statehood for Hawaii," and then under his breath said, "and for Formosa, too."

page 78

RITCHIE: I'm interested in your observations on Acheson. Acheson is usually criticized for having such poor congressional relations, and one thing that John Foster Dulles supposedly tried to do when he became Secretary of State was to mend his fences with the Congress. And yet with the Foreign Relations Committee Acheson got along pretty well.

HOLT: Well that's my memory of it. I think you would have to say that in general Acheson did have pretty bad congressional relations. I mean, after all., a majority of Senate Republicans called for his resignation as Secretary of State; you can't get much worse in congressional relations than that. But this was outside the committee to a very considerable extent. Acheson worked on his congressional relations, at least so far as the Foreign Relations Committee was concerned. I think Acheson viewed Congress as a potential source of trouble and his approach to it was one of co-option, to eliminate it as a source of trouble. This worked reasonably well with the Foreign Relations Committee because as I've said the committee, or most members of it anyway, generally agreed with the Acheson policy. It did not work with respect to the Republicans in the Senate in general, because they disagreed with it, and a good many of them also saw

page 79

the situation in China and later Korea as an issue which they could make a lot of mileage on in the '52 election, which they did.

RITCHIE: How would you then compare Dulles to Acheson, particularly on his dealings with the Foreign Relations Committee?

HOLT: Well, they were different personalities. Acheson was more urbane, aloof, given to intellectual arrogance, which was by no means always unjustified, it was just an unfortunate personal trait. Dulles was more pedantic, one might even say theological. The roots of the relationship were different. Dulles had served in the Senate, as an appointed rather than as an elected senator, but anyway he had been up here.

He was Truman's and Acheson's chief negotiator for the Japanese peace treaty, during which he assiduously cultivated the Foreign Relations Committee and particularly its subcommittee on the Far East, which at that time was headed by John Sparkman. This was in the early days of the consultative subcommittee structure, which we discussed earlier. At irregular but frequent intervals during the period of negotiating the Japanese peace treaty, Dulles came up to the Capitol and had breakfast with members of the Far East subcommittee. I was not a party to these things, so I don't know what went on,

page 80

but members of the subcommittee were very well satisfied with what went on and with the relationship in general. Dulles also was very well satisfied with it. As a matter of fact, some thought was given to assigning a young Foreign Service officer to write the history of this as a text book case of the way Executive-Congressional relations ought to work. I don't suppose that anything ever came of the idea, but the fact that it was considered is an indication of the general satisfaction on all sides.

Well, it's from this background that Dulles arrived to be Secretary of State. He had a lot going for him really that Acheson didn't. He immediately ran into trouble from some of the same Republicans in the Senate who had been giving Acheson trouble, namely the McCarthy wing of the Republican party, and this was over the nomination of Chip Bohlen to be Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Well, with very considerable help from Taft, Dulles and Eisenhower got over that. I think in general it can be said that Dulles' relations with the committee were pretty good, as Acheson's were, although they began to decline over the period of Dulles' incumbency. Dulles worked at this as Acheson had worked at it. When George was chairman of the committee in '55, '56, Dulles went by George's apartment at the Mayflower Hotel and had breakfast with him every Wednesday morning. What they talked about, I don't know, because neither one

page 81

of them ever communicated much about this to members of their respective staffs. As a matter of fact, Dulles and Eisenhower were considerably responsible for George becoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. When the Democrats recaptured the Senate in the election of 1954, the question arose as to who would become the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. George had been the ranking Democrat, after the departure of Connally, but George was chairman of the Finance Committee, and he was really more interested in taxes than he was in foreign policy. There were cynics around who said his supporters and campaign contributors in Georgia were more interested in taxes than they were in foreign policy, but anyway George was not breathing hard to get to be chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Next to George on the Democratic side was Theodore Francis Green, who in the fall of 1954 observed his 87th birthday, and was already showing a few signs of this. In addition to which, throughout his political career Green had shown himself to be much more of an independent maverick than George had. So the Eisenhower administration decided that they would much prefer to have George than Green as chairman of the committee. I know Dulles, and I think Eisenhower, talked to George about this. One of the reasons George was reluctant to take it was that he did not want the social

page 82

attention which came with the job, and the protocolary functions of it. George was getting pretty old himself by this point and he didn't like to go out at night very much. One of the quid-pro-quo's involved in his agreement to assume the chairmanship was a promise from the Eisenhower administration that although for reasons of protocol they would feel impelled to invite him to state dinners at the White House, they would understand if he did not come. So the Dulles-George relationship was a pretty good one.

Dulles' relationship with the committee really began to go downhill following the Suez crisis of 1956. This led in early '57 to the administration's proposal of what came to be known as the Middle East Resolution, which was a successor to the earlier Formosa Resolution, and a forerunner of the famous Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The Middle East Resolution, as I recall did essentially two things. It gave the president a bunch of foreign aid money to sort of play around with in the Middle East to use as he saw fit; and it authorized him to use the armed forces if necessary to defend against communist aggression, or whatever the phrase was. The Formosa Resolution a couple of years earlier had been handled very expeditiously in the Congress. The Middle East Resolution ran into a great buzz saw of questions, trouble, and opposition up here. I think that by the time they got around to voting on it there were only eighteen

page 83

or something votes against it, but it had a long and troublesome passage. There were people who thought that, in its provisions about the use of the armed forces, it muddied the waters of the president's authority as commander-in-chief. There were people, Wayne Morse being the most articulate, who called it a "pre-dated declaration of war," or a blank check to the president. There were rather diverse people, like Russell and Fulbright and Kennedy, who were more vaguely troubled by what they saw as increasing and open-ended involvement of the United States in the morass of the Middle East, in a sort of no-win situation. Russell once said that considering the resolution was like wrestling with moonbeams, that you could never quite get a grasp on it.

Anyway, the resolution was referred to the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees jointly. Green by this time was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and Russell acted as chairman of the joint committee. And they met *endlessly* in the Armed Services Committee room over here in what is now called the Russell Building. In the course of which I think they had Dulles on the witness stand for nine days in a row, all day. Fulbright particularly kept pressing about how it was that the then current situation in the Middle East had developed. Fulbright thought that the point of no return the matter had been Dulles' withdrawal of American par-

page 84

ticipation in the Aswan Dam project in Egypt the summer before. In point of fact, Dulles had been under considerable pressure from the Senate Appropriations Committee to do exactly that.

But, anyway, during the course of consideration of these problems, the joint committee adopted a resolution calling on the State Department to submit a complete and documented history of the development of United States policy in the Middle East. I think this idea originated with Fulbright, and Fulbright originally limited it to the period beginning with the Aswan Dam project. The Republicans on the committee insisted that it be broadened to go back to the beginning of World War II, because if dirty linen was going to be washed they wanted to be damn sure that some of Truman's dirty linen was going to be hung out as well. This was a fascinating exercise. One of the troubles with broadening the thing so much was that it became damn near unmanageable. The State Department was very responsive to flit, this request. Indeed, so much so that there was a suspicion they were being too responsive in order to dump too much stuff on the committee. But they went through an elaborate exercise.

Bernard Noble was then chief of the State Department's Historical Office, and he pulled in people from the Middle East to review everything they had down there, annotate it to some degree, and ship it up here. This went on for a

page 85

period of months and it seemed to us at the time that they were really being pretty slow. Given the volume of the material and the magnitude of the task maybe they weren't. But anyway, as I recall we eventually got something like twenty-seven file drawers! I was put in charge of this, and George Denney who was on our office staff did some work on it as well. We obviously did not read twenty-seven file drawers; we did read an awful lot of it. We looked to see what was there and there was an extraordinary collection of stuff there. I hope it hasn't again been dispersed in the State Department's files; I hope they kept it together some place down there but I don't know what happened to it after we sent it back to them. It had everything from unclassified, essentially irrelevant documents, like the commercial air agreement with Turkey--that was one of the first ones--to White House memoranda and other memoranda with handwritten marginal notes signed "H.S.T.", the kind of thing which presidents traditionally have very strongly maintained was covered by executive privilege. An awful lot of internal State Department documents and State Department-White House memoranda regarding the most sensitive aspects of American foreign policy connected with the creation of the state of Israel and so on.

