

**(George Edward) Lord Peter Thorneycroft Oral History Interview –JFK #1,
6/19/1964**
Administrative Information

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Interviewer: Robert Kleiman

Date of Interview: June 19, 1964

Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.

Length: 23 pp.

Biographical Note

Thorneycroft, (George Edward) Lord Peter; Minister of Aviation (1960-1962); Minister of Defence (1962-1964); Secretary of State for Defence, United Kingdom (1964). Thorneycroft discusses his interactions with John F. Kennedy [JFK] and JFK's way of creating organic conversation. He covers the relationships between Britain, Europe, and the United States, joint weapon production, and the discussions that were held in Nassau, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation

(George Edward) Lord Peter Thorneycroft, recorded interview by Robert Kleiman, June 19, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Oral History Program.

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(George Edward) Lord Peter Thorneycroft

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Oral History Interview

with

(GEORGE EDWARD) LORD PETER THORNEYCROFT

June 19, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Robert Kleiman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

KLEIMAN: What I would like to do before we start is to get the dates clarified because the Library have given me the dates they have in their record and they may not know so if you can just tell me when you first met the President.

THORNEYCROFT: I can't remember when I first met him. He was a young Senator when I first met him. This must have been fifteen years ago. I was a back-bencher and I remember that I went over to America with a friend of mine and we spent about a month or six weeks in America and a great deal of time obviously in New York, Washington. I remember being taken round to him, I had never really heard of him then and I was taken round by my friends and they said that this man is going to be President of the United States, well I didn't believe that but I went round and I saw him and I saw a young man obviously of great attraction and full of ideas. I think the thing that struck me about him then was he was a remarkable American in one way if I may say so. His knowledge of Europe was infinitely greater even then than most people who live in America. He had a sort of instinctive feel for it, partly of course because he had been over here with his father, he had also been in the American Embassy in Paris and he was very much at home in Europe and even then he was talking, because we were talking politics you see and he was talking about the possibilities of greater unity and what could happen in the

Europe after the war. I always remember this and above all I remember that I was told he was going to be President.

KLEIMAN: Do you remember who it was that told you?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, I do. She is a woman who is now married to an American naval officer in charge of the American Aid Programme in some part of the world, I think it is in Mauritius, called Mrs. Strauss.

KLEIMAN: Do you know her first name?

THORNEYCROFT: Her name before she was married was Bee Phillips. She is the daughter of a former American Ambassador in Rome.

KLEIMAN: Well, let me just get the chronology. That was the first meeting, when did you meet him next?

THORNEYCROFT: Well then I didn't meet him again until I went to America as Minister of Defence.

KLEIMAN: This was in September '62?

THORNEYCROFT: This was in September of '62.

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KLEIMAN: And then after that when did you meet?

THORNEYCROFT: I met him when he came over here. He came over in '61 and he reminded me then of our earlier meeting. I met him at the airport, I was Minister of Aviation when I went out there and when he saw me he reminded me of our earlier meeting which I thought was rather pleasant of him.

KLEIMAN: And then?

THORNEYCROFT: And then I saw him again in September of '62 when I went out as Minister of Defence.

KLEIMAN: And the next meeting was at?

THORNEYCROFT: The next meeting was at Nassau.

KLEIMAN: Did you see him after that?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes I saw him at Mr. Harold Macmillan's home in Sussex.

KLEIMAN: When was that?

THORNEYCROFT: 1963.

KLEIMAN: Then, in the 1961 meeting was there anything of great interest there?

THORNEYCROFT: No, because I was just meeting him as Minister of Aviation, he was having talks with Prime Minister and I met him getting off the aircraft and getting up without a note and saying what he thought. I thought there aren't all that number of public men who can speak so freely, he was a very relaxed man in that way, he could say what he felt very well there, but I wasn't in on those discussions.

KLEIMAN: Now when you come over in September 1962, what were the subjects that you wanted to cover in that series of talks?

THORNEYCROFT: When I came over here in 1962 I came over really primarily not on a specific mission for a specific purpose. I came over to inform myself of the American military and defence scene because I had only just been appointed as Minister of Defence over here and I felt that a knowledge of what was going on in the Pentagon was essential to a Minister of Defence in this country. I came over then to spend a short time and to visit a number of American defence installations at Omaha and Norfolk Virginia.

