

Francis O. Wilcox

Chief of Staff,
Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1947-1955

Interview #4:
Assistant Secretary of State
(Friday, April 13, 1984)
Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

RITCHIE: You said there was some material that you would like to add in from the last interview.

WILCOX: Yes, there were a couple of points, Don, that you raised that I wanted to amplify just a bit. You asked, for instance, about the relationship between Acheson and Vandenberg. I said that I thought the relationship was pretty good, generally speaking, although I think Acheson had some question about Vandenberg's vanity. But I noticed in my notes that he did write Vandenberg commenting on his "rare qualities of leadership in the legislative branch. These are not only your ability and amazing effectiveness on the floor, qualities which everyone recognizes," wrote Acheson, "but your outstanding fairness and your warm generosity in meeting someone who tries to take an objective view." This, I think, does at least show that on occasion--there are times when you can afford to flatter people, and if Vandenberg had done a good turn to Acheson, it may be that that was the result. But in any case I think Acheson did admire some of the qualities that Vandenberg exhibited.

You did ask also about the workload of the committee during the early days, and I just happened to come across a note that I had made

page 168

about the activities of the 80th Congress, and the tremendous workload in foreign policy right after the war. This was one reason why it was important to have a bipartisan approach. Just to take a look at the more important items on the Foreign Relations Committee calendar during the 80th Congress: 1) aid to Greece and Turkey; 2) relief assistance to the war devastated countries; 3) the International Refugee Organization; 4) the trusteeship agreement for the Pacific territories; 5) the Rio treaty; 6) the Institute of InterAmerican Affairs; 7) treaties of peace with Italy, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary; 8) the St. Lawrence Seaway; 9) the World Health Organization; 10) the Foreign Aid Act of 1947, known as Interim Aid; 11) the Marshall Plan; 12) aid to China; 13) the Children's Fund; 14) the UN headquarters convention; 15) the revision of the UN participation act; 16) the so-called Vandenberg Resolution; 17) the \$65 million UN headquarters loan; 18) the wheat agreement; 19) the Smith-Mundt information and educational exchange act; 20) three double-tax conventions; and 21) treaties of commerce with Italy and China. Now, that does give you some indication of the tremendous scope of activity in that early postwar period. It

does indicate, I think, again the desirability of having something like a bipartisan approach to our foreign policy in that period.

Those were two points I wanted to add to my earlier comments about the work of the Foreign Relations Committee during the postwar era.

page 169

RITCHIE: I'd also like to go back a little bit. In reading over the last transcript I realized there was one area that I wanted to ask you about, and that was triggered by your comment that when you were considering going to the State Department you also had an offer from Allen Dulles of two different positions in the Central Intelligence Agency. I wanted to ask you what the relationship between the Foreign Relations Committee and the CIA was in those early years, when you were on the committee staff. Was it a close relationship? Was it a distant relationship? How did the committee get along with this new intelligence operation?

WILCOX: Well, as you suggest, the National Security Act came along in 1947, and one of the problems that arose in the early history of the CIA was the question of congressional surveillance. It was understood, I think, on Capitol Hill, that the CIA had to do some of its work in secret, but that it did have to have some kind of surveillance from Capitol Hill. Otherwise the Executive Branch would be completely free to do whatever it wanted to in any part of the world, if it could get by with it. The question arose with Senator Vandenberg, who was then Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, as to what kind of machinery, what kind of organization would be suitable. Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon had introduced a resolution providing for the creation of a surveillance committee on Capitol Hill. But the difficulty was that Senator Morse had a close relationship with Drew Pearson, and I think Senator Vandenberg, and the

page 170

committee staff, felt that if Senator Morsels resolution was acted upon, according to the custom on Capitol Hill, he would be asked to serve as chairman. But this relationship with Drew Pearson and his column was such that it did not seem to be desirable to have him serve as chairman of the surveillance committee looking after CIA activities, when the tendency to leak to the press was rather apparent. So what we did was to shelve the surveillance problem for several years. That's the principal reason why at that time a satisfactory surveillance system was not set up. Now, this question came to the fore again, you remember, in the 1970s when the CIA got out of bounds and Congress became very indignant and provided that some eight committees and over a hundred and fifty members of Congress had to be notified about any covert act that was to be undertaken by the CIA. This was perfectly absurd, of course. How could any covert action be kept secret if it were known by 150 members of Congress? More recently the Congress has amended that to provide that only two committees now will be notified in connection with covert acts. But that's the beginning of the problem, and that's

the reason why, as I recall it, a subcommittee or a surveillance committee was not created in the early period.

RITCHIE: Were you able to get directors of the Central Intelligence Agency to testify before the committee in private sessions? Were they reluctant to come before the committee?

page 171

WILCOX: There was some reluctance of course. As I recall there weren't many occasions when the head of the CIA was brought before the Foreign Relations Committee. The record will clear that up. There were some occasions, but it was not like the relationship between the Foreign Relations Committee and the Department of State, for example, where we had frequent consultations and frequent testimony. The CIA had a closer working relationship with the Armed Services committees.

RITCHIE: It seems that in that period the CIA was increasingly becoming an arm of American foreign policy. Looking back we understand its role in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954. Did you have a sense that the members of the Foreign Relations Committee were aware of the covert activities that were going on?

WILCOX: I think they were aware but they weren't fully briefed on those activities. Generally speaking, most members of the Congress felt they didn't want to know about some of these covert things. They felt that if they knew, the tendency might be to say something about them in public. They were really quite protective of the agency at that early date, to make sure that any covert activities were not leaked to the press. In this respect, I think in the early days the Members of Congress showed a greater degree of responsibility toward covert activities and the CIA than they do in this period, when some members seem to be quite willing to reveal what

page 172

they know to the press. That, of course, means that when you have a covert act that becomes public knowledge, it obviously ceases to be a covert act. Look at the mining situation now in the waters around Nicaragua. As soon as it became known that the CIA was involved, and strong criticism began to arise on Capitol Hill, obviously the administration had no alternative but to discontinue the aid to the Nicaraguan insurgents who were mining the harbors there.

RITCHIE: It does create a gray area that must make it more difficult to evaluate what executive policy is if there are areas of executive policy that are not being presented to the Congress. At least at that period--now there's more oversight.

WILCOX: Yes, and I think it is important that some members of the Foreign Relations Committee have some knowledge of what is taking place. For a time, there were a few members of the Foreign Relations Committee who were to serve with some of the members of the Armed Services Committee, I've forgotten the exact proportion now, to keep in touch with the CIA and to monitor its activities. But there certainly must be some kind of relationship between Capitol Hill and

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

the CIA, and between the CIA activities and our foreign policy. Obviously there is in the executive branch through the work of the NSC. If the State Department (and the ambassador) doesn't know what the CIA is doing in a particular country it can play havoc with our foreign policy. So there must be a proper relationship, both between

page 173

the executive branch department's concerns with foreign policy, and the CIA and the Capitol Hill representatives on the other hand.

RITCHIE: You mentioned Senator Morsels resolution. Later on Senator Mike Mansfield and Senator Eugene McCarthy introduced similar resolutions. Were there other members of the Foreign Relations Committee before 1955 who expressed any kind of discomfort over not knowing what was going on? Or who expressed concern that they were not getting information from the CIA?

WILCOX: Yes, this happens of course from time to time. But it didn't happen then nearly so often as it has in the last eight or ten years. I think this is partly because of the persistent efforts of the press to reveal anything that has taken place and to investigate rumors and reports in a way perhaps that they didn't in the 1940s and '50s.

RITCHIE: The other thing I wanted to ask you was how it came that Allen Dulles offered you two positions. Had you had any dealings with Dulles that he had you in mind for these positions in the CIA?

WILCOX: Well, I don't know, Don. I did know Allen Dulles. He had been before the Foreign Relations Committee on various occasions, and I knew him as a friend. I guess in looking around for people for these two jobs he had my name on a list and he decided to offer them

page 174

to me. I don't know why, unless he thought I was qualified to do the job. But in view of the fact that I preferred to be in the Department of State I did turn him down.

RITCHIE: I was just curious how your name came up on his list.

WILCOX: I wouldn't know. I have no idea.

RITCHIE: I'd like to ask you about the period you were Assistant Secretary of State, from 1955 to 1960. I'm curious as to how different the world looked from Foggy Bottom as opposed to Capitol Hill. Did you find yourself looking at issues in a different way after you shifted from the Congress to the Executive branch?

WILCOX: Yes, I think it's inevitable that one look at these problems in a somewhat different light. You become responsible for action in a way that you aren't on Capitol Hill. Of course the members of Congress are entitled to and responsible for monitoring the activities of the executive branch. They don't have any direct responsibilities for what takes place after the law is passed or after the treaty goes into effect, whereas when you are in the Department of State you have to follow up and take care of all the details that are involved in that action. For example, in connection with the Suez crisis and the Congo situation, we had to do

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

all the planning involved in taking the necessary action to provide sanctions in the Suez crisis, set up the forces that were to be used there, to

page 175

work with the Department of Defense, to take care of the logistics, the way of getting troops and supplies and so on, into the areas, negotiating all these things with the different agencies and the countries that were involved. These are things, of course, that the Congress doesn't have any particular responsibility for. But this meant many, many days of hard, nitty-gritty work, laying the plans and doing the negotiating with all the countries that were involved, and of course working with the United Nations Secretariat. We had very close relations with them. And our relationships in the executive branch with the Department of Defense and the other departments that were concerned.

The task of getting the Marines into Lebanon, for example, in 1958, or the task of moving forces into the Congo in 1960, and of taking care of all negotiations that are involved with the different countries and the United Nations. This requires many, many days of work within the executive branch, and arriving at decisions as to how troops would be transported and how provisions would be supplied, and who would take care of the airlift, and all the other things that are involved in this sort of situation. No, there's a good deal of difference. On Capitol Hill you're dealing with the basic principles and you come to an agreement with respect to the general approach to a problem--that our policy shall be so and so--and then it's left to

page 176

the executive branch to execute the policy agreed upon. So as between the formulation of policy and the conduct of policy, you have a very substantial difference.

The legislative branch is involved in most cases in the formulation of policy, but in the execution of policy it's the executive branch that has to carry the ball--with of course the legislative branch doing the necessary monitoring. They are entitled to keep in touch, and that's the reason consultations are important--even after the decision is made to do something--to keep Congress informed as to how things are proceeding, what the problems are, and all the rest. After all, Congress does not have the staff, the communication facilities, or the know how to execute, on a day to day basis, the policy decisions agreed upon.

RITCHIE: I know you came back to the committee on a number of occasions. I've seen your name in the executive session transcripts, especially around the time of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, and items like that. Because of your connections with the committee were you consulted on congressional relations within the State Department?

WILCOX: Well, yes. When we were considering problems in the Department of State, particularly if a crisis arises everybody is so concerned about meeting the crisis that they tend to forget sometimes that Congress should be alerted or

briefed or warned as to what is happening. Because of my experience on Capitol Hill I would often

page 177

remind the officers in the State Department that they should be in touch with their subcommittees, or with the full committee, or the Secretary should go testify, or whatever. I think the custom now is getting to be more readily accepted in the State Department, but I suggested when I was in the Department that in connection with every action paper we put at the bottom: "Has Congress been properly advised and consulted?" So we would make sure not to forget the important role of Congress.

RITCHIE: Did you get the feeling that some State Department officials considered Congress basically a nuisance?

WILCOX: Oh, yes. It is true that some people in the Department do consider that Congress is a big nuisance. Take the present situation for example. Secretary George Shultz is very annoyed, obviously from his statements in the press. He's annoyed because he thinks that Congress is undermining our policy in Lebanon and in Central America. This creates in the Department, among those who are working on these problems, a real concern, a real feeling that maybe Congress is getting in the way. I think a lot of State Department people do have the feeling that members of Congress don't know very much about the problem, and they're after publicity, and they interfere sometimes in a way that is harmful to our policy. They take an incredible amount of time away from the executive branch, who have to go up frequently to the Hill to testify, or to brief members of

page 178

Congress. There are some exasperating experiences, I must say, when you are in the executive branch, but you have to learn to live with these things because it takes two to tango, and you have to be able to convince Congress that what you're doing is right. This is, of course, the essence of the check-and-balance system of our government.

RITCHIE: Was there anyone in particular who exasperated you, when you were dealing with the committee after you left it?, Did you find any members more difficult to deal with than others?

WILCOX: Well, Don, I got along pretty well with Congress, because I was known on Capitol Hill. This is a great advantage. You will find that the members of the House and the Senate are rather considerate of their own products, and when someone who graduates from Capitol Hill comes back they're treated with I would say a greater degree of courtesy than other people might be treated. I had no particular problems with the Congress. I suppose the one situation that aggravated me as much as any was the John Rooney subcommittee--in the House--which took care of appropriations for State Department activities. It was my responsibility to get funds for the United Nations and for other activities within my bureau, and among other things I had to get support for

representation allowances. The Congress has been notoriously difficult with respect to what they call "whiskey money." They don't see the importance, at
page 179

that time anyway--they do more now perhaps--but they weren't inclined to see the importance of the relationship between entertainment and foreign policy. If you go to an international conference there is a good deal of entertaining being done. You invite your colleagues from other countries to have a cocktail or to come to dinner or to lunch or whatever, and a good deal of work is done in that fashion. But some members of Congress were always reluctant to recognize the importance of this, I guess maybe because if word got back home that Congress was approving two million dollars for "whiskey money" there might be a hue and cry, particularly back in the Bible Belt where they might not approve of such things. But the fact is we would go to conferences and be very short of entertainment money.

I remember one international labor conference that I went to where the Chinese put on a very fancy party, much more elaborate than the United States could afford. It's a curious thing that the United States, as big and powerful as we are, can't afford to put on a party as nice as some very small country with very modest resources. So this was one place where I had to argue pretty hard. Now, John Rooney was always good to me, and I got along with him very well, but this was one area of concern that we had. But I must say that during my tenure in the State Department I never had any difficulty getting money for the United Nations, or any of the specialized agencies, or

page 180

any of the conference activities that I was involved in. But with respect to this one area they were a little reluctant to give us what we thought we needed in order to do a good job.

RITCHIE: You mentioned Rooney. I was interested to know if you found there was any particular difference in dealing with the House Foreign Affairs Committee as opposed to dealing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, from a State Department point of view?