RITCHIE: Did any of that material go up to the Eisenhower years, or was it all in the Truman years?

page 86

HOLT: No, it came up to the Eisenhower years. As I recall we got most of the stuff we wanted about the Aswan Dam. Well, George Denney and I between us went through this stuff pretty carefully. I didn't do very much else for a period of months, as a matter of fact. Fulbright went through a good deal of it. I remember my secretary for a period of weeks had to come to work on Sunday morning, in a little room we had over there in the Capitol, to open the safe so Fulbright could sit there and read this stuff. Held read for a while and she'd lock the safe again. Knowland also read some of it. As a matter of fact, Fulbright and Knowland, as I recall, had been appointed sort of a subcommittee of two to carry out this exercise. All of this resulted in a speech which Fulbright made in the Senate that was *very* critical of the Eisenhower administration, as a matter of fact he made two or three speeches that year, very critical of the Eisenhower administration in the Middle East, particularly in respect to the Aswan Dam. Knowland made an answering speech on the other side of the issue. Both of them were frustrated by the feeling that they were under wraps and were inhibited from documenting the conclusions they reached because the documentation was at that point still classified. But that, I think, was the point that marked the beginning of the deterioration of Dulles' relations with the Foreign Relations Committee.

page 87

RITCHIE: I get the feeling, from looking at the transcripts that there was some frustration, particularly with Fulbright and others, about what was happening to

consultation. That consultation was not consultation, it was just brief advance warning. Just before that Middle East resolution was introduced, at the end of the 84th Congress, before the 85th Congress had convened, Dulles requested a secret late-night meeting of the Foreign Relations Committee to brief them on what was going to become the Eisenhower Doctrine. Later on, Fulbright in a speech on the floor said that the committee was not being consulted on this, it was merely being informed in a dramatic setting.

HOLT: Yes, I think that's right. I had forgotten about that secret meeting that you referred to. It was so God damned secret that I didn't even know about it at the time it was happening, and I still don't know what went on there. Yes, I think that was true, even more so I guess the year after the Middle East resolution when Eisenhower landed troops in Lebanon. Then of course, Dulles left as Secretary of State in 1959 and Herter succeeded him for the remainder of the Eisenhower administration. Herter was well known and liked and respected on the Hill, mainly because of his prior service in the House. He had a lot to do with the legislative implementation of the Marshall Plan, and so on. He was really not a very

page 88

strong Secretary of State, as viewed from here. It's not entirely his fault, because he came in so damned late that he was sort of an interim or caretaker Secretary. However, he had the misfortune to be there at the time of the U-2 incident in May of 1960, although it's interesting that in connection with that, Douglas Dillon, who was then Under Secretary, carried the ball for the State Department up here.

RITCHIE: Douglas Dillon was very popular with the members of the Foreign Relations Committee. I've seen a lot of references to him when he became Under Secretary in 1958.

HOLT: As a matter of fact, at that time he became Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. The position of Under Secretary for Economic Affairs was created legislatively for the express purpose of having Dillon fill the job. The principal duty of the job was to coordinate the foreign aid program, and the committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee too wanted Dillon in the damn job. And there was an understanding with the Eisenhower administration that he's the one that would be appointed to it.

RITCHIE: What made him so popular?

page 89

HOLT: Well, later on it's easy enough to see, but in the beginning I don't really know. You know he began his government service as Eisenhower's ambassador to France and in that job he impressed a good many senators. Now, what he did to impress them, I don't know. I wasn't that much involved in it. But they were sufficiently impressed to create this position of Under Secretary for Economic

Affairs. After he was in that job, Dillon became one of the principal forces in the administration to "liberalize," if that's the word, United States policy toward Latin America, which up to that point had been stuck in a rut of orthodoxy, the roots of which were in the Treasury Department. We wouldn't even talk about commodity price agreements on doctrinaire economic grounds. Everything was to be left to private investment in Latin America. If the Latin Americans wanted economic development, let them do something more to attract private investment and they'd get it.

Dillon began to argue for a loosening of this, and so did Tom Mann who became Assistant Secretary about the same time. In this, they found some allies within the Foreign Relations Committee, one of them being George Aiken, and another being Wayne Morse, and another being Bourke Hickenlooper. And so, by '59 this thing had begun to turn around. I think '59 was the year the Inter-American Development Bank was created, with United States

page 90

participation, something which only a few years before the United States had refused even to consider. Then in the summer of 1960 Eisenhower was in Newport and issued a statement about a new policy for Latin America, which represented the complete turn-around that led to the Act of Bogota in September of '60 and that in turn led to the Alliance for Progress. Dillon by this point was well known around here and very well liked, but you know he had been before, and I don't quite know why.

RITCHIE: This whole question about gathering information seems to me an important one. The Foreign Relations Committee obviously had to know what was going on, and yet there were a lot of times when the senators on the committee complained that the only way they could find out what was happening was by reading the newspapers. What were the channels to the State Department and to the administration? How did they get information? And was it as bad as they were saying?