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KLEIMAN: So you saw him in Washington and at Newport? Was he with you on any of your visits to installations?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, I spent a day with him going down to what was then called Cape Canaveral which is now Cape Kennedy and he took me down in his aircraft and we stopped at the Redstone Works at Huntsville and I had some talks with him then about their space programme and his hopes in the rocket field and all that and then we went round Cape Canaveral and saw all these great rockets pointing, happily most of them at the moon but they were all there and I spent the day talking with him and he was going from point to point and saying a few words to foreign students who were over here in the Rocket Establishment and so forth. I think the thing that struck me then about him and indeed always very keen to know and whether he was talking to say a foreign student or to a German professor who was deciding how you could get off the moon once you landed on it, he was a man who always wanted to find out the ultimate details of the things.

KLEIMAN: What were the substance of matters which you discussed? Was Skybolt already an issue or not yet?

THORNEYCROFT: No, Skybolt was then still running as you might say. It was still well in the American programme, no decision at that stage had been taken to cut it and no indication was really given to me at that stage that it was likely to be cut. I took the opportunity of impressing upon him and Bob McNamara that he attached importance to that particular project, but we didn't spend the whole time on Skybolt, we talked a good deal together about defence organization, about the role of America in the world and particularly on the military side and perhaps importantly how America and the United Kingdom had a role which was rather distinctive from most other European countries, mainly because we had a responsibility which lay outside Europe. In America particularly in the great areas of the world which border the Pacific and with us in the great areas of the Indian Ocean between Aden and Singapore. We spent a great deal of time talking about that.

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KLEIMAN: Were there any particular problems in that area. Coordination?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes a certain amount. Making sure that we had the facilities that would enable each of us to share the other's base or fuelling installations or whatever it might be.

KLEIMAN: Did you discuss general issues of strategy?

THORNEYCROFT: To some extent and in broad terms. The Americans impressing upon us that they attached as much importance to our role in the world outside as they did to our role in Europe. Not encouraging us to leave Europe not at all, but I would say that they attached as much importance to us in these wider spheres as they did in the narrow Continental ones, and I was able to follow that up to some extent because I stayed with him at Rhode Island afterwards.

KLEIMAN: How long were you there?

THORNEYCROFT: For the weekend.

KLEIMAN: Did you go out on his yacht?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes we went out on his yacht the Harry Fils. It was a lovely day. It was rather pleasant to see him there in a relaxed atmosphere.

KLEIMAN: Did you see the America's Cup Race?

THORNEYCROFT: I arrived just after that. Yes, they finished in the evening and I flew in just after they had finished. I saw them as I was flying in over Boston, I saw them coming round you know. I wasn't there for the finish.

KLEIMAN: Now what happened? Did you visit Newport? How much time was devoted to serious discussion and business discussion you might say and how much social matters?

THORNEYCROFT: All Presidents I suppose have to cut out a good deal of social life in any order to face their burdens. I mean they all have to live pretty austere lives really. At 10:30 they have to start to go to bed if they are going to be able to work the following morning and I suppose one of the important aspects of Kennedy was that he had in a way to pay more attention to his physical health than most.

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KLEIMAN: Was this evident to you when you were there?

THORNEYCROFT: It was always evident to me I think. Not in a dramatic way but in order to cope with the trouble he had in his back he always had to take a reasonable amount of exercise swimming. He always used to try and get to bed about 10:30 so that he wasn't over training his strength. He worked very hard.

KLEIMAN: Was he in any pain when you saw him last?

THORNEYCROFT: He never gave the impression that he was in pain, but he was a hard worker and of all the public men I have known he was as well informed as most I mean he always worked on his briefs, he not necessarily believed a word of what they said but he read them, he knew the patter behind it all.

KLEIMAN: Now what happened in Newport? What time did you arrive? Where did you see him and did you have serious discussion all the time you were with him?

THORNEYCROFT: No, no, far from it. I arrived in evening and we had dinner that night and the following day we spent really on the yacht. We went out for the day, we came in and we saw a film as a matter of fact the visit we had made to Cape Kennedy and we listened to a speech he had made on the importance of going to the moon on the radio, a recorded one, then I was taken off to the airport after supper in a helicopter. Our own Ambassador was there with his wife and children.

KLEIMAN: And did you cover any Defence matters while you were there?

THORNEYCROFT: We continued really our discussion on the future possibilities in Europe which he was extremely interested in. He was always looking at this, from a point of view of not simply European unity but the wider and further possibility of an Atlantic - a closer union of the Atlantic powers at some stage.

KLEIMAN: