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BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL

A Conversation with Clark Clifford

(Two-Part Show)

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Clark Clifford: On Presidents and Power — Part I

[Tease]

CLARK CLIFFORD: Every American has an ideal in his vision and concept of a president. And they reach very high for that ideal. And, as a matter of fact, no human being quite reaches that ideal. Basically, however, the people want their president to be the kind of man maybe that they hoped *they* might be. They want their president to be better than they are, more intelligent than they are, better educated than they are, better understanding of government, more diplomatic than they are. The power of the presidency is practically unlimited. The president can make out of the job almost what he chooses to make.

MOYERS *[voice-over]*: From behind this desk across from the White House, a man once described as Washington's most powerful private citizen has advised and observed our presidents for more 30 years. Tonight, I'll talk with Clark Clifford about presidents and power. I'm Bill Moyers.

[Bill Moyers' Journal opening]

MOYERS: Few men in Washington have exercised power for as long or in as many ways as Clark McAdams Clifford. He came from Missouri to Washington in 1945 as a young naval aide to Harry Truman who soon made him Special Counsel to the President, a job that placed Clifford right at the center of the most critical decisions of those crucial years. He was a principal agent in shaping American foreign policy from within the White House and in unifying the armed forces under a single Department of Defense. During the Eisenhower years, he became one of Washington's most successful lawyers. "Super Clark" they called him — the most powerful private citizen since Bernard Baruch. While advising many of the nation's mightiest corporations, he also became an advisor to presidents. He planned John Kennedy's transition to the White House and while still a private citizen, became Kennedy's chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. He was an intimate behind-the-scenes advisor to Lyndon Johnson until, in 1968, Johnson named him Secretary of Defense. A hawk until he arrived in the Pentagon, Clifford decided the war in Vietnam couldn't be won. According to most participants, he played the key role within government in persuading LBJ to reverse his policies. He returned to private practice in 1969, until President Carter sent him on special assignment to Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and India. Now, at the age of 75, still putting in a full day in his office, he looks out across Lafayette Square at the White House and reminisces about presidents and power.

MOYERS: You've been advising presidents and observing presidents through that window for almost 25 years, now. Is it, from your perspective, an impossible job?

CLIFFORD: No, it isn't at all. I have the deepest reverence for the institution of the presidency and have made a good deal of a study of it. And I find that it has become more complicated but the right man at the right time can still make a signal success of the presidency. The fact is that in almost each era, there is the feeling that the job is almost impossible.

MOYERS: The splendid misery idea.

CLIFFORD: The splendid misery, one of our earlier presidents said. Interestingly enough, President Polk, who was one of our more illustrious presidents, served one term and said he just was not up to it physically. And he chose not to run for a second term. It was a wise plan because in three months, he was dead. But he said that he doubted that ever again in American history would a president be elected twice. Because the problems were so inordinately difficult that he felt a president would have no reputation left at the end of one term. Well, we've been through a lot of that lately.

MOYERS: Would you be in favor of the six-year, one term for a president that has been proposed widely by some political scientists?

CLIFFORD: Not at all. I think it would be a mistake. One of the main troubles with it is that occasionally the electorate makes a mistake. And you elect the wrong man, you have him in office for six long years. That would be a pretty bitter lesson for us, it seems to me. Four years is pretty long, but a good deal shorter than six years would be, if

we'd made a mistake. Also, that's a long time to elect a man with the changing political attitude of the American people. Because he happens to be that man, the man they want today, there's no saying that they will elect that man six years from now. Their attitudes may change. The world is in a posture, now, in which changes come much more quickly than they used to. That is another reason. I believe, also, that as soon as a man is elected for one six-year term, he is a lame duck the first day that he takes office. Everybody knows in six years, he's through. And it is amazing the diminishing power that a president has as that time goes on. The fact is, I would like to see the Congress withdraw the 22nd Amendment.

MOYERS: Which makes it impossible for him to have a third term.

CLIFFORD: To have a third term. I think that's wrong.

MOYERS: Why?

CLIFFORD: Well, because, if the man is the right man his first term, and they want him, they should have him. If, when he's up again for the second election, if they think he's the man, they ought to have the right to elect him. And at the end of eight years, they may say, "This is the best president we've ever had. He's got a fine program. He's the man we want." And way back, ten years or so ago, the Congress said, "You can't have him." It doesn't make any sense. The fact is, the most ironic factor in the 22nd Amendment is that it was passed by the Congress at the urging of the Republicans after Franklin Roosevelt had run four times and been elected four times. And they said, "We've had about enough of that." And they passed the 22nd Amendment. And the only man it has affected since that time was Dwight Eisenhower.

MOYERS: A Republican.

CLIFFORD: A Republican. If it hadn't been for the 22nd Amendment, the American people would have elected Dwight Eisenhower until he died.

MOYERS: But to some extent, isn't the idea of a one— of a two-term presidency partly a myth? Because if I remember correctly, there have only been seven two-term presidents in our history. So the office is not made for personal endurance, is it?

CLIFFORD: No, it isn't at all. And the fact is that the burden placed upon the president is an extremely serious one. But at the same time, our whole basic concept of government has been spectacularly successful. Under our system, our country has grown from a small agricultural community of only 13 states with four million people to 50 states and 225 million people. So that economically, I think militarily, and from the standpoint — whichever way you wish to look at it — we are very likely the greatest and strongest country in the world. And to a very considerable extent, that's the result of our system. Now, we chew up our presidents badly. But they know it ahead of time. And so they come into it. We use them up. But they render an excellent service in the process of being used up.

MOYERS: What do you mean by render a useful service?

CLIFFORD: The power of the presidency is practically unlimited. The president can make out of the job almost what he chooses to make.

MOYERS: Let's take the presidents you have known personally and observed from here for the last 25 years and you give me a thumbnail sketch on how you felt the personality of each affected the office. And start with your old mentor, Harry Truman.

CLIFFORD: Well, that's quite an assignment. There is probably a way that in a word of two you can describe each one of our presidents. President Truman, you would use the words *decisive* and *courageous* and *modest*. And those qualities together made him one of our more unusual presidents. Then you come to President Eisenhower. The primary factor in the Eisenhower administration was, he was elected at exactly the right time that the country needed him.

MOYERS: What do you mean.

CLIFFORD: Well, we'd had 20 years of Franklin Roosevelt with the constant pressure for social progress carried on to a great extent by President Truman. I had the feeling that sometimes that we were like a military commander who

we'd made a mistake. Also, that's a long time to elect a man with the changing political attitude of the American people. Because he happens to be that man, the man they want today, there's no saying that they will elect that man six years from now. Their attitudes may change. The world is in a posture, now, in which changes come much more quickly than they used to. That is another reason. I believe, also, that as soon as a man is elected for one six-year term, he is a lame duck the first day that he takes office. Everybody knows in six years, he's through. And it is amazing the diminishing power that a president has as that time goes on. The fact is, I would like to see the Congress withdraw the 22nd Amendment.

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CLIFFORD: Exactly.

MOYERS: —and the country applauded.

CLIFFORD: They did. But now the trouble with that is, if you stop and think about it, the message that goes out over the entire country is the message that comes out of Washington. If he's not making good contacts with men on the Hill, the press is constantly in touch with men on the Hill, and so they say to congressmen and senators, "How do you think President Carter's doing?" And they get a wrong answer. I saw columns day after day after day critical of President Carter. And that's what the people out in the other states were reading. I think that they never grasped that particular point. And that seemed to be awfully unfortunate.

MOYERS: How do you explain Carter's wariness?

CLIFFORD: Well — and I've thought a lot about that — and I do not know if this is correct — as I said, the whole administration was an enigma — I) I believe that there was in his mind the thought that to bring in experienced outsiders — I'm talking about younger men who could just work there day by day, men in their fifties—

MOYERS: In their fifties?

CLIFFORD: Yes.

MOYERS: That's a younger man?

CLIFFORD: Yes, you bet. And so that I think he felt that after the kind of campaign that he won— ran, if he did that, it would be construed as either a confession of inadequacy or even failure. So, apparently, he was just determined to run it on his own and show that it could be done. In addition to that, some of the people who were close to him said that there was a certain Southern defensiveness in the operation. Now, I don't know that. I'm not from the South. I'm not conscious of any difference between me and our southern Americans. But apparently there was some kind of defensiveness about that.

MOYERS: Well, Lyndon Johnson had that, as you know, Clark. We suffer from having lost the only war that Americans ever lost.

CLIFFORD: And so I think that entered into it. Now, here is another idea that I have and it's purely my own; there may be no merit to it. He was a very religious man. And he came from absolutely nowhere in politics. You remember the "Jimmy Who?" days?

MOYERS: Yes.

CLIFFORD: And then even when he was known, the polls originally showed him two or three percent. And yet, in some way, some force, some power enabled him to get the Democratic nomination. And then he was won— and elected President of the United States. Most people thought it wasn't in the cards at all. I've wondered whether because of that, that he might feel that he might possibly have been an instrument of divine guidance. Now, it's possible. Because he made it and he made it on his own with practically no help from other forces that usually come into political campaigns. And I'm wondering whether that gave him such a confidence that he was a chosen instrument that possibly he didn't need the help that other presidents had needed. Now, it seemed to me, you put all those elements together and there is the answer to it. Now, the fact is, however, history will treat him much more kindly than I think the American public treated him in the last election.