HOLT: Well, I guess it was pretty bad for a while, although it took the committee quite a time before it began really to press on things like this. The channels to the State Department that you asked about were mainly to the Office of Congressional Relations and the offices of the various Assistant Secretaries, and of course the Secretary himself and the Under Secretary and so on.

page 91

There developed during the decade of the '50's a greater network of staff relationships with these people than had been in existence to begin with, in quite informal ways like telephone conversations or lunches or something of that sort. The committee and occasionally in subcommittees relied more on the hearing procedure, either formal or informal, you know a guy from the State Department

would come up and brief the committee on this thing or the other thing, or discuss this or that problem with it. Some State Department people were rather more forthcoming in these things than others, but I guess it's fair to say that most of the time certainly, whoever it was from the State Department was more in the role of an advocate than a consultant. Although, frequently, or occasionally anyway, there was just straight forward passing on of information. I remember a vivid account by John Foster Dulles of the overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran, in which Dulles described the old man climbing over the wall of his garden wearing his pajamas to escape the mob. But in all of this nothing was said about the unseen hand of the United States in the process, that did not become apparent until later.

The Department was very forthcoming, as I mentioned, in response to the committee's request about the Middle East in '57. During the Lebanese crisis in '58 an arrangement was made whereby every morning somebody from the State Department would arrive with telegrams and maps and what-

page 92

not, which would be available in S-116 for senators to come in and look at during the day. These had scarcely more on them than the A.P. wire but that was it. It was not until, well, you know one of the very important ways in which Congress informs itself through foreign travel. Members of the committee accompanied by staff had been traveling throughout the decade if the '50's. Originally they were not always accompanied by staff, but in those early days even when they were then which this was done left them pretty much at the mercy of the Foreign Service apparatus, wherever they were. It wasn't until much later that the staff acquired enough expertise and really enough of the committee's confidence to go out and assess a situation independently. Looking back on it now, from twenty-five years, especially in the light of what's been doing since then, the flow of information really was pretty meager in the '50's.

RITCHIE: How useful was the Legislative Reference Service then?

HOLT: Well, it was extremely useful in terms of looking thing up, particularly in those days when the committee itself, had a much smaller staff and other resources than it's got now. The Legislative Reference Service also did some useful studies for the committee. I recall off-hand one on the relative eco-

page 93

conomic performance and prospects of China and India, which was really damn good, and very enlightening. It turned out that neither China nor India followed the course foreseen, but then you can't foresee everything. They did some really very good reports from time to time on Soviet foreign aid programs--a lot of stuff which I suspect even the Executive Branch didn't know, certainly didn't tell us if they did. It did some country studies that were useful background material. But it

wasn't used as much as it is now. Well, it didn't have the staff or sources then that it has now.

RITCHIE: It lent you some staff from time to time, too, didn't it?

HOLT: It lent us some staff from time to time. Francis Valeo came from LRS.

RITCHIE: Was that whenever there was a new issue or a new area that needed strengthening of the staff? His specialty was the Far East, I know.

HOLT: Yes, although he did a lot of other things as well. Valeo came for a temporary period--or we thought he was going to be temporary--to help out on a subcommittee, I guess it was the subcommittee I mentioned earlier that was created to study the foreign information program. He came over to help out on that and I'm not sure he ever went back.

page 94

RITCHIE: A little earlier you talked about Walter George. He was actually chairman twice, for a few months in 1941 and then became chairman for the 84th Congress. There's very little known about him, you know he destroyed all of his papers.

HOLT: He did? I'll be darned.

RITCHIE: Yes, and there has never been a biography written about him. It's hard to figure him out now, but I get the feeling from looking through accounts that he was enormously respected by his colleagues.

HOLT: Yes.

RITCHIE: But I'm not quite sure why, and I was wondering if you could explain some of that.

HOLT: Well, the origins of it I don't know. You know, George had been in the Senate for a long time before I got here.

RITCHIE: Since 1922.

HOLT: But by the time I arrived on the scene he was one of the most powerful men in the Senate, widely and deeply respected. Why, well, gee whiz this sounds trite but I think you just have to fall back on it as character. He was honest, intellectually and

page 95

otherwise. He was conservative but open-minded. He was very good at accommodating diverse points of view, usually in a way that resulted in their being done in the way George had wanted in the first place, but also in a way that left everyone else feeling pretty good about it. You know, I really can't go very much beyond that. I would suppose that a good deal of his position in the Senate was a consequence of, or at least related to his long service as chairman of the Finance Committee. And I just had nothing to do with the Finance Committee.

RITCHIE: What was his grasp of foreign affairs and the issues that were facing the committee? Was he really on top of it all?

HOLT: He was pretty damn good, as a matter of fact. I think you have indicated another reason for the respect in which he was held. I guess as much as anybody I've known up here, George epitomized political wisdom. I don't mean political in the sense of how you maneuver to win a damn election in November, but in a more basic and profound sense of recognizing trends that are going on and trying to influence them rather than fight them. George, well, I remember once while he was chairman, George remarked that Chou-En-lai in his judgment was the ablest living communist, and it sort of impressed me that he would pick out a fellow like Chou-En-lai to say that

page 96

about. Another adjective that well describes George is reasonable. As a matter of fact, he was always looking for what he called a "reasonable solution" to something. George, as much as anybody I guess, was responsible for what became a phrase of art in American security treaties, that each party would respond according to its constitutional processes. That question first came up, in my experience anyway, in connection with the North Atlantic treaty, when on the one hand there was a desire to make the responses as automatic as possible, and on the other hand a desire to protect the prerogative of Congress to declare war. The reasonable solution which George found to this was to say according to constitutional processes, and then he muttered under his breath, "whatever *they* are."

RITCHIE: Like Connally, George wound up losing his seat to an up-and-coming young politician from his home state, in his case Herman Talmadge, and decided not to run again. He was given an appointment in the Eisenhower administration, wasn't he?

HOLT: He was made an ambassador at large, or something like that, working on NATO, as I recall. I think he went to Europe and some Foreign Service officers went with him and wrote a report. He did fool around with something like that for a period of some months, but I don't think he ever did very much with it.

page 97

RITCHIE: He sort of epitomizes a situation--he was a Democrat and the Democrats were in the majority in the Senate, but they had a Republican president, and they had to get along with each other. There didn't seem to be very many waves between the committee and the administration during his chairmanship. How much do you think that influenced the Formosa treaty? You said that the Formosa treaty went through comparatively easily by contrast to the Middle East Resolution, which was just two years later.

HOLT: Well, resolution, it wasn't a treaty. Well, there was a treaty with Formosa too, at about the same time. The Formosa resolution and then the treaty came up I think in the very early days of George's chairmanship. He had not been chairman for very long, which didn't really make all that much difference because he'd been around the committee and around the Senate for a long time. I guess, as a matter of fact, he was president pro tem that last Congress he was here. Well, I don't think George was extraordinarily influential in that Formosa business early in '55. That resolution also involved a secret meeting, which again I didn't know about until after it had happened. This was the Democratic members of the committee, not the committee as a whole. They were concerned about it.

page 98

In a way, that Formosa Resolution is analogous to the Gulf of Tonkin which came along years later, in that the context in which it was considered made the Eisenhower administration, particularly the president, look like a moderate, as compared to some others who were beating the drums of war and armed intervention. The Formosa Resolution followed the French disaster at Dienbienphu, and the negotiation of the Southeast Asia treaty at Manila the year before. You know, the committee wasn't getting as much information then, indeed the public wasn't getting as much, the Executive Branch wasn't leaking as much then as it does now. But there was enough so that people got the impression of a division of opinion within the Joint Chiefs of Staff over what the American response to Dienbienphu and later the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu and increased communist activity in the Straits of Formosa, over what the American response ought to be. Eisenhower was sort of cooling down the superhawks in the Pentagon over this.

One of the most moderate people involved was General Ridgeway, who was then Chief of Staff of the Army, who had absolute nightmares over the vision of his army slogging ashore in Vietnam or Fukien Province in China or some damn place. The Navy was much more "hell-let's-go," Admiral Radford and so on. So while a good many senators were bothered by the potential of the Formosa Resolution and later the treaty with Taiwan to enmesh the United States

in a difficult situation, they also sort of wanted to support what looked like the moderation of the president vis-a-vis some elements of the JCS. In the case of the Gulf of Tonkin, nine years later Lyndon Johnson looked like a moderate, compared to Barry Goldwater, who by that time had already been nominated as the Republican candidate, there was sort of a parallel in that sense.

RITCHIE: Well, having discussed Walter George, I'd like to talk about Theodore Green and the committee after that, but perhaps we should save this for our next session.

[End of Interview #3]