WILCOX: I suppose that having graduated from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee I found it fairly easy--I use that term cautiously--as least I can say I was well received by the Foreign Relations Committee. I knew all the members, and I could approach them individually as friends. That was very helpful to me. I knew also a good many members from the House committee, particularly the chairman and the ranking members, and I had no hesitations in approaching them about foreign policy problems.

I recall on one occasion, I think it was a United Nations development program that was up for a vote on Capitol Hill and the Appropriations Committee came up with a figure that was somewhat lower than we thought would be reasonable or fair. I conducted quite a campaign and got that vote changed on the floor of the Senate, which is a rather unusual sort of thing to do. But I wrote letters to a good

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

many of my friends in the Senate, and talked to some on the telephone, and got them to reverse the vote, which I considered at

page 181

that time a rather substantial victory, because the chances of getting something like that overturned on the floor of the Senate aren't very great, particularly when it comes from the Appropriations Committee, which was very strong at that time. But I don't recall any particular differences between the House and the Senate, except for the fact that you're dealing with a smaller number of people in the Senate, and the fact also that I knew them quite well and was able to get along with them reasonably well.

RITCHIE: Were House members, do you think, more sensitive to slights, in the sense that they are considered the "Lower House" and the Senate has had more of a leading role in foreign policy?

WILCOX: Yes, you find that. There is a certain amount of jealousy, and a certain amount of maybe just a bit of feeling of superiority on the part of some of the senators toward the House. You notice a substantial difference in conference work when representatives of the two bodies come together to hammer out some kind of a compromise on a bill or resolution. The members of the Senate are harder pressed in terms of time and workload. They aren't as inclined to devote as much time to talking about these things as much as the House members are. They want to get the job done and get back to their offices or to their constituencies. So they're inclined to give in a little more easily. The House members, I think, recognize this, and they are a little like the Russians: they are willing to

page 182

negotiate over a relatively long period of time to achieve their objectives. The Senate members have to be a little careful or they will get the short end of the deal when it comes to conference work, because House members aren't quite as constrained with respect to time, and they are willing to stay longer to achieve their objectives. I did notice that in my experiences with conference activities.

RITCHIE: When I was looking over the period you were assistant secretary, it struck me that a person you must have been dealing with frequently was former Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who was the United Nations ambassador. I wondered what kind of a person Lodge was to work with. You had worked with him as a staff person when he was a member of the Senate, and now you were the assistant secretary and he was the United Nations ambassador. How did you find Lodge as a colleague?

WILCOX: When I took the job as assistant secretary, a number of people told me I was foolish because it would be difficult to get along with Cabot Lodge. I had always gotten along with him in the Senate, and I thought I could manage the situation in the Department of State. When he went to take over the United States Mission in New York, the then Assistant Secretary of State told Lodge that they

would be sending instructions from the State Department to the Mission in New York. Ambassador Lodge is reported to have replied

page 183

rather indignantly, "Well after all, I'm a member of the cabinet. Who are you to send me instructions?" Or words to that effect. It soon developed that he began to realize that it was to his advantage to be under instructions from the State Department, because when you are negotiating something, if you have full powers to negotiate and the other side knows that you have full powers, you're at a serious disadvantage because they expect you to make decisions on the spot. But if you can say, "I'll have to consult with my government about that," then you're off the hook for the time being and you can wire back to Washington and get the necessary instructions. But Senator Lodge felt that since he had been instrumental in getting President Eisenhower into the White House, that he had an unusual relationship with the president--which indeed he did have--and that he shouldn't really expect to take instructions from an Assistant Secretary of State. Well, as time went on he realized that was not only a logical procedure but that it was to his advantage in conducting negotiations.

The Mission in New York, of course, can't have access to all the information that is available to the Department of State, because it's in the Department that they get word from all the missions in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and you have the necessary in-put from the Department of Defense, Agriculture, and Labor and the other interested departments. It's only there that you can see the total picture. The people in the Mission in New York have access to

page 184

the ambassadors and the representatives of the different countries there, but this is not sufficient to determine what our foreign policy should be. So it's only natural that instructions have to be sent from the Department to the Mission in New York. I remember Cabot Lodge saying to me on one occasion, after I went to the Department, "I'm a good soldier. You just tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it." So he had changed his attitude over time, as he began to appreciate the proper role of the State Department and the United States government in the formulations of policy. And of course, there is the congressional role that has to be considered. These are things that the Mission normally doesn't know about. So it is important that those relationships be kept in their proper place and various facts and opinions carefully weighed before a policy is finally agreed upon. Oh, but Lodge was all right. I got along with him fine. He did have access to the White House, of course, to the president, but that's understandable and it was helpful to have our United Nations programs supported at that level. But we exchanged views all the time, and I did not find him difficult to work with.

RITCHIE: He's sometimes described as a patrician type who could be a little imperious in his behavior.

WILCOX: Yes, I think that's probably true. After all, he had been a senator, and he did have this special relationship with the president. He came from New England--where patricians are born and

page 185

brought up--and he might have been a bit imperious in some ways with his staff, but on the whole I found him a reasonable person and easy to get along with. If you had good arguments he was always willing to listen to them.

RITCHIE: I would think it would be difficult for a senator to make the move from the legislative to the executive branch. In the Senate they are wholly independent figures, it's not uncommon for a senator to buck his own party. But when you are in the executive branch you are expected to be a team player, and presidents are supposed to make the final decisions.

WILCOX: Yes, in the executive branch a certain amount of loyalty to the president is essential.

RITCHIE: Did you have the sense that some of the senators who made the transition to the cabinet found life less pleasant than they expected?

WILCOX: I think that's inevitable, Don. Members of the Senate who go on international missions or who serve on delegations to international conferences tend to reflect that attitude. They're free to speak their own mind on Capitol Hill and they do so. They aren't limited, but when they get in the executive branch they have to conform to the policies of the United States government. It's the president who makes those policies, or at least he's the one who

page 186

stands responsible for them. When people get to New York, for instance, with the General Assembly of the United Nations they have to go along with the policy that has been determined.

I remember on one occasion--I can recall a number of occasions like this--but I remember on one occasion Senator Morse, as a delegate, was asked to vote on the approval of Portugal as a member of the Security Council. He became indignant because the Portugese had not given independence to their colonies Angola and Mozambique, and he felt that he would be misunderstood if he voted to support the election of Portugal to the Security Council. Well, the United States government had agreed that normally the states in the region from which a state came would determine who would be elected to represent that region, who their representative would be on the Security Council, and the Europeans had decided that it was Portugal's turn. Well, who were we to deny this decision of the European group? But when the time came to vote, Wayne Morse was the principal delegate sitting there. He said to me, "Well, I'm not going to vote for Portugal." I said, "Well, you just sit here and I'll go vote. I don't mind." But it showed that he had a mind of his own and he wasn't about to do something that would jeopardize his relations with his constituency, even though it meant in effect that he was denying our foreign policy.

page 187

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

Instances like this do happen, where senators decide not to take a public position, or at least not to expose their differences with the State Department to the public view. But it is true that somebody like Ed Derwinsky in the State Department now (previously a member of Congress) obviously has to go along with the foreign policy of the United States, and that's just not true on Capitol Hill.

RITCHIE: The votes just this week on Nicaragua indicated that not even the members of the president's party will stand behind him on certain issues. You also worked with the senators and congressmen who went up to the United Nations--you mentioned Morse. Did you think that program continued to work well, having members as delegates?

WILCOX: Oh, yes. There's no question about it. When I was with the Foreign Relations Committee there were numerous examples where members of the Senate would say, "Well, I served on the delegation to the United Nations and I was there when this problem came up, and I can tell you just what happened." Maybe on the floor of the Senate or maybe in the Foreign Relations Committee, this sort of thing would happen very often. So this experience gave to the members who participated not only a better realization of the problems involved in negotiating with other countries, and the difficulties that our government encounters in formulating and executing policy, but it also gave them an understanding, a knowledge of the problems

page 188

that came up, so they were better equipped to do their job on the floor of the Senate or in the committee itself. I think it exposed to a good over-all array of foreign policy problems. You know, on the agenda of the United Nations there are normally about a hundred and twenty-five topics, ranging from arms control to trusteeship problems to human rights to trade relations to legal problems and to different regional problem areas like the Middle East and South Africa. It gives members an exposure to a wide range of foreign policy problems that can be very helpful to them in their work in the Senate. That applies also to House members. I think it has been very helpful, not only to continuing support for the United Nations--which has fallen off recently, for obvious reasons--but also equipping the members better for their work in the House and the Senate. Now, more recently the United Nations has fallen on harder times--so far as we are concerned-- and our policies have been more difficult to defend in the General Assembly. We have been on the short end of a good many votes. So the situation is different from what it used to be, quite different.

RITCHIE: It was sort of a transitional period, when you were there. From 1955 to 1960 was a time when former colonies were becoming members of the United Nations, and the membership was expanding quite rapidly. Did that change your views, and were you satisfied with the response of the United Nations to the changes that were going on within the UN?

page 189

WILCOX: Well, I wasn't satisfied because we were in a very difficult position. We were pushed hard by the colonial powers to support their position in the United Nations and not to encourage the independence of the developing areas too soon. And we were pushed hard by others who wanted independence for all of the colonies and the trust territories as rapidly as possible. The United States tried to be reasonable--to chart a middle course. We recognized that if the colonies got their independence too soon this would put them in a difficult position because they wouldn't be able to maintain their economies, they wouldn't have the experience and the education and training for their people to survive as new states, at least not to make the kind of progress that we had hoped. So we were in a difficult position. We were criticized by the French and the British and the Dutch and the Belgians for siding too much, in their judgment, with the colonies, and we were criticized by the colonies and the other countries that wanted speedy independence for not being more forthright in supporting their position. In other words, we were caught between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea.

We did our best to be reasonable. So I wasn't entirely satisfied with the way things developed, but the fact is that in 1960, as I recall, there were seventeen new countries admitted to the United Nations, and in that period between 1955 and 1963 or 1964 the United Nations grew tremendously. Our position began to change because as these new countries were admitted we lost the kind of control we had

page 190

over the General Assembly, the kind of support we'd been able to muster through the years. The Latin countries had usually supported us; the NATO countries had supported us; and we could get a substantial vote for our position on almost any important issue. But as the membership increased by the time 1965-1970 rolled around we found ourselves more often on the short end of the vote.

RITCHIE: I understand that you were speaking at the United Nations when Nikita Khrushchev took off his shoe and pounded it on the table. I wonder if you could tell me a little about that and some of your reactions to what was going on?

WILCOX: That was a time when our relations with the U.S.S.R. were not too good. They were criticizing us severely for being colonial powers--that is, the British, the French, the Belgians and the Dutch--for being colonial powers. I was speaking for our United States delegation at that point and suggested that there were two kinds of colonialism in the world. One was the kind that the Russians were referring to, which was rapidly being liquidated because many colonies were getting their independence, and the other was the kind that the Soviet Union had imposed on the countries of Eastern Europe, where there was no liberty and no freedom and no prospects for gaining independence. I thought that people ought to take into account and evaluate these two kinds of colonialism.

page 191

At that point, the Philippine delegate rose to speak on a point of order and asked for the podium. I was standing at the podium, and he made a point which was comparable to mine--highly critical of the Soviet Union brand of colonialism. At that point, I guess, Mr. Khrushchev felt that he had enough of this. The Philippine delegate had indicated that the kind of colonialism that Khrushchev was talking about, or that the Russians were talking about, certainly was not reflected in our relations with the Philippines, because we had been most generous in our treatment of the Philippines and had given them their independence at an early date, as everybody knew. I guess that the reference to the Soviet kind of colonialism did touch a raw nerve. Khrushchev began to pound on the table. It's said that this sort of thing is done a little more, perhaps, in the Soviet Union than in the United States.

But it was at that point that the chairman of the meeting, the ambassador from Ireland, Fred Bohlen began to pound his gavel for order, because when Khrushchev began to pound his shoe there was a lot of noise in the Assembly hall. The noise increased and he kept pounding, and pretty soon the gavel broke. All over the country this was shown on television so that after the elapse of a week or so Fred Bohlen began to receive gavels from all over the country. I think he must have received twenty-five or thirty gavels to replace the one that was broken. He kindly gave me one that was made out of a ten-pin by the Boys Club of Dayton, Ohio. I have it as one of my

page 192

little mementoes of my experiences in the United Nations. I don't know what he did with all the other gavels that he was sent, but it was quite an event and it was portrayed at some length in the press at that time.

RITCHIE: I assume you were taken aback when you looked down and saw the Soviet Premier with his shoe in his hand.

WILCOX: Yes, I called the acting Secretary of State and reported the incident to him. It was Douglas Dillon who was acting Secretary at the time. He said, "Well, what are you going to run for now?" He thought maybe I ought to run for the Senate or something, having challenged the Soviet Union that way! But at the delegation meeting the next morning it was agreed that I should resume my talk and that the other members of the delegation would support what I had said in the Assembly so that it wouldn't appear that I was acting on my own behalf. Obviously, I was reflecting the point of view of the delegation in any case. But it was one of the first instances where we called a spade a spade and pointed out directly the evils of the Soviet brand of colonialism.

RITCHIE: It was probably the most dramatic moment, I guess, of your association with the UN.

page 193

WILCOX: Well, it was one of the most dramatic, because Mr. Khrushchev was creating quite a sensation in the country at the time, when he was here along with some of the other heads of state. That was in 1960 and the United Nations was in

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

a very prominent position at that time in the press because of the presence in this country of the leaders of India, Yugoslavia, and other "neutralist" countries.

RITCHIE: That was the same session that Castro attended.

WILCOX: Yes.

RITCHIE: Did you sense a tilting of the Third World nations--or a more favorable reaction on their part--towards Khrushchev and Castro?

WILCOX: Well, it was becoming apparent that with the admission of many new members to the UN the situation was going to change, because they were bound to have an influential voice in the activities of the General Assembly especially, where they were all represented. This didn't come to a head until somewhat later, because it was in 1960 that a good number--I think sixteen of the African and Asian countries were admitted to the United Nations in that year, and some came later, so that now instead of the fifty-one that the organization started with, I think the latest number is one hundred and fifty-eight or one hundred and fifty-nine members of the UN. Most of

page 194

the additions came from Asia and Africa. And with the spread of "neutralism" in the world our role in the UN was bound to suffer.

RITCHIE: It was just shortly after that that you announced your retirement from the State Department. Why did you decide to leave the State Department in 1960?

WILCOX: Because Milton Eisenhower was a pretty convincing negotiator. I had not thought that I would be leaving the Department that soon, but Milton Eisenhower--then president of Johns Hopkins University--came to see me one day and said that they were searching for a new dean at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies here in Washington. He explained to me that they had approached several foundations for large grants to build a new building and to mount a program for the next ten years or so. He said that some of the foundations executives had indicated--and I think this was especially Dean Rusk who was then president of the Rockefeller Foundation--that if I would be willing to accept the job they would give the school sizable grants of four and a quarter million dollars. This would enable us to build a new building and to increase and enlarge the program for a period of ten years or so. I told him I had not planned to leave the Department, but he urged me to think about it, and I promised him that I would. Sometime later he called and invited me to come to Baltimore for the weekend, which I did. He's a very convincing man, and over the weekend he convinced me that

page 195

I should accept the job as dean. I certainly didn't regret the decision after that, because it's a very prestigious organization and there was a good deal of interest and pleasure involved in planning a new building. We got a very nice piece of land from the District of Columbia at a very low price. We put up a new building,

we enlarged the faculty and we put on a more substantial program than we had been able to do before that.

RITCHIE: What sort of objectives did you set for yourself and for the school when you started out?

WILCOX: I wanted to make it the best institution of its kind in the world. With a new building and with its location here in Washington, in our nation's capital, where the State Department, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, Congress, and the diplomatic missions are located, it seemed to me to be an ideal place for the training of young people in international relations. So I felt that we had an excellent opportunity to achieve that objective. And I believe that most people would agree that today the school is, if not the best, certainly one of the best two or three in the country and in the world. The idea of having students study international relations, where the important decisions are being made and where they would have access to people who are making them certainly was attractive to me. I think it has proved to be attractive to the students both from the United States and abroad. A number of

page 196

the adjunct professors that we have at the school are in the business of making decisions. They can relate at first-hand what happens when a crisis arises and what kind of response comes from the executive branch and from the Congress. So in my book it is very advantageous to be studying world affairs here in Washington--which, after all, is a great laboratory.

RITCHIE: Did you find that you were able to integrate your congressional experiences into the school?

WILCOX: Oh, yes. We started a course on the Conduct of Foreign Policy and we encouraged the State Department to create a number of congressional fellowships, or interns, who would be assigned to Capitol Hill for jobs with members of the Congress, the Foreign Relations Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, or leading members of the committees. Some 20 of these fellows would be working on Capitol Hill and at the same time would be taking a course on the conduct of foreign policy, with particular reference to the role of Congress. This was designed to enable more members of the executive branch to understand better the relations between Congress and the executive in the conduct of foreign policy. That course has now been going on for over fifteen years and as a result a good many members of the Foreign Service now understand better what the challenge is and what the tasks are in developing good working relations with Capitol Hill. And then, too, we encourage our students

page 197

generally to visit Capitol Hill, to go to the hearings of the Foreign Relations Committee and the other committees in the foreign policy field. It isn't the best thing in the world for students to go out and teach foreign policy if they haven't had an opportunity to see at first hand the Senate committees in action, or to visit

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

the Department of State, or to have an opportunity to interview people at the World Bank, or to engage in some project that involves the very important laboratory facilities that exist here in Washington. At least it's helpful if they've had those first-hand experiences.

RITCHIE: We lost the last few minutes because the machine did not shut off when the tape ran out. I hate to ask you to repeat what you said.

WILCOX: I was just saying that one of the things the school has done to help develop a better understanding of Congress and its role in foreign policy, is to establish a program in conjunction with the executive branch and the Congress whereby some twenty or twenty-five younger people from the executive branch hold an internship position on Capitol Hill. During the year they are on Capitol Hill they come to the school for course work in foreign policy, particularly a course that is specially designed for them on the conduct of foreign policy with emphasis on the relationship between Congress and the State Department and the executive branch in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy. With this year on Capitol Hill I think

page 198

they have a much better understanding of the role of Congress and they go back to their executive branch work better equipped to deal with Congress. This has been going on for fifteen years, so that with twenty or twenty-five a year being trained in this process you can see that there is a substantial number of people in the executive branch who have a far better understanding of the role of Congress.

RITCHIE: Being here in Washington during this period you must also have been an observer of the Washington scene, and I wondered if you could comment on the changes that were going on in the relations between the executive and the legislative branches, during these years while you looking at it from an academic perspective? How the Foreign Relations Committee changed, for instance, and how its role changed.

WILCOX: Well, there's no question but what the role of the Foreign Relations Committee has changed. The Foreign Relations Committee used to be the focal point on Capitol Hill for the consideration of foreign policy problems. As the years have passed the defense aspect of foreign policy has become more and more important, so the Armed Services Committee has shared with the Foreign Relations Committee the spotlight in connection with foreign policy problems. And also, as more of our international problems have had domestic impact, or domestic connotations, the Committee on Agriculture, the Labor Committee, and other committees dealing with trade relations,

page 199

immigration, health, communications and so on--these have all begun to share in the foreign policy process. I noticed that Senator Charles Percy wrote a piece not long ago in which he pointed out there were sixteen committees of the Senate interested in foreign policy problems. This has resulted in a considerable change in the role of the Foreign Relations Committee, with more and more committees

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

sharing in the task. While the Foreign Relations Committee still remains the mother committee in its relationship with the State Department, the other committees have more and more to say about foreign policy, and this means that the inter-relationships up there on Capitol Hill need to be improved. It means that maybe there should be more joint hearings, more joint committee action. It means that the staffs ought to relate more closely than they do.

But to go back to look at the role of Congress as a whole, by the time the Vietnam war came along, you had a real collapse of the bipartisan approach. I think it's fair to say that the bipartisan approach to foreign policy ran through the late '50s, maybe, but it began to dissipate and by the time the Vietnam war came along it had collapsed. You had a very important role that the Foreign Relations Committee played at that time, because if it hadn't been for the persistent efforts of the committee I don't think the attitude of the public in this country would have been quite as much in opposition to the Vietnam war as it was. I think it was the efforts of the chairman, Senator Fulbright, and the members of the committee, that did

page 200

much to help bring about the turn in public sentiment toward the Vietnam war. Rightly or wrongly, Dean Rusk thinks that if the Congress had not strongly opposed maybe we would have won the war. I don't know whether that is true or not, but I have a feeling we made a big mistake in getting into the war in the first place and it was to our credit to get out--even though we didn't win it--and it was the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that really engineered this thing. As a result of that, the Congress has been much more assertive in recent years. There are two factors, I think, involved. One is a deep distrust of the executive branch brought about by misinformation during the Vietnam war and the Dominican crisis, which took place in '65. There was a good deal of misinformation about body counts and about other things that took place during the Vietnam war, and the Congress felt they were misled, so they developed a suspicion of the executive branch. The other factor was the determination of the Members to take a more assertive role in foreign policy and not to let something like Vietnam happen again; I think they felt that they had not carried out their proper role in foreign policy. They had allowed their war powers to lapse and hadn't exercised the proper functions that they should have exercised under the separation of powers principle. And they were determined not to let this happen again. So they have become much more assertive.

page 201

This is due to not only Vietnam but to the fact that there has been a great influx of new members in recent years. In the early 1980s fifty-five members of the Senate were serving in their first term. Now this is something that is very unusual. In the House the turnover was equally great, where you had a lot of younger members, a lot of new members coming in, who were elected, many of them, on an anti-establishment platform. They have less respect for the establishment than the

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

older members did. They have less loyalty to party discipline and to leaders in the House and Senate. They are still very much concerned about the Vietnam war and determined not to let this sort of thing happen again.

There were some structural changes too in the House and the Senate in the 1970s that made the legislative process more open in nature. The election of committee chairmen by secret ballot, for example, has taken away some of the old principle of seniority, or detracted from it. The provision for open hearings, the increase in number of subcommittees and the number of chairmen. What else? There were a number of things like the Freedom of Information Act. These things have in general, created a more open legislative process. You have much more action on the House and Senate floor now a days that used to take place in the committee. The number of amendments that are offered on the floor now, for example, and that are accepted by the House and Senate has greatly increased over previous years. This means that the committees are losing some of their

page 202

authority and members are asserting their independence by taking their proposals directly to the floor of the House and Senate.

So you have a new kind of Congress. You have a younger Congress. You have a more assertive Congress. It's determined to play an important role in the field of foreign policy. This has developed to the point where in the 1970s the Congress enacted over a hundred and fifty prohibitions and restrictions on executive action. Take arms sales for example. The original provision was that any arms sales, seven million dollars and over, had to be notified to the House and the Senate. Now I think the number has been raised to \$25,000,000. You had--what are some of the other restrictions--well, I mentioned the one on intelligence where you had at least to notify a hundred and fifty members of the House and the Senate for covert action. There were others of that type that were introduced, providing for example that foreign aid would not be given to countries that didn't conform to certain standards with respect to human rights, and the House and Senate would determine. These restrictions did quite a lot to limit and hamper the execution of foreign policy, but they did demonstrate the determination of the Congress to take restrictive and limiting action that would give them a more important role in foreign policy. So we have a tremendous change in the last fifteen years both in the composition and the philosophy of Congress, and I think it's a change that is going to be permanent.

page 203

RITCHIE: President Reagan just recently gave a speech in which he indicated he would like us to go back to perhaps the way things were before, the idea of Congress falling in line behind administration decisions once the decision had been made, and things like that. Do you think he's asking for a return to bipartisanship?

WILCOX: Well, he did.

RITCHIE: And was that the type of bipartisanship that existed in the 1940s and 1950s?

WILCOX: Of course, he did two things. He scolded roundly the Congress for undercutting his policies in Central America and in Lebanon, and then he asked for a return to the bipartisan approach in foreign policy. I think the principle is sound, but the timing was very bad. To associate it with his accusations about undercutting policy, it seemed to me to be unwise and perhaps unfair. It's all right to be critical of the Congress, but I'm not sure that I would have tied the request to return to a bipartisan approach to the scolding that he gave Congress. And of course the Democratic members came back and said the president is playing politics with foreign policy. It's an election year, they argued, and if he wanted a bipartisan foreign policy why didn't he start this sometime ago? But they all came through with support for a bipartisan foreign policy. I think it was Dante Fascell, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, who said, "Well, it takes two to tango,

page 204

Mr. President." Getting at the point that it wasn't sufficient for the members of the House and Senate to be willing unless the president--who has to take the lead in these things--would really give them the kind of lead that would make it possible for the Congress to participate in a good tango.

Speaking of bipartisanship I have here some notes that I made in the early days in which I set forth the ideal conditions for a bipartisan foreign policy. I jotted down four ideal conditions. First, when the White House and the administration are controlled by one party, and the Congress is controlled by the other party--as in the case of the 80th Congress--when cooperation becomes absolutely essential; the government can't function in that kind of situation unless you have a bipartisan approach. Secondly, when there is a fairly good consensus in the country about the basic principles or goals of our foreign policy and the way it should be conducted. Such a consensus existed in 1947. We have to agree that there isn't that consensus right now. There could be if the two branches would work together to develop it. Thirdly, the kind of leadership on Capitol Hill that can command the confidence of the Congress and the executive and be willing to de-emphasize politics while working for the national interest. And fourthly the kind of strong leadership in the White House that is willing to accord Congress its rightful place in the constitutional scheme of things and is willing to consult frequently with Congress on important foreign policy questions. Now, if

page 205

you have these conditions--those would be the ideal conditions in my opinion--for the reestablishment of a bipartisan policy.

RITCHIE: Bipartisanship broke down in the mid-1960s, but you've indicated that you thought it was moving in that direction since the mid 1950s. Do you think this was a result of the way Lyndon Johnson was handling foreign policy, or

do you think there was something within the bipartisan philosophy that really couldn't sustain itself over a long period of time?

WILCOX: Well, the leadership changed, both in the White House and on Capitol Hill. Senator Vandenberg was criticized by some of the Republicans for practicing what they called a policy of "metooism," indicating that the legislative branch would just go along with more or less anything that the president wanted.

Vandenberg was very careful to avoid this sort of accusation by making certain that the Congress had a fairly important role to play in the evolution of policy, hopefully from the beginning. He pointed out that if the leaders of the Congress worked with the executive branch in evolving policy, and if the committee had a role to play at a proper stage in policy making, that discussions could take place there and any changes that the Republicans wanted to make could be made, and that this would accomplish the purpose. There was no me-tooism involved in that kind of procedure.

page 206

It's hard to say just where and when the bipartisan approach broke down. It didn't ever apply to all things, all foreign policies, but I would guess that somewhere in the mid '50s it began to diminish in importance and by the time Vietnam came along of course it went out the window. Even there, of course, you had a breakdown within the parties, because there were a number of Republicans who supported the administration, and a number of Democrats who supported it and a number who opposed it. Indeed, I think it can be said that some of Lyndon Johnson's principal supporters were Republicans, and some of his principal opponents were Democrats. If you look at the Foreign Relations Committee with Senator Fulbright as the prime example, he lost the support of a good many Democrats, certainly in the Vietnam war. This has been true in a good many instances. I guess you'd have to say that the wingspread of the two parties is pretty substantial with the result that you find some of the Democrats just as conservative, or more conservative in foreign policy matters, than some of the Republicans, and vice versa. But I think that after the early post-war years when the basic pillars of our foreign policy were constructed, the consensus in the country began to change somewhat. This was reflected in the Congress and in the executive branch to a certain extent.

But some people have argued that bipartisanship is not realistic, it's not practical, and that differences are bound to exist. There are differences now, of course, certainly, of a substantial

page 207

nature about nuclear weapons and about the use of the armed forces both between and within the two parties. It's pretty hard to nail down a bipartisan approach toward foreign policy unless real efforts are made at the beginning of a policy. I have contended that about the only way to do it effectively is to establish a continuing relationship between the two branches. In fact, the consultative process has not functioned very well. The subcommittees have not been as

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

effective in developing the kind of consultation that we'd hoped. All the committees want the Secretary of State to come to testify. They don't want assistant secretaries or under secretaries, they want the Secretary. This hasn't worked as effectively as it might. What I would like to see is some kind of a continuing relationship, maybe along the lines of Clem Zablocki's suggestion that there be created a National Security Committee on Capitol Hill, made up of the leaders of the House and the Senate, from the four or five related committees such as Armed Services, Appropriations, and Foreign Relations. These leaders would bring together the threads of foreign policy on Capitol Hill in a way that is comparable to the National Security Council in the executive branch. They could meet with the executive branch people on occasion.

But I think we need something really more than that, and I would like to see the president invite fifteen or twenty of the leaders of Congress to the White House at regular intervals, not just when crises arise, but every four or five or six weeks to have a real

page 208

review of foreign policy problems and to look at those issues that are arising on the horizon so that the members of Congress are more aware of the problems we face in the world. In this way they can be kept abreast of emerging problems and what we intend to do about them. This could be done either by enlarging the National Security Council and having the members of Congress brought into the Council, or it could be done informally by the president. He could try it once or twice and see how it worked. If it didn't work very well he could refrain from inviting them again. But my feeling is that if a president is really serious about bipartisanship and about making this constitution work, he could make a real effort--and it's got to be done from the executive branch, the leadership in this has to be taken by the executive and not on Capitol Hill --- he would make a real effort to bring the members in, as I say either formally or informally at regular intervals. If he's afraid of the constitutional process and the possibility of violating our constitutional system of checks and balances, at least he could do it on an informal basis.

The way it's done now, as you know, is that the president normally waits for a crisis to arise. Then, by the time he calls the members in, they've had to do something about the crisis, and he tells them what they've done, or what they are about to do. And there isn't any opportunity to exchange views, or to make recommendations or suggestions on the part of the legislative branch. So I think the members always feel that it's rather frustrating, that they

page 209

don't have any input, that they listen to what the president, and the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of the Treasury, and Defense have to say, and it's too late to change things. When the consultation takes place, the White House already has the press release fixed up. They issue that when the meeting is over, and that's it. I know that there are all kinds of reasons why this suggestion would not

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

meet with favor on Capitol Hill or in the executive branch. Party politics remains one factor; jealousy between the executive and legislative branches is the other. Some members wouldn't want to get committed. They would be reluctant to go down to the White House at regular intervals, because then they would think they would be beholden to the president, and they don't want to do that. There are all kinds of reasons why this couldn't be done, but in my book something like this needs to be done, because the Constitution isn't working very well right now. There are too many crises coming up that are mishandled. We're misunderstood abroad. The troops in Lebanon, the troops in Central America, the mining of the Nicaraguan harbor incident, these are but three of the many instances where you have had serious misunderstandings between the president and the Congress.

page 210

RITCHIE: A couple of times we've mentioned Senator Fulbright as a key player in the split between the administration and the Congress. I was wondering if you might evaluate Fulbright by comparison to the other chairmen that you worked with on the committee, what you thought of his performance as chairman?

WILCOX: Well, there's no question but that Senator Fulbright is a very intelligent person. He's had a remarkable role in foreign policy ever since--what, 1943?--when he introduced into the House the resolution calling for the creation of an international organization to keep the peace after World War II. Then he came over to the Senate and was made a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a very early stage. I think that his service on Capitol Hill ran through ten Secretaries of State. That meant that he had a pretty good exposure to foreign policy, and a pretty good institutional history at his command, in a way that Secretaries of State just didn't have. So there's no question but what he had the kind of background that he needed to be chairman of the committee. I was not with the committee when he served as chairman, so all I know is what I have heard and read. I did not see him perform his functions, except the few times that I testified before the committee, I did not see him perform his function as chairman. I admire his courage.

He took the lead in getting the approval of the Senate for the Tonkin Resolution in 1964, which gave to the president a kind of

page 211

blank check to do what he needed to do to win the war in Vietnam. He has said since that time that this was the thing that he did in life that he was most regretful about, or words to that effect. This is the one decision he had made that he really wished he could make over again. But then he later began to oppose the administration in different ways, which eventually led to the resignation of the president and the decision to withdraw from Vietnam. I think this came about--and I have reviewed it briefly in the book I did on Congress and foreign policy [Congress, The Executive and Foreign Policy (New York, 1971)]--I think it came about partly because of misinformation on the Dominican crisis first, where the president made some outlandish statements about what had happened, and the

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

committee later found out that this was not true. And it came about as a result of the diminished friendship between Lyndon Johnson and Bill Fulbright. They had been close friends, and their wives had been close friends. When Senator Fulbright started to make a speech on the Dominican crisis, he sent a copy to the president, and through some staff oversight or whatever, I don't know, the president didn't do anything about it, or say anything about it, and the relationship began to deteriorate. I think the president misunderstood Fulbright and Fulbright misunderstood the president.

When this sort of thing happens, when the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and the president of the United States fall out, some serious consequences can occur. Now, at this point,

page 212

Senator Fulbright's support for Lyndon Johnson began to diminish and as the misinformation came in from the Defense Department and the government, it increased Senator Fulbright's concern and distrust. This spread to the committee, and you know the results. I think it was the persistent concern and opposition of the Foreign Relations Committee that developed then that resulted in our decision to get out of Vietnam. But that's a long story that needs to be documented.

RITCHIE: The critical issue seems to be the distrust that the senators began to feel towards the information they were getting from the executive branch. It seems that bipartisanship had to be built on some level of trust.

WILCOX: Yes. Trust is an essential element in the development of good working relations.

RITCHIE: And even the relationship between the committee and the executive branch, and how many staff people the committee has, how the subcommittees are set up, and all the rest of it, has to assume that you are getting honest answers and the right information. But when that assumption can no longer be made it seems almost inevitable that the committee would begin to go a separate way, build a much larger staff, and try to develop its own sources of information.

page 213

WILCOX: Yes, I think this is fundamental. If you don't have trust between the two branches, if members of Congress begin to feel suspicious about the kind of information they're getting, and they don't trust the executive branch, you're in for real trouble. I recall when Bill Rogers went before the Foreign Relations Committee just before the bombing in Cambodia. There were good reasons why the executive branch wanted to root out the forces in Cambodia that were making it difficult for our forces to operate. I've forgotten the exact detail, but the committee did raise questions about Cambodia and about its relationship to Vietnam, the crisis there. Secretary Rogers didn't tell the committee that they were ready to launch a bombing attack, but the next day, or the day after, the attack was launched and the members of the Congress who had had Secretary Rogers before them felt that he had neglected to tell them something important

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

that they should have known. Either they hadn't asked him the right question, or he hadn't answered it in such a way as to let them know that there was to be an air attack. They felt that they had been let down. It may be that he felt it would be unwise to give out this information because if it leaked it could jeopardize the whole enterprise. But the fact is that they felt that he had in a way betrayed them, because he had not informed them. Whether they could say that he had misled them is another question. He didn't lie to them. Maybe they didn't pose the question directly enough. Or maybe

page 214

he didn't know. I'm not sure what led to that, but it's the kind of incident that creates distrust between the two branches.

RITCHIE: Certainly Senator Goldwater's letter to William Casey that appeared in the Washington Post the other day had that same sense of anger and distress that information wasn't made available.

WILCOX: Well, there again, you see, is the problem of communication, because some staff people said that the committee was informed of the mining of the Nicaraguan harbor. The CIA apparently feel that they did inform the committee. Maybe Senator Goldwater didn't hear it, or maybe he didn't understand it, maybe it wasn't clear enough in Bill Casey's testimony, or whatever. It's hard enough to understand Bill Casey anyway. But there are some indications that the committee was notified--at least the staff was. Now, who's right, I don't know, but the kind of letter that Senator Goldwater wrote to Bill Casey does tend to raise doubts and suspicions about the role of Congress and the role of the CIA and the executive branch.

RITCHIE: There certainly seems to be a great human element in any equation of foreign policy: how well individuals like Johnson and Fulbright can work together; how much a senator like Barry Goldwater feels his prerogatives have been neglected. The human factor seems to be a major element.

page 215

WILCOX: Personal pride and prejudices come into the picture, but if you find people like Arthur Vandenberg and Harry Truman or Bob Lovett or General Marshall, it's a good start towards putting together the kind of leadership on Capitol Hill and in the executive branch that you need. That's a good beginning but it isn't easy to find. People are funny.

RITCHIE: Well, we've covered a lot of ground in your long career with the Congress, the executive branch and American foreign policy. This has been a tremendously useful series of interviews.

WILCOX: Well, I don't know whether we got into the chairmanship of Senator Wiley or Senator George very much. But I think maybe the earlier period is probably more important for your purposes.

RITCHIE: Are there any areas that you would like to develop any further that we didn't cover?

WILCOX: It just occurred to me that there was one thing with respect to the staff and the tenure of Senator George. I don't know whether I mentioned this before or not, but it is, I think, illustrative of the kinds of things staff members can do if they have an opportunity--and opportunities do arise because of the pressure of duties that the senators have. I remember when we were discussing one day the Foreign Assistance bill, Senator George was concerned about his constituency in Georgia and about the possibility that he

page 216

might run again. He felt that in view of the political situation there that it was important for him to sponsor a substantial cut in the foreign aid program. We were holding hearings that day in the Foreign Relations Committee and after the morning session was over, he said to me, "You know, I have to cut this foreign aid program a substantial amount. I wish you would go through it and see where you can find a billion dollars or so to cut out of it. Then we'll convene after lunch, and I will make a formal proposal."

Well, I went through the foreign aid bill, different aspects of it, including technical assistance and aid to the developing countries, and military assistance, which was fairly important, and I found it difficult to locate very much in the way of weak places in the bill. So after the lunch period was over, I went to see Senator George. He said, "Well, what do you suggest?" I replied, "Well, senator, I have gone over the bill carefully and I think that all of the places where you might cut have to do either with activities and functions that you consider in the national interest and have proposed or urged before the committee." I said, "There are only one or two places that seem to me to be appropriate for you to recommend cuts." We discussed it awhile and he finally decided to recommend a two hundred million dollar reduction in the bill.

page 217

When he was confronted, you see, with the facts in a reasonable way and was encouraged to think about the impact of his action upon the foreign aid bill, he decided that it was not in the national interest to do that. This is where his patriotism and reason took over from the political considerations that had motivated him earlier. But it's just one sample of the kind of thing that a reasonable staff person can do on occasion. Now, this sort of thing doesn't happen every day, but this is one of the things that sticks in my memory: the thought that he, the leader, was going to recommend very heavy cuts in the foreign aid program, but when he was encouraged to stop and think about the effect of those cuts, he readily changed his mind.

There was another matter that occurred to me that would be of some interest and that has to do with the action of the Foreign Relations Committee in connection with the North Atlantic Treaty. Dean Acheson came before the committee on a couple of occasions and went through the text of the treaty in a way that I thought was very helpful. In doing that, he raised certain questions in the minds of senators about improvements in the treaty. One of those changes had to do with

United States Senate Historical Office -- Oral History Project

www.senate.gov

the use of armed forces in order to restore stability in the north Atlantic area in the event an attack should take place. Senators George and Connally and Vandenberg, as I recall, were the three who were involved mainly in these recommendations. The text of Article 5, 1 don't have it with me, provides that in the event an

page 218

armed attack should take place, the other countries would come to the aid of the attacked country, in whatever manner they felt would be helpful, including the use of armed force. That wording was put in deliberately so that it would not be compulsory to use armed force, but it would be possible to use armed force, and that armed force would be contemplated. Related to it was the phrase that occurred, I think, in Article 11 of the treaty, which Senator George advocated, that whatever action is taken under the treaty would be taken in accordance of the constitutional processes of the countries involved. He asked that this be put in Article 11 so that the constitutional process would cover every aspect of the treaty, not just Article 5, but Article 4 and Article 6, and the other articles as well. When the changes were made, there was some criticism that the senators had gone too far in depriving the executive branch of the authority they might need to come to the aid of an attacked country. In other words some people felt that the senators had weakened the treaty and that our lack of resolve would be noticed by the other signatories. But the years have passed. In fact the changes made have not resulted in any weakening of the Western Alliance or the NATO treaty or our resolve to come to the aid of an attacked state. We've gone ahead and we've helped with the other countries to develop the infrastructure, the command structure, the communications systems, and the plans to defend Europe. These things have all developed, you see, and I don't think in retrospect what the Senate did

page 219

was detrimental to the treaty at all. It made it possible for the Senate to approve the treaty by a substantial vote. I think there were only twelve votes against it, as I recall. But it was these changes that made it possible for the Senate to give an overwhelming vote to the treaty. Now, that is one sample of the kinds of things that the Foreign Relations Committee can do that can be helpful to our foreign policy and to the executive branch in getting an important policy established.

RITCHIE: Oh, yes. I was wondering, if you were in the position now of advising someone who was about to become the chief of staff of the Foreign Relations Committee, from your experiences with the committee and the executive branch, what kind of advice would you give?

WILCOX: Oh, things have changed, so you've got a bigger job up there than I had in terms of personnel to manage. I had a very small staff. Now there are sixty members of the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee. I would say, however, that it's important for staff members to be in a position to service both sides of the aisle in a nonpartisan way and to avoid getting heavily involved in political

considerations. Now, I realize that is advice that cannot be accepted by staff members who are attached to minority members, because they are bound to carry out the wishes of their superiors. I would say that the most important thing is to remember that staff members have not been elected by the people of the United States.

page 220

They are not policy makers. They are advisers, and consultants, and helpers, and assistants. If they themselves misrepresent their senators or attempt to make foreign policy on their own, they can easily go too far and destroy their usefulness.

I remember one member of the House committee in the early days who was a very capable person--and a good friend of mine--Bill Elliott from Harvard, who got into trouble because he attempted to lecture to the Foreign Affairs Committee and tell them what to do, and they didn't like it. I think the staff members have to remember that it's the senator and the congressman who are the representatives of the people and who are the ones to take the lead in the formulation of policy. What the staff members can do is to be helpful to them and not attempt to take over their role. I think they ought to also refrain from exercising their authority in an unwise way by leaving the impression in the executive branch that they're speaking for their senator or the congressman when in fact they may not be. They may not tell the executive branch that senator so-and-so wants this, but the implication of their remarks might lead the executive branch people to feel that they are speaking for their senator, when in fact they aren't. This creates a lot of confusion downtown--and a good deal of doubt and mistrust. Staff members ought not to throw their weight around too much either. They ought to be careful in their trips abroad not to embarrass the United States or to use unfairly the authority that is involved in their position. They have

page 221

a responsible role to play and they ought to play it with caution and restraint. Well, who am I to lecture to the staff members who are now there in a much different position than I was in?

RITCHIE: Well, like Dean Acheson you were "Present at the Creation." I thank you very much for your insights and your observations.

[End of Interview #4]

page 222