MOYERS: Why?

CLIFFORD: Because I think they'll find some solid accomplishments. And these attitudes, taken at the time, fade. When President Truman was president, I believe he was probably more bitterly criticized, held up to more ridicule than any man since that fellow they described as "the baboon in the White House," which you will remember was the way they referred to President Abraham Lincoln. That's right. And President Truman was criticized everywhere. I remember at the end of the first year of his presidency, there was a cartoon prominently displayed all over the country of a very large chair and it was marked "The Presidency." And sitting in front of it, a very tiny little figure you had to look closely to see, and it was President Truman sitting in this very large chair. He was criticized because of his background, criticized for lack of education, criticized for having one time been in the haberdashery business,

criticized for being a product of a political machine in Missouri — constant unremitting criticism. But he rose above all that. And people today don't remember any of that. Oh, they say, he was one of our greatest presidents. And, of course, I get a deep sense of appreciation and gratification when I hear it because I think of all those days in which they just wouldn't let him up. I think it appeared sometime as though the attitude of the press toward President Truman was, "Don't hit a man when he's down — kick him." And that's about what he got.

MOYERS: Jimmy Carter felt that way.

CLIFFORD: See, when you analyze President Carter — and I grew so fond of him — the basic answer to your question is: He had a preconceived concept of the presidency that he and the tightly-knit group around him had. It proved not to be an accurate concept of the presidency. But he adhered to that original concept, stayed with it for four years. You say, "What could he have done?" He could have opened that up at the very beginning. And he could have found any number of persons anxious to come in and serve him. It would have prevented many of those aggregious mistakes that were made, that the people just sort of never recovered from: that unfortunate mistake that had to do with the U.N. in Jerusalem, which you will remember. I think that could have been prevented with people in the White House who were experienced. I believe they never should have tried that kind of rescue attempt as far as our hostages were concerned in Teheran. I think, again, a broader experience in the White House would have prevented that.

MOYERS: But the larger point you are making is that you cannot govern in this town without the cooperation of the Washington establishment.

CLIFFORD: I watched with the greatest concern over the problems that President Carter had with his brother, Billy. Now, we all have relatives that we're not very proud of. You and I know some presidents that also had relatives that they had lots of trouble with. But the one factor that changed Billy from merely a troublesome relative into a national problem was when he accepted a payment from the government of Libya. And that could have been prevented. People say, "Well, you can't control your brother." You can't control your brother. But you can control foreign governments. If before they made that payment to his brother, Billy, we had gotten word through our diplomatic representative or through a third party or if the president sent somebody over, saying to Libya, "Don't give Billy any money. Because it will be the most counterproductive thing that you can do. So I'm just telling you." They would not, then, have done it. And all of that could have been prevented. that's what made the Billy problem. And I must say, I think it hurt him very badly.

MOYERS: When you talked to him personally, how did you find Carter, in private?

CLIFFORD: Oh, very attractive. Easy, modest, intelligent. I tell you, some of the press conferences that he conducted were classics. The best press conferences that I have ever seen occurred in the Carter administration. And that is even including the Kennedy administration. Exceedingly well-informed, industrious enough to prepare with meticulous care before he had the conferences. He had so many things going for him.

MOYERS: Did you ever have the feeling that, like an engineer, he preferred to be down tinkering with the machinery instead of being on the deck of the ship charting the course?

CLIFFORD: To a certain extent. But I would have difficulty faulting him for that. If it is his nature to want to get down in the details, then certainly I would commend him for it. Because we've had a good many presidents who did not choose to get down into the details. You know, we've had some presidents who were pretty lazy sometimes. And that certainly cannot be said about President Carter. But there is another facet present in being an engineer that I saw. And it also, unfortunately, was a handicap. He prided himself on being an engineer and a scientist. And every now and then he would say, "Now, as a scientist, I would do this." "As a scientist, I would do that." And he had good scientific training. What scientists do is they start at A. And they go from A to B and B to C and C to D and D is their goal. And they know that if they just stay on the line, unquestionably they will reach D. I saw that in the President from time to time — that he had sufficient knowledge and experience to know that if he proceeded along a certain line, the result would be there. The trouble is: It doesn't work in the White House. Because it doesn't take into consideration the House of Representatives or the Senate of the United States or the media or the American people—

MOYERS: Or the permanent bureaucracy, the lawyers, the lobbyists—

CLIFFORD: That's right. All these other factors that come in. The problems of the President of the United States are not susceptible to scientific treatment. There's a lot more that goes into it. The fact is, you almost have to disregard it. May I give you an illustration? He came into the White House—

MOYERS: Carter.

CLIFFORD: President Carter came into the White House and after awhile he got settled and began to feel more comfortable and began to look around for problems to solve. Well, one of them was the Panama Canal. Now, I never had a shot at that. Because you cannot go to a president and say, "Mr. President, you've not asked for my opinion but I'm going to volunteer." You probably only do that once. And then you'd never see him again, do you see? But I know that issue. It came up in the Johnson administration. It was all talked out. I sat in on some meetings. And that is a perfect issue for a president to bring up in the third year of his second term, when he can be a statesman. And he can say, "This is right." And then he doesn't have to worry about commitments that he's made. He doesn't have to worry about enemies that he has made. But he picked this one out. Now, interestingly enough, he was right.

MOYERS: And courageous.

CLIFFORD: And courageous. Absolutely wrong to bring up at the time. Because he absolutely froze a very substantial part of the populace in this country into a position of eternal and permanent enmity, as far as he was concerned. Also, there were a number of members of the Senate, do you see, who just would not forgive him because he forced them into a position that made them very unpopular at home. And they felt they had to go along. There, again, the right thing to do, the timing was wrong. A broader concept on his part of the presidency would have greatly facilitated that decision-making process. Another 22 water projects out in the West — do you remember that one? He took a look at that and my recollection is, he said about 14 of these, I think, have no merit, and maybe seven or eight have. Well, right about that time, out went California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Colorado—

MOYERS: And he never recovered.

CLIFFORD: Never recovered—

MOYERS: Out in the West.

CLIFFORD: —from that. Now, later, he had to back up, do you see, in all. But there, again, the fact is *politics* is a very important part of our government. It must not be denegrated. It's the way our country runs. It's the lubricant that keeps the wheels going smoothly.

MOYERS: So when you hear Ronald Reagan advising his cabinet not to make any decision on the basis of politics, what goes through your mind?

CLIFFORD: I say that that is an excellent statement to make in public, if he will say later to them in private, "Now, if you have political problems that come up, come to me with them," do you see, "and we will look at them together." Because politics is our system.

MOYERS: Define it. What do you mean "politics"?

CLIFFORD: Ah, this is it. I mean that if a president fulfills his obligation, then he must have a program. And if he has a program, then he must try to get the Congress to pass the program. And in doing that, there occurs one of the most skillful areas — our most skillful, our most illustrious presidents have been good politicians: Abraham Lincoln was, do you see; Teddy Roosevelt was; Franklin Roosevelt was; and Lyndon Johnson was.

MOYERS: Lyndon Johnson, in the beginning.

CLIFFORD: Oh, excellent in the beginning. So, you've got a program. You want to get it through. You have an energy program. You have civil rights programs. You have human rights programs. A president has to have a program. He absolutely founders if he doesn't know politics.

MOYERS: Which is trading, which is compromise,—

CLIFFORD: But sure.

MOYERS: —which is persuading.

CLIFFORD: Sure. Which is saying, "I have certain things that you want. But you have certain things that I want. And I will work out arrangements with you in which you will get some of what you want if you will give me some of what I want." And it goes very nicely. And what you do, too, is you invite congressmen to the White House for dinner. You know what it does? It puts 'em in great with their wives. Because the wives love to be invited to the White House, do you see. And they love to talk about it to their friends. "Well, I went to the White House last night. The President said this and the President said that." You make a friend of that congressman. You make a friend of that senator. And after awhile, you can call him in. And President Johnson calls in a senator and he says, "Joe." And Joe says, "Yes, Mr. President." He says, "Does that law partner of yours still want to be a federal judge?" "Oh," he says, "he certainly does." "Well," he says, "you know, I've been thinking about that lately and we're going to want to talk about that. But in the process of talking about that, I want to talk with you about the fact that I think we've got to increase our Social Security program." "Well, Mr. President, I've spoken against that." "Well, I know, Joe. But times have changed. And you thing about it awhile, you see. Let a week go by, you call me." Joe calls him in a week and says, "Mr. President, I've been thinking about that and I think there's a lot of merit to your position. And I believe I can change on that Social Security. I want to come over and talk to you. And, incidently, I talked to Joe, my partner, and he is just tickled to death." Now, people say, "Well, that's politics." That's the way the country runs. That's the way business runs. That's the way commerce runs. That's the way our government runs. Is that you're constantly trading assets back and forth to get your program.

MOYERS: But Jimmy Carter said, I'm going to come to Washington and stop that Washington game, because it's so expensive, it's the reason, said Carter in the campaign, that we are in trouble, and I'm going to stop the Washington game.

CLIFFORD: It just doesn't— life doesn't work that way. *(laugh)* It sure doesn't work that way in Washington. And it doesn't work that way in government. If you feel you are right, then you do everything in your power, within proper ethical considerations, to get support for what you believe, and that leads to success. And if you don't use all those other factors, then you get an unfortunate result.

MOYERS: Now here we are with Ronald Reagan, just in office a few weeks. Do you think that his election was a mandate for conservatism?

CLIFFORD: That's farther than I'd be willing to go. I think that his election is due to a number of factors, as all elections are. They're very rarely due to any one set of circumstances. One, I think President Reagan made an attractive candidate, and the people reacted well to him. Easy, relaxed, a master at appearances on the tube and so forth — very valuable asset to him. So I think we had an attractive candidate. That was accentuated by some of the attacks that President Carter made. Fact is, some of his campaign proved to be calamitous — attacking Governor Reagan and then having to rescind the attack.And then starting down another line and then later on saying, "Well, no, I was misquoted," or something. Or "I take it back," you see, those are devastating moves that you make in a political campaign. Another factor, and I think a very important factor is, that the liberal policies that over the years elected so many presidents and so many senators and congressmen, right at the present time are not very popular. And the reason why it is, is that the great majority of our Americans today are very badly pressed. They're pressed by our high tax structure on one side, and pressed by constant unremitting inflation on the other. And hardly a week goes by in which a man and his wife don't have to have some trouble over bills — the grocery bill's higher than it's ever been, and everything's going up, and they're under pressure all the time, and the idea of giveaway programs, of looking after a lot of people who won't get off their duffs and get out and work and so forth, cause, I think, a revulsion against many liberal principles that some of our best people had run on and been elected on. Now, I do not believe that this is a strong turn to the right — I don't sense it that way. I think the country is basically still a fundamentally liberal country. But, we've reached a stage where people were much more attracted to conservative programs than they have in the past. It's just a question of degree. We have come all this way with our social programs; we are not going to go back. There are too many American people now who are dependent upon it. There are too many who now recognize that as a matter of fact, in most instances, it lends strength to our country. Do you remember what happened in 1929, when we had the crash?

MOYERS: I've read about it.

CLIFFORD: And people went out of work at that time. There was nothing to sustain them. There was no social security, there was no unemployment insurance, there were no health programs. That Depression just almost destroyed our form of government, and we've worked away from that ever since. We can still go into recessions, but they are greatly lessened by these built-in devices that we have, do you see, to minimize the occasional recessions that we get. We're never going back to those days, we're never going back to the days when we didn't have a Securities and Exchange Commission, we're never going back to the days where we didn't have anti-trust laws. All those have been great forward steps in aid of the public welfare, and the public good. We're not going back.

MOYERS: Well, if you don't think the election was a mandate for conservatism, what is Reagan's agenda?

CLIFFORD: I think I can never recall the American people being as unified on one issue as they are about inflation. It's hit every family. And particularly older Americans who live on fixed incomes. They're having an exceedingly difficult time. And I hope that his program will aid in that regard. Taxes will help, if, at the same time, by reducing taxes you do not reduce the value of the dollar. I hope that that doesn't happen. But the main goal that he must have domestically is to find the answer to inflation. It will not be easy, but the American people have lived with it a long time, they know that because we've had it so long it will take quite a while to get rid of. But if he should succeed in that regard, he will endear himself to the American people. Abroad, to me the one great issue — there are lots of "minor" issues, the one great issue — is our finding an answer to getting along with the Soviet Union. It's easy to quarrel with individuals, it's easy to quarrel with countries. It's difficult to find a way to get along with the Soviets — they're an extremely difficult people to get along with. But I've been a little concerned lately that President Reagan's comments and those of General Haig have been so harsh with reference to the Soviets. My own view is I doubt that that's very effective. I think that in individual contacts you can make your complaints, but I think it has a tendency to build a wall between the two countries, if our comments are so critical. I note that today the Soviets are replying in exactly the same manner — very critical of the United States. So my hope is that we will get that done. The fact is, one of the great— maybe the most important vital issue today, is that we reach a conclusion and understanding with the Soviets, so that we don't have to live in constant fear of war. Because once war comes, then we know enough today to know that there's no limit to it.

MOYERS: When you talked a minute ago about people being pressed, I thought of that very famous memorandum you wrote in 1948 outlining the strategy for the election which no one, except you and a few others, thought Harry Truman could win. Did he think he would lose, or was he always optimistic?

CLIFFORD: No one will ever be able to answer that question. I know only that I never heard a word come from him that indicated that he thought he was going to lose. But it was almost impossible to find anybody else who thought he was going to win! Everything was against him — in the summer before the election — we had two polling companies at that time, one was Gallup and one was Roper. And within a month of each other they took their last poll, and Dewey was so far ahead that they said they weren't going to conduct any more polls, because there was no way in which Truman could possibly catch up to Dewey. And that's the way it continued on — everybody accepted them. Oh, an incident. Six weeks before the election in 1948, *Newsweek* came out with a story saying that they had picked the top 50 experts in the country in politics and political science, and sent them a ballot which merely read, "In your opinion, which man will win on November 6, Dewey or Truman?" And the 50 were Walter Lippman, and Scotty Reston, and Roscoe Drummond, and Joe Alsop, and all— you name them, the top big figures of that period. All 50 responded, one of the most unusual polls that was ever taken, and they announced that 10 days before the election they would publish the result of this poll. Well, we on the train — we spent three or four months on this train — we knew it was going to be important, and we were out in Iowa and we came up to a small town, Chicken Gristle, Iowa, I think, and I remember slipping off the train and going in to see if they had a newstand, and they did. And I got a copy of *Newsweek*, and on the outside it said "Truman" and it gave the number of votes that he had, and "Dewey" and the number of votes that he had. Do you know what it was? "Truman zero, Dewey 50." All 50 of these experts said that Dewey was going to be elected. And when I got back on the train, I put this under my coat, and I had to walk through, and the President was sitting there, and he said to me, "What does it say?" And I thought I might get by, and I said, "What does what say?" He says, "Come on back." And I said, "What does what— " He said, "What have you got under your coat?" I said, "I haven't got anything." He said, "I saw you go into the newstand, now let me see it." And I had to hand this magazine to him that said, "Truman 0, Dewey 50." And his attitude was, they just get more wrong all the time.

MOYERS: Is it true that, while you were on that famous train that he took across the country, you would help write the speech and then you and your colleagues would slip off the train and go out into the crowd and applaud while the President was speaking — applaud your own lines?

CLIFFORD: It may have happened once or twice, when we didn't expect a very big crowd. But it wasn't a regular event, I don't want you to think that we were just a claque on the train. But sometimes he had been very critical of the Republicans — in his Dexter speech, for instance, he had said the GOP stood for "Gluttons of Privilege" and I think if we had it to do again, we might have written it a little differently. And he said that the Republicans have plunged a pitchfork into the farmer's back. The rhetoric was getting a little stronger all the time, so they started— the crowds started the cry when he come out on the back and say "Hello" and "I'm glad to be in your town," and one thing and another, somebody out in the crowd would yell, "Give 'em hell, Harry," and then that would whip up the crowd. So occasionally, if that hadn't happened early enough in the speech, I think I have seen some of our fellows slip off the train in the back of the crowd and yell, "Give 'em hell, Harry." And that had a tendency to revitalize the audience.

MOYERS: Do you think we've lost something from politics in the time since then, when television has taken the place of that kind of personal experience on the road, that kind of direct confrontation between a candidate and the voters?

CLIFFORD: I think not. The fact is, that very likely it has greatly increased the personal contact between the voter and the candidate. Because I remember one time, the President went out and made a speech in Chicago. And we commented coming back on the train, how marvelous it was, there were a hundred thousand people in that great stadium, and just think, you see, that one speech, we said, reached a hundred thousand people. Do you know what I read in the papers some time ago? There is some soap opera about Texas or something, I don't know quite what it is—

MOYERS: Called "Dallas."

CLIFFORD: "Dallas." And they put on some installment of that, and then they took the test, and one hundred *million* people saw that installment of that particular opera, whatever it is. But suppose you get a campaign that has vital issues in it, and both candidates are arguing them well, why, a candidate can go before the American people and maybe get fifty or sixty million people. It is a simply marvelous medium for that kind. They— they're not going to go down the railroad station and hear him. We went almost to every state in the Union and maybe five percent of the American people saw him.

MOYERS: When you were in the White House, there were only six senior assistants to the President, and you met every morning at 8:30, and that's when you got a lot of business done. But you were the one of the six who discovered the importance of staying late in the afternoon, and of discovering that the roots of power in the White House are often bourbon and branch water taken alone with the president at the end of the day. Right?

CLIFFORD: Well, in the White House, there is always struggle and contention. If you're going to be worth your salt, you have to take part in the policy decisions. There's where the excitement, there's where the provocation, there's where the challenge is. And so I did that, and I had a definite position on the different issues. I learned after a while, that at the end of a day when the President was relaxed a little, if I would drop in and talk with him, it gave me an excellent opportunity to present my view. You could work it in unostentatiously, almost with considerable naturalness, and as a result, it established something of a precedent, and so I would always manage to drop in at the end of the day. And then he would have things to discuss about the next day. And after a little while, I decided I wouldn't trade that half hour with anybody else in the government — if they could see the President every week for an hour or two hours or something — just that time at the end of the day every day gave me a great advantage.

MOYERS: Poker was important to him.

CLIFFORD: Yes it was, I think for two main reasons. He loved an eight-handed game, so that meant that you had to— I would sit in them, that means I'd have to get six other persons. And they'd always be people that he was very fond of. The Chief Justice and Senator Anderson, George Allen, and occasionally Lyndon Johnson, and after a while Senator Stuart Symington sat in, and Averill Harriman — he had a group of about twelve, and you could always get six in. And it served more as a medium to get together, because he'd go down to the boat Friday afternoon, and play

some poker that evening. Even at the poker table subjects would come up, and then for a half an hour there wouldn't be any poker. I will wager I heard him tell about the Chicago convention of 1944 — I'll bet I've heard it forty times. Because they'd get talking about that and it was enormously important to him, because that's when Roosevelt selected him as vice president.

MOYERS: Forty-four?

CLIFFORD: Yeah, that's right, do you see, and it almost was Bill Douglas, it almost was Henry Wallace, it almost was Jimmy Byrnes, but it wasn't, it was Harry Truman. And then the phone conversation that he had with Roosevelt, who was away on one these inspection trips, and all. And then the men that he knew all were experienced men, either in politics or government. And the discussions were exceedingly valuable, sometimes quite erudite, other times quite political, and all. But he loved this— and it was a great relaxation for him.

MOYERS: Is it true that he was uncomfortable in the presence of women, and that's why so many of these were stag affairs?

CLIFFORD: Well, he just liked to be with men, more, he—

MOYERS: That may have come from his days in Kansas City.

CLIFFORD: *[Laughs]* Well perhaps so, it's just that he was a man's man, and he enjoyed very much being with men, and he kind of put up with mixed parties, but you would sense a little impatience in him. He was always very pleasant with the wives of staff and wives of— that would be invited into the White House. One interesting facet of the man, he actually, completely adored Mrs. Truman. It was the one great love of his life.

MOYERS: What about that story I heard somewhere of his actually playing poker with Churchill? I'd never heard it before until somebody told me recently that he'd actually gotten Churchill playing poker once.

CLIFFORD: Well, a curious thing happened. There's a small college in Missouri named Westminster College. And the president of that college one spring had a real mental aberration. He said "We're going to have a proceeding here in the spring, commencement, and I would like Winston Churchill to come and make the commencement address." Well I'd say the odds were ten thousand to one. He writes a letter to President Truman, and President Truman says, "Well, by golly, what a good idea. I've wanted to get to know Churchill better, and this'd be a great opportunity to get him over." He writes to Churchill and says, "I'd think this is a good idea," and three days later he has a letter back and Churchill says, "I'd be glad to do it." So Churchill comes over and the President planned the trip very well. He planned it by train. So the President at that time had a private car, a very comfortable private car. And so he took six staff members, those were the six main staff members, and we all lived on the train. And we started off on that train, it was to take six days. Three days out, and three days back, and that would give him a chance to get to know Churchill well. Well I might digress a moment, but they didn't know each other very well. They'd only met each other at Potsdam, and that had been a very unfortunate situation, because halfway through Potsdam, they'd had an election in England, and Churchill had been defeated, after taking the British people through the Second World War, and Clement Atlee, his bitter enemy, had been elected. So we all sat down on the back of the train about noontime when it pulled out, Mr. Churchill said, "Mr. President," he said, "I want to suggest something to you." He said, "What's that?" He said, "Now we're going to be together for six days," and he said, "I would like to call you Harry." President Truman, a very modest man, said, "I would greatly be honored, Mr. Churchill." But he said, Mr. Churchill said, "You have to call me Winnie." The President said, "I couldn't ever call you Winnie, you're the first citizen of the world." "Well," he said, "you have to, you have to learn to do it." "Well," he said, "all right, I'll try." So it wasn't very long before it was "Harry" and "Winnie." The President wanted to make some conversation, couldn't think of anything much, and really made a rather bad choice, because he said, "Winnie, about a month ago, Clement Atlee came over to see me." There's a dull silence. Churchill says, "There is less there than meets the eye." Well, the President knew he'd gotten off on the wrong foot, but he had to try again valiantly, so he said, "Well, he's a modest man." Churchill said, "Yes, he's got a lot to be modest about." He wouldn't let him up. So after a little while, it got to going a little better after a while, and Mr. Churchill said, "I understand you play poker." "Yes," the President said, "I've played a lot of poker." Well, Mr. Churchill said, "I first played poker in the Boer War." Oh dear, that sounded very impressive. So he said, "Do you think we can play some poker?" The President said, "Tonight, we'll play tonight." So soon as dinner was over, they put a green cover on the dining room

table, eight of us sat down. But before that happened, when Mr. Churchill was taking his nap, the President called us all in there, we all stood in front of him like this, do you see, and almost at ease, and he said, "Gentlemen, the reputation of American poker is at stake. Now," he said, "this fellow is awful bright and he's probably a very fine poker player, but I don't want him to go back to England and say that he took us all, you see, because poker's an American game." He said, "I expect each man to do his duty." So we all filed out. When we got in the poker game that night, we played a pretty good game. We played for about two hours, and Mr. Churchill was over $700 in the hole, do you see. He had to excuse himself to go to the men's room. The President said, "Now look here, men, this man's our guest, and you're treating him very badly. General Vaughan spoke up and said, "Boss, you can't have it two ways, now make up your mind, which do you want?" Well, it finally worked out all right, and everybody eased up a little. He was a terrible poker player.

MOYERS: In that memorandum you wrote, you came at the conclusion to saying in effect, the re-election of Harry Truman was tantamount to the salvation of the western world. Did you really believe that?

CLIFFORD: Yes. I really believed it because I had developed the most enormous faith and respect in President Truman. I knew that he was the kind of man I wanted to be president again. I knew about the issues that were important to him. I knew how he felt about the American people, and I knew that we had come through the Second World War, we had lots of problems ahead, Governor Dewey offered nothing, really, that was appealing to me. Very conservative program, a laissez-faire attitude, and yet President Truman had programs going that were to be of immense benefit, not only to this country, but to the world.

MOYERS: When I re-read that memo yesterday, I thought of John Mitchell testifying before the Watergate hearing, and Senator Talmadge said to John Mitchell, "Are you saying that you put the re-election of Richard Nixon above all these other considerations?" And John Mitchell said, "Yes, sir, I thought that the re-election of Richard Nixon contrasted to the alternatives was the most important thing in America." And all of us who have worked for presidents get this sense of obsession about our man, don't we?

CLIFFORD: Yes, but I was just more objective than most. *[Laughs]*

MOYERS: This has been part one of a conversation on presidents and power, with Clark Clifford. We'll return next week with some fascinating tales about the men he has known and served. I'm Bill Moyers.

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A Conversation with Clark Clifford — Part II

[Tease]

CLARK CLIFFORD: Sometimes we seem careless and casual about it, but basically, Americans love this country deeply. And the one man who stands more as a symbol of government than any other is the president. The man who understands the power of the presidency, who understands the potential of the presidency, can get almost anything accomplished. . . Harry Truman saved the free world. That's his great monument.

BILL MOYERS *[voice-over]*: From behind this desk across from the White House, a man once described as Washington's most powerful private citizen has advised and observed our presidents from more than 30 years. Tonight, the second part of a conversation with Clark Clifford. I'm Bill Moyers.

[Bill Moyers' Journal opening]

MOYERS: Few men in Washington have exercised power for as long or in as many ways as Clark McAdams Clifford. He came from Missouri to Washington in 1945 as a young naval aide to Harry Truman who soon made him Special Counsel to the President — a job that placed Clifford right at the center of the most critical decisions of those crucial years. He was a principle agent in shaping American foreign policy from within the White House and, in unifying the Armed Forces under a single Department of Defense. During the Eisenhower years, he became one of Washington's most successful lawyers — Super Clark, they called him — the most powerful private citizen since Bernard Baruch. While advising many of the nation's mightiest corporations, he also became an advisor to

presidents. He planned John Kennedy's transition to the White House and while still a private citizen, became Kennedy's chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. He was an intimate behind-the-scenes advisor to Lyndon Johnson until, in 1968, Johnson named him Secretary of Defense. A hawk until he arrived in the Pentagon, Clifford decided the war in Vietnam couldn't be won. According to most participants, he played the key role within government in persuading LBJ to reverse his policies. He returned to private practice in 1969, until President Carter sent him on special assignment to Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and India. Now, at the age of 75, still putting in a full day in his office, he looks out across Lafayette Square at the White House and reminisces about presidents and power.

MOYERS: You once said that Harry Truman had seemed a rather ordinary man when you knew of him out in Missouri, until you actually met him in the White House and he seemed a much more substantial figure, there, than he had prior to his being president. And you attributed this to the mystique of the presidency. What is it that happens to a man — a rather ordinary man — upon arriving in the White House, that suddenly makes him appear to be ten feet tall?

CLIFFORD: First, it's the pride that every American has in his country. And the devotion that he has to our form of government. Sometimes, we seem careless and casual about it. But basically, Americans love this country deeply. And the one man who stands more as a symbol of government than any other is the president. And the American people feel that that man has their hopes, he has their future in his hands, and they want very much to see that he is a success. It seems to me that that's the main way they go at it.

MOYERS: And yet they can turn on him very quickly.

CLIFFORD: Yes, they can. And I think that part of that is that every American has an ideal in his vision and concept of a president. And they reach very high for that ideal. And, as a matter of fact, no human being quite reaches that ideal. Basically, however, the people want their president to be the kind of man maybe that they hope they might be. They want their president to be better than they are, more intelligent than they are, better educated than they are, better understanding of government, more diplomatic than they are, and they take great pride. When President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy went abroad and were guests at a very formal dinner that President DeGaulle gave, oh, they showed to such wonderful advantage at that time. They looked like the American people wanted their president and first lady to look like. And then the next day, on national television, Mrs. Kennedy made a speech to the French people in absolutely flawless French. My, what a surge of pride came through the American people.

MOYERS: Remember when your president, Harry Truman, was in office and somebody said, "If Harry Truman can be president, then the fella next door can be president"?

CLIFFORD: Yes. Well, the fact is, that happens to be incorrect. Because it was something that maybe the American people don't know — and I didn't know for awhile — President Truman had the best knowledge and understanding of American history than any president who ever served in the White House with the exception of Woodrow Wilson, who wrote one of the very fine books on the American government and American history. The reason for it was — he explained it to me one time because I had commented on it — and he said, "Well, I'll tell you about it." He said, "You don't understand it. But young people — particularly young boys — are interested in sports. Every sport they are interested in has a moving ball. But," he said, "my eyesight was so poor when I was a boy that I couldn't engage in sports. But," he said, "by great good fortune, I had access to the Encyclopedia Britannica." He said, "I'm one of the few individuals who has ever read the Encyclopedia Britannica." Now, what he did was absorb American history beyond anything I have ever found in another human being, no matter who he might be. It meant something. It lived with him. I remember one weekend we went down on the boat with him. And something came up about some monetary and financial problem. And he started in to talk about the conflict between President Andrew Jackson and old man Biddle over who was to control the financial future of this fledgling country. Biddle thought it ought to be private banks. He was a leading Philadelphia banker at the time. Andrew Jackson was the determined that it be a national United States bank. And President Truman talked an hour about that and he took each part. He told what the position that Jackson took and the position that Biddle took. He actually made it live. And that's what history was to him. And so, as problems came up, he filtered the problems through that phenomenal knowledge of American history.

MOYERS: What about Harry Truman's temper? I ask that particularly in regard to a story that, in 1946, during a nationwide rail strike, he got furious at some of the unions and sat down at his own desk and wrote a really tough,

longhand draft of a speech in which he was going to say, "Let's hang a few traitors. Let's make our own country safe for democracy. Let's tell Russia where to get off. Come on, men, let's get to it." And that the staff panicked and came to you and said, "Clark, you've got to stop him from making that terrible speech." Is that a true story?

CLIFFORD: Well, partially. He was deeply angered by these two railroad union men because he felt that they'd been offered a fair wage increase. And a railroad stike at the time was going to have the most grevious result as far as our economy was concerned. And he had pleaded with them and used every possible argument and persuasion that he had. And they had been really pretty abrupt with them. So he wrote out this longhand memo. And it really was his means of getting rid of steam. I'm sure he didn't mean for those things to go in there. He brought the speech to Charlie Ross and me. And we felt that rather than go to the President when he was as angry as he was, we felt the proper course of action would be to sit down and write the speech. So Charlie and I went to work that night and worked on the speech most of the night and wrote a speech. It was still a tough speech. But it was a speech that I think would not have had the reverberations that his would have had. And he went up the next day and delivered the speech to a joint session of the Congress.

> **Pres. HARRY TRUMAN** *[addressing Congress]*: I request the Congress immediately to authorize the President to draft into the Armed Forces of the United States all workers who are on strike against their government.

CLIFFORD: About two-thirds of the way through the speech, he was handed a note that the unions had capitulated.

> **TRUMAN:** Word has just been received that the rail strike has been settled on terms proposed by the President.

CLIFFORD: Now, that was a very valuable incident to President Truman. Up until that time, people were regarding him as sort of a pale, carbon copy of Franklin Roosevelt. And it was hard to get out from under the shadow of Franklin Roosevelt. He had had such an enormous impact. His personality was so all-enveloping. And this mean speech, which ended up by forcing a powerful union to capitulate, began to project President Truman as a president in his own right. And he said later, privately, he said, "I think that speech did a great deal for me."

MOYERS: And the story goes on to say that at the Gridiron Dinner, after that — the Gridiron Dinner is where Washington reporters lampoon public officials in town — one of the skits that the reporters put on had a ventriloquist named Clifford holding a dummy named Truman on his lap, making him talk — that you and Truman were both in the audience when that occurred and you were profoundly embarrassed because of the skit. Is that true?

CLIFFORD: Yes, it was really mean, too. I was deeply disturbed by it. I went to him the first thing the next morning and he was simply wonderful. He said, "They weren't after you. You were just an instrument. They were after me. And, being president, they will continue to be after me. Don't think about it, again. You had absolutely nothing to do with it. They are going to stay at me and they're going to vilify me and denegrate me every chance they get. So," he said, "forget it." Well, gee, I was very, very comforted by that. But that's the kind of fellow he was.

MOYERS: Should White House assistants have a passion for annonymity?

CLIFFORD: Oh, yes. It's so important. And we've gotten away from it, particularly in the person of the national security assistant that has grown up.

MOYERS: It's when you were in the White House that you were the national security counsel, weren't you?

CLIFFORD: Well, I came to— it came about— I was counsel at the White House and then I had a close personal relationship with James Forrestal who was the first Secretary of Defense. And I had an intimate relationship with Dean Acheson who was Secretary of State. So, naturally, as we worked together, they would contact me, send papers over, get reactions to them. I'd check back with them. And very naturally, there grew up a relationship by which I became the liaison in the White House with the State Department and the Defense Department. I had one assistant, a very able man named George Ellson, who had been a history major at Harvard.

MOYERS: One assistant.

CLIFFORD: One assistant. But later on, that developed to the point where, for instance, under Dr. Henry Kissinger in the Nixon administration, he developed a whole nother State Department in the White House. He had 144 people working for him.

MOYERS: His answer to that would be, well, it's a much more complex world than it was back in 1945, '46, '47, and '48 when Clark Clifford was a one-man national security counsel.

CLIFFORD: Sure, there is some merit to that. But, if you are going to include the machinery and increase it so that it can handle a larger volume of problems, do it within the State Department and don't build another State Department in the White House. We've just been through that in the Carter administration. I think it was terribly unfortunate to have a competent, able secretary of state like Cyrus Vance constantly contending with Dr. Brzezinski to see who was going to state American policy. I had friends abroad. They didn't know who was really enunciating. Oftentimes it would be different. Brzezinski was taking a much harder-nosed position in reference to the Soviet Union than Cyrus Vance was. And I think that was one of the facets of the last administration that lent a sense of uneasiness to many thoughtful people and, in fact, I think, to the American public.

MOYERS: When Harry Truman left office, he wasn't very popular. He had been ridiculed; his policies were controversial. There was a general disapproval of him. What do you think his lasting legacy is today?

CLIFFORD: Harry Truman saved the free world. That's his great monument. As time goes on, it becomes more apparent all the time. Here's what happened. After the Second World War, Europe was prospering. Look at England. Look at France. Look at Italy. Look at Belgium. Look at Germany, you see. And the great aim and the great ambition that Harry Truman had was to find a way to work together with the Soviet Union and develop a permanent concord in the world. It was not to be. The Soviets didn't want it that way. They started in, soon as the Second World War was over, to do everything they could to further their own future. You'll remember they started in and took all the nations on their western periphery: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia later on. They just took them all. They wanted to have a bridge against the Soviet Union and the West. After doing that, then they set up the Comintern which was a Communist cell in every important country in the world. And at that particular time, it was nip and tuck as to whether you were going to save the countries of Western Europe and keep them from going Communist. Harry Truman came along first with the Truman Doctrine, March, 1947, in which he said to the whole world it shall be the policy of the United States to prevent the Communism by a force of these countries that they now had put pressure upon. That saved Greece and Turkey. Greece and Turkey were going down the drain just as sure. And they were the southern anchor of the line in the Mediteranean. Then the next he comes along with is the Berlin Airlift. The Soviets thought that they could squeeze us and the Allies out of Germany. They didn't squeeze Harry Truman out of there. He started and he supported Berlin with these air flights. And they got more and more and more efficient all the time. And it showed him— showed the Soviets in the world that he could not be pushed around. Then came one of the greatest of all, NATO, the North American Treaty Organization. We signed that treaty with the main nations of Western Europe and it said to the Soviets, if you attack any one of those nations, you are attacking the United States of America. And you know what NATO has done? It has kept the peace for 31 years, since it was passed. Because the Soviets had a very clear signal, you attack any one of those nations, you are at war with the United States. That's kept the peace.

MOYERS: You wrote the famous memorandum in 1946 that helped shape those decisions. It pushed the Truman administration toward many of those decisions and I'd like to quote from it because some people claim that it declared the intellectual framework of the Cold War. Here's what you said in part. "The key to an understand of current Soviet foreign policy is the realization that Soviet leaders adhere to the Marxian theory of the ultimate destruction of capitalist states by communist states. The language of military power is the only language which disciples of power politics understand. Compromises and concessions are considered by the Soviets to be evidence of weaknesses." Now today, many revisionist historians look back and say you exaggerated, that the bellicosity of that language, which led to these policies you described, forced the Soviets to become belligerent because they saw you arming all the nations around them. Do you feel that analysis still holds, 30 years later?

CLIFFORD: Yes. Nothing could be more wrong than the suggestion that we took the lead and then the Soviets followed and adopted their policies because of our position. President Truman wanted terribly to get along with the Soviets. He had met Stalin. He felt they could work out an arrangement. And at Potsdam, they started down that course. The Soviets violated every single agreement they had made at Potsdam. The President still worked. When we came up with the Marshall Plan, which came then as another — maybe the fourth — great leg in this policy to save the free world. Most people have forgotten, if they ever knew, President Truman offered the Marshall Plan to

the Soviet Union. And said, "We will treat you the same as the nations of Western Union. You have been through this holocaust, the worst war in history. You lost 20 million of your men in this war. We will help rebuild you." They turned it down. But this was his suggestion. And the pressure that they were putting on the European countries is what necessitated our going into the Marshall Plan. And now, historians are saying that perhaps the great accomplishment of this century has been for a nation such as we, without any hope of personal or practical gain, to come in and save the world as it existed at that time. And that's what did happen. Now, mind you, do you see, what Stalin said and what you read continued to be the policy of the Soviet Union. Do you remember when Mr. Khrushchev came here? In one speech, he said, "We are going to bury you." Well, that's the same way it goes.

MOYERS: Do you think that attitude existed— I mean General Haig and President Reagan are using much the same language that you used in that memo back in 1946.

CLIFFORD: I think so. But I would hope that we wouldn't get into name calling now. I don't believe that helps very much. I was in Moscow two months ago. And I had a number of meetings with top Soviets. And I might say there is a real opportunity for us there today. They'll be hard to get along with but the Soviets are sorely pressed today.

MOYERS: Economically.

CLIFFORD: Economically, they're pressed. And they've got lots of problems as they look at the world. They've got problems with Afghanistan. They felt they had to go in and clear that up. They are deathly afraid of what's going on in China. They know that China has the nuclear device. They know that they are working on a system of delivery of the nuclear device. That's a very great concern. China has a billion people. They are deeply bothered by the neutron bomb that's going to be distributed to the Allies that we have in Europe. And now, with all of those pressures on them and problems, they have Poland. And Poland might be the most difficult problem of all.

MOYERS: As a former Secretary of Defense, do you think that either side will let the other gain military superiority in this kind of situation?

CLIFFORD: No. No, they won't at all.

MOYERS: Doesn't that mean the arms race is just bound to continue?

CLIFFORD: No. No, it should not. It is absolutely insane. It's the ultimate end of absurdity for this race to go on.

MOYERS: But how do you—

CLIFFORD: Take the nuclear field, for instance. I attended a seminar three years ago. Every top nuclear scientist in the United States was there. And for four days we discussed all these problems. Some said if we had a hundred nuclear devices that were deliverable to the Soviet Union, that would be enough, particularly now that we MIRV them. We used to have only one warhead in each missile. Now, we have as many as ten. I've seen those tests out in the Pacific. They send one of these over about ten separate targets. The accuracy is incredible. Ten separate warheads come from this instrument and each zeros in on ten separate targets. Some of these men said if we had a hundred of these missiles, that's enough. We'd destroy anything of value in the Soviet Union. The one that said the most said 400. If you had 400 deliverable missiles, that's enough. You know how many we have? We have 10,000.

MOYERS: But there you are. Jimmy Carter's budget was plenty big and now Ronald Reagan's defense budget is going to be even bigger. And the Soviets are going to match it by your own admission. It just—

CLIFFORD: Of course.

MOYERS: What's going to happen?

CLIFFORD: The only way to do it is to sit down, as we were preparing to do with the Soviets, and agree upon the end of the arms race. You must have arms control. The Soviets want it. We should want it. I don't know what's going on in people's minds when they say, "Forget SALT II. Get on with the arms race." You give up whatever there is in SALT II, even if you don't have complete confidence in it, you give up something. You know that Churchill said one time — it's haunted me ever since I read it — he said, "If you go on with this nuclear arms race, all you are going to do is make the rubble bounce." We can destroy each other at a thousand apiece. We can destroy each other at 5,000 apiece and make the rubble bounce interminably. We are way up now way above that. Let's stop it. Let's stop it right there.

MOYERS: But won't it just continue to—

CLIFFORD: I would hope not because SALT II would stop the arms race where it is. SALT III is the one I'm looking at. SALT III I want more than any almost desire I've ever had. SALT III begins to cut back how much we have, starting reducing our arms.

MOYERS: So we shouldn't expect immediate results. This is a longterm process.

CLIFFORD: This is a longterm process. The happiest I ever saw Lyndon Johnson in my life was on one of our Tuesday luncheons — every Tuesday, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, head of the CIA, met and had luncheon and that's where the real policy was made. This particular day, in August of 1968, we gathered outside of the upstairs dining room and he said, "Gentlemen, I'm going to relax a rule." We said, "What's that?" He said, "We're going to have a drink before luncheon today." And everybody got a glass of sherry about that big. That was the relaxation of the rule. We said, "Why?" He said, "Tomorrow morning, simultaneously, in Moscow and the United States, we are going to announce a summit conference. And I'm going to Moscow and we're going to announce the beginning of the negotiation for arms control." And he said, "It will be my monument. It'll be the greatest contribution that I've made to this country and to the world." And he was as excited as a boy. Finally, we had ageed on the protocol that would start that process of limiting arms. At five o'clock that same afternoon, the Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia. And all his dreams crumbled. He couldn't do a thing after that.

MOYERS: You make me think, also, of that paradox of your having been a hawk through the '60s about Vietnam and then Lyndon Johnson finally almost forcing you to become secretary of defense. And your going over to the Pentagon and discovering that we couldn't win that war. And convincing him that he couldn't win it and he had to start cutting back. He listened to you. Yet he turned on you.

CLIFFORD: I had had a long and very friendly relationship with him — went back 25 years at that time. And I had worked with him before going to the Defense Department and went because I was interested in it. It's the field in which I had been trained. And I had felt that our policy was correct. I was guilty of the same misdiagnosis as practically everybody else in public life at the time. Do you remember the Tonkin Gulf Resolution? The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was passed by the House and the Senate and they authorized the President to use military force in Vietnam — a practical declaration of war. You know what the vote was? Only two against it; I think the vote was 412 to 2 in favor of that resolution. We all thought that what we had to do was face up to what was going on. We thought that there was a joint effort— by Communist China and Communist Soviets to engulf the area there in Southeast Asia as the effort had been made before by the Soviets after the Second World War.

MOYERS: How do you explain that so many people were so wrong for so long?

CLIFFORD: Well, I've got my own theory. We saw what happened to the world when Hitler began to move, when we went through that horrible holocaust. When they saw what was happening in Southeast Asia, they thought it was another kind of aggression and that we had better profit by the lesson that we had not followed with Hitler and that we had better get in early. It's just as though it were a cancer. And the thing to do would be to go in and excise the cancer early, before the metastatic process took place and spread through the body politic.

MOYERS: I know that was the diagnosis. But what do you think there was in Lyndon Johnson's personality that made him become so obsessive about the war?

CLIFFORD: Well, because we were in it and to a certain extent, attacks against our forces in Vietnam were attacks against Lyndon Johnson. And he took it personally. And he just said, "By God, this is not going to be."

MOYERS: That's very dangerous, isn't it, to confuse the identity and fortune of the president with the success and fortune of the nation? "I am the State."

CLIFFORD: Yes, but to ameliorate that feeling, that was the attitude of the House. That was the attitude of the Senate. These people are not going to push us around. You know, when they fired on the destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, if they did. And so, we all rose up at the time and there seemed to be justification for it— I accepted it, mistakenly, until I got to the Pantagon and after a month in the Pentagon, I knew that we were wrong and I knew that,

a) it wasn't really communist aggression. What we were dealing with was a civil war in Vietnam. And I knew we had an absolute loser on our hands. We weren't ever going to win that war.

MOYERS: But why did Johnson— President Johnson turn on you after you had told him that we had to reverse our policies in Vietnam.

CLIFFORD: This was a very difficult time for him. I had accepted his policy. He sent me over there in order to continue with this hard, stern warlike policy as far as Vietnam is concerned. And then here is this friend who he had known all this time and he trusted. This friend comes back to him and says, "We are wrong." Well, who is "we"? That— mainly the President. In effect, without being too blunt, "Mr. President, you were wrong. You've been wrong from the very beginning." That's a very bitter pill for a man to take. He didn't like it. He didn't want to hear it. And yet, he had the courage and he had the character and he had the resolution. From that time on, we met almost every day. Not alone but in that cabinet room, we met almost every day, talking this thing out. And those first two or three months, were as difficult days as men ever spent together.

MOYERS: What did he say to you?

CLIFFORD: He just said this isn't right. Who sold you on this? Explain it to me. Now, the reason why my attitude worried him so was that he knew that I had sincerely supported him before. And we had worked together for so many years that he knew that something had happened. And then I explained the whole thing. And I brought the joint chiefs over. I sat in a tank with the joint chiefs for three days while we tried to talk this thing out. There's where I finally learned they had no plan to win the war.

MOYERS: Why didn't your predecessor, Secretary MacNamara, come to this conclusion? Was it because he, too — like Lyndon Johnson — had such a commitment to the commitment, itself?

CLIFFORD: He was in the process of softening his attitude.

MOYERS: But Lyndon Johnson would never take it from MacNamara.

CLIFFORD: He would not. And, as he began to soften his attitude, because he was getting the feel of this thing, President Johnson felt that he ought to have another job. So it was kind of a mutual arrangement that Bob MacNamara left. And I think the President heaved a sigh of relief, said, "Now I've got a man there who is going to be really hard-nosed." And it was very disappointing to him.

MOYERS: And he had this unfathomable feeling about people who left him.

CLIFFORD: I remember one interesting incident that gave a wonderful indication of the general attitude of the press toward President Johnson who was a very powerful man and who brooked no opposition and who ruled from on high. And when he would be down at the ranch on vacation, his press secretary would hold an afternoon press conference and the press would gather around. And at that particular time, his press secretary was named Bill. Fact is, his name was Bill Moyers.

MOYERS: I remember.

CLIFFORD: And the story came back to me — I dont think we really talked about it since — but at that particular time, President Johnson and Bill Moyers had had a number of difficulties. And the relationship was terribly strained. If the President and one of the men working with him differed, it got pretty testy. So this afternoon, one of the men in the press corps said, "Bill?" You said, "Yes." He said, 'Where is the President this afternoon?" And you said to the press man, "He is down at the lake." And so the press man said, "Is he boating?" "No," Bill Moyers said, "He's taking a walk."

MOYERS: *[Laughs]* I should have followed Clark Clifford's policy of the passion for anonymity.

CLIFFORD: Well, I learned later that the President had admitted that he felt that that was as unfunny a joke as he had ever heard. And I think you could almost count the days from that incident until we learned that Bill Moyers was out looking for other employment.

MOYERS: *[Laughs]* I took my own walk.

CLIFFORD: Yes, I expect—

MOYERS: When you persuaded him otherwise on Vietnam, he began quietly around town — didn't stay quiet — to say other things about Clark Clifford.

CLIFFORD: Yes, as time went over, he got over. Because I'm gratified at the fact that as time went on, he wouldn't ever come right out with it, but as time went on, he also accepted the conclusion that the war in Vietnam was hopeless and we were never going to win it.

MOYERS: Johnson was the third president you served. The second we haven't touched upon. And that is John F. Kennedy. And that was an accident because somebody told me the biggest political mistake Clark Clifford ever made was in 1960 to support Stuart Symington for president instead of John F. Kennedy. Why did you do that?

CLIFFORD: A number of reasons. One is that Stuart Symington and I were very old friends — both from Missouri, both from St. Louis. He had come from the East and come out to be head of one of the largest companies in Missouri and we had become friends and our wives had become friends. We both came to Washington by entirely different routes and then resumed our friendship here and it became closer and closer as it has down to the present day. So when he told me in, oh, I think it would be in early 1959 that he was going to run for the presidency, I said at once I would be for him. And I worked for him, attended meetings and worked on the organization and all. During that period of time and for some years, I had been John F. Kennedy's lawyer.

MOYERS: While he was in the Senate?

CLIFFORD: While he was in the Senate and we had become really quite good friends. And I remember the time that I first learned that he also was going to run for president.

MOYERS: How did that come about?

CLIFFORD: ABC network had a program—

MOYERS: ABC television?

CLIFFORD: ABC television had a network which it ran every Monday night. And Mike Wallace was on that program. It was a long time ago. And he would have different people on. One evening, on a Monday night, he had Drew Pearson, the columnist. Now, you'll remember that Senator John F. Kennedy had written a book, *Profiles in Courage*, — excellent book — and had won the Pulitzer Prize for it. On this ABC television program, which Mike Wallace put on, Drew Pearson said it is a national scandal that John F. Kennedy got the Pulitzer Prize for that book because he was not the author of the book. Well, the roof fell in in the Kennedy family. I did not understand why they were all so excited about it at the time. President Kennedy came to see me right away and we got to work on it.

MOYERS: He was then Senator Kennedy.

CLIFFORD: Well, excuse me, Senator Kennedy. His father, Ambassador Kennedy, called and said to me immediately to sue ABC for $50 million, get the complaint in that day and all and so we had to go to some lengths to quiet him down. So as we got into it, why, I decided after talking with ABC that Senator Kennedy and I should go to New York. Well, we went to New York and spent two days with a Mr. Goldinson who was head of ABC and maybe still is. And we took along longhand notes of Senator Kennedy that he had written down in Florida when he was having a back problem. And then showed where his longhand notes appeared in the book. And then some research had been done by Ted Sorensen — a very able lawyer and assistant to Senator Kennedy. But every book has research that's gone into it. But it was Senator Kennedy's book. By the end of the second day, they agreed that they would retract the charge.

MOYERS: You proved that Kennedy had written the book.

CLIFFORD: Had written the book, that's right. And so we sat down, the lawyers did, and we worked up a retraction statement. Well, President Kennedy— Senator Kennedy was delighted with it. Because it was a very ugly situation — uglier than I knew because they didn't want to carry that millstone around their neck. That afternoon — the second afternoon — he said, "Well, you of course understand why this is so important to us." And I said, "You'll have to explain it to me." And he said, "I will tell you in confidence, I am going to be a candidate for the Democratic

nomination for President of the United States." Then it all became completely clear to me. At that particular time, he said, "We've worked together well these past years. I would hope that maybe you might be able to support my candidacy." And I said right away, "I will not be able to." I said, "Senator Symington and I have been friends for 25 years and he talked to me months ago about it. And I said at once that I would support him." Senator Kennedy's reaction was absolutely typical. He said, "Of course, I understand why you are doing it." He said, "If I had had a friend for 25 years and he didn't support me, I wouldn't think he was much of a friend." And so it made me feel much easier.

MOYERS: And you warmed up, even though you supported Symington, heading Kennedy's transition between the election and the innauguration.

CLIFFORD: Again, it was absolutely typical of him. Out in Los Angeles, we had a very spirited struggle. But after he finished this very spirited struggle, a week went by and my phone rang, it was Senator Kennedy saying, "I want you to come for breakfast." I went to breakfast at eight o'clock and we sat there until 12 o'clock. He said, "I want you to start in and in the most meticulous detail, go through the entire 1948 Truman/Dewey campaign." And I did. He asked a lot of questions. At the end of that, he said, "Thank you very much, this has been very useful. Now," he said, "I want you to spend this summer writing up a plan of takeover." He said, "I'm going to win this election."

MOYERS: He said it that flatly.

CLIFFORD: He said it that flatly. "I'm going to win this election. And I don't want to wake up the morning after being elected president, look at my father and my brother, Bobby, and my staff and say, 'Now, what do I do?' I want a book right there in hand so we will know exactly what to do." Well, it was real prescience because that's exactly what he did. I worked all summer on that book and it ended up 70 or 80 pages and the next morning after he called— the next morning after election, he called and said, "You have the book ready?" I said, "I do." He said, "How many copies are there?" And I said, "Twenty." He said, "I'll send the Secret Service by and they will pick it up and bring it up to Hyannis." Then the next morning, he also went on the television and announced that I would be his "transition man" to work with the Eisenhower administration. And I gave full time to that, from Election Day until the 20th of January. And through that period, and prior — during the campaign — I became so impressed with Senator Kennedy's professionalism.

MOYERS: What do you mean?

CLIFFORD: He went about everything in a professional manner. Sure, some mistakes were made. But if so, then he would admit the mistake and get right on.

MOYERS: Speaking of mistakes, do you think he should have appointed Bobby Kennedy to be attorney general? Because the day after the election, Lyndon Johnson said to me, "Clark Clifford is going to be Kennedy's attorney general."

CLIFFORD: Well, that certainly wasn't in President Kennedy's mind. That's a very interesting story. I'll make it short. After he was elected, he went to Palm Beach and he rested for two or three days and called and said to come down. And I went down and stayed for four days with him. And we went all through this document of the takeover— which jobs were the most important, which must be appointed first, which reports have to get in first like the budget report and the economic report. We went through all of that until he understood it very well. He had said that his experience had been in the legislative branch and my had been in executive branch. Then about the third day, we got to the Cabinet and discussed that. And he said, "I have one thing I want to tell you," he said, "My father wants me to appoint my brother, Bobby, as Attorney General. But," he said, "I'm just really not completely comfortable with it. Bobby's bright and he has been doing a marvelous job as campaign chairman. But I'm just not comfortable about it because Bobby hasn't practiced law." Well, I said, "I agree with you." And I said, "I think there's a good deal of merit to that." Then he said, "Tell you what I want you to do. When you've finished down here, I want you to go to New York and have a meeting with my father and see if you can pursuade him that we ought to put Bobby someplace else." And so I did that. I flew from Palm Beach up to New York, had luncheon, father couldn't have been nicer. He said we'd all worked together so well and gotten his son, Jack, elected. And I said, "Now I want to talk to you about Bobby." And I explained all of the reasons why. He listened very politely. And he said, "Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Now," he said, "we'll turn to some other subject because," he said, "Bobby is going to be Attorney

General." And he said, "That ends that part of it, you see." And that ended that part of it. Well, now, just to show the graceful manner in which President Kennedy handled things, he named Bobby attorney general. He got an avalanche of criticism. The night after he was innaugurated, they had a dinner here called the Alfalfa Dinner. And in his remarks to that audience, he said, "I have received a lot of criticism for appointing my brother, Bobby, as Attorney General. But," he says, "folks, you don't understand." He says, "A young lawyer has got to get his experience someplace." Well, everybody just howled and it took all the sting out of it. And as a matter of fact, Bobby made a good attorney general.

MOYERS: The story is that in many of the meetings that President Kennedy had with his attorney general brother, you were present because the President wanted your legal advice and he knew that Bobby wasn't a very good lawyer. Is that true? And was Bobby jealous?

CLIFFORD: Well, I can't fathom the President's reasoning. What he did was, as matters would come up that involved the Justice Department, he would call Bobby over and he would also include me. I think he felt he got something. He got something from Bobby and he got something from me. By that time, I had been practising 35 years and I think he felt that from the combination, he got something. It was perfectly all right with me. But I think that that particular custom was just not too popular with Bobby.

MOYERS: You know, you talk about that and I'm thinking as you talk of the time in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson decided that Bobby Kennedy really was going to contend for the vice presidential nomination and Johnson didn't want this to happen. He didn't want to have to have a fight at the convention over Bobby Kennedy's desire to be his vice presidential running mate. So he said to me on the phone, "Get Clark Clifford over here." And he said to Jack Valenti, "Get Abe Fortas over here." And the two of them came. And I remember you devised a solution. Do you remember what that solution was?

CLIFFORD: Oh, very well. We did not want the President to make an announcement that he had closed the door to Bobby Kennedy. With President Kennedy being a national hero and Bobby coming up politically, it was very unwise for the President to get into an imbroglio of any kind with Bobby. So he could not say, "I've reached the decision that Bobby has no chance to be Vice President." What we did was have the President, within a couple of days, make an announcement at a press conference that he had given very careful thought to this whole subject of Vice President and he had reached the conclusion, for the following reasons, that no member of his Cabinet should be Vice President. And Bobby Kennedy was in his cabinet. And that took care of it. People accepted it. There was no particular reflection on Bobby. He was just one of ten men.

MOYERS: Remember what he said?

CLIFFORD: I give up.

MOYERS: He said, "I took a lot of good people overboard with me."

CLIFFORD: *[Laughs]* I had forgotten.

MOYERS: You were known as the liberal in Harry Truman's White House. Has your conscience ever bothered you since because you spent so much of your time being the counsel to mighty corporations?

CLIFFORD: No, I don't believe there is any real conflict, there. Corporations are rarely involved in that type of governmental problem. Corporations have tax problems with the government. They have SEC problems, Trade Commission problems, Power Commission problems, energy problems, communication— it's in that great area. They have antitrust problems with the government, tax problems. It is in that area that we work. Now, many of my clients would be companies that have Republicans at the head. The fact that I have liberal views regarding governmental policy in all those areas outside the ken of the corporate policy, makes very little difference to them. They'll tease me about it sometimes. But at the same time, I think there is a recognition that over a period of years, in the practise here, you get two great assets. One is, you understand how the government really works. So when a tough problem comes up, you've got all these years of experience to know where the chains are, where the paths are through this trackless jungle here, do you see. So you know how to work them out. Also, I feel that I have an asset. And that is, I tell a client I have absolutely no influence. I don't know what it is. I don't know what it means. I only know that I don't have it. What I do have is, after all these years, I think I have the confidence and respect of the

people in government with whom I deal and I wouldn't give that up for anything. For instance, I had an experience one time with President Kennedy that had a profound impression on me. I was in the private practice at the time. The phone rang. I went over. It was two days after the Bay of Pigs. He'd had a disaster at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. He said, "Let me tell you something." He said, "I've had two full days — I haven't slept — this has been the most excruciating period of my life." He said, "This is such a tragedy, I don't know if I could survive another one like it." He said, "Here's what happened. I made a very bad decision. The reason I made the bad decision was my advice was wrong. And my advice was wrong because it was based upon incorrect facts. And the incorrect facts were due to faulty intelligence." An excellent analysis of what had taken place. And he said, "I know that you were the main draftsman of the law that created the CIA and you've grown up in that whole area. I'm appointing a committee and I want you to be a member of the Committee. And I want to find out what's wrong with the foreign intelligence operation of this country." So I served two years as a member of that Commission and five years as chairman of the Commission. Now, here was a fine opportunity. I would not have been given that assignment if I were in government. He wanted people to come in from outside of government. That's what Lyndon Johnson learned after awhile. Lyndon Johnson was such a powerful, overbearing presence that the staff oftentimes was at a very serious disadvantage. He wouldn't like it if you disagreed with him. Later on, after a number of unhappy and unfortunate circumstances, he learned the value of having people come in from the outside who wanted absolutely nothing from him.

MOYERS: In 1962 — and this is something I have always wanted to ask you about — you got involved at Kennedy's request — President Kennedy's request — in negotiations to roll back the price of steel. You went up to New York to see Roger Blau who was then running U.S. Steel to tell him that the President wanted the price of steel to be reversed — that it was going to contribute substantially to inflation. Now, what tactics did you use with Roger Blau?

CLIFFORD: Well, the President phoned and said come over. And he was really angry. He said, "The steel industry came down and talked to me. And they said they had a very tough labor negotiation. The union contract was ending. And they would have liked to have had some assistance from the government. Because we wanted to try to keep the price of steel down. And if we could get a reasonable wage settlement with the union, it would help hold the price of steel down because we were engaged in quite an economic buildup at the time. So," he said, "I listened to them, I worked with them for weeks, even months, with the understanding that if we got a reasonable contract with the union, they would not raise the price of steel." He said, "The contract was as solid and as unequivocal as two men can agree on." He said, "I helped them. We got a splendid contract. They said, 'Mr. President, this is what we hoped we would get. Thank you for the fine help.' And the next day they raised the price of both coal and hot steel a substantial amount — $8 or $10 a ton. Now," he said, "I'm not going to stand for it. I don't need to have them go back on my contract and I want you to go up there, get in touch with Roger Blau. I've already talked to him. I've told him you were coming. Go to New York and sit down and you persuade them to retract that price increase." So we went up and he had a suite in a hotel.

MOYERS: Now, be frank with me because I know you gave him some frank talk.

CLIFFORD: I really— I cannot go into the detail. But we went all that day, had luncheon and talked it out and all that afternoon, had dinner and talked it out. I decided to stay on in New York. We stayed on, went at it all the next day. And the President had already begun to suggest certain things that he might do. There was a lot the government could do. The government, for instance, could stop buying steel from domestic steel companies and buy all their steel abroad.

MOYERS: There were tax questions that could be raised.

CLIFFORD: Lots of tax questions could be—

MOYERS: Antitrust investigations that could be started.

CLIFFORD: Possibility of all kinds of things and those were gone into. At one stage, they said, "Well, we'll go half way." And that was passed on to the President because it was felt necessary to. The President said, "Absolutely not. I want them to live up to the agreement." By the end of the second day, it occurred what the President referred to in a press conference that he had asked complete capitulation. They had retracted all of the price increases and put the

prices back where they'd been before. It was an excellent victory for the President. The public responded very well to it.

MOYERS: What does it say about the use of presidential power?

CLIFFORD: It means that a man who understands the power of the presidency, who understands the potential of the presidency, can get almost anything accomplished. The president is the one who fights for the people. There are interests in this country — and it's a part of our system — that are looking out for them. For instance, industry looks out for the interests of industry. Labor looks out for the interests of labor. Many times presidents have had to insert themselves into industrial struggles of that kind because the public was in the process of getting hurt very badly. But a strong president after awhile begins to develop a reputation and these various segments of the country don't want to take him on. And the people are very— he gets very popular with the people. And it's very bad to get on the wrong side of a popular president.

MOYERS: You are how old this year?

CLIFFORD: Seventy-five.

MOYERS: Is it the worst of times or the best of times?

CLIFFORD: It's a mean, tough time, which is one of the problems which President Carter had. It's a very difficult time to be President of the United States. As I watched all these smiling faces come in to the Car— to the Ken— to the Reagan administration, I thought what those faces will look like a year from now. I hope they are successful. It is important that the administration be successful. This is a mean, tough year. They are going to look a lot older a year from now than they do now. I hope the ebullience that they have will carry them for awhile. But it's going to be awfully tough. It's difficult to be president, now. And they will find it out. It is difficult to serve in government, now, and make these close, hard decisions. But I wish them very well.

MOYERS: Thank you, Clark Clifford.

MOYERS *[voice-over]*: This has been a conversation with Clark Clifford, about presidents and power. I'm Bill Moyers.

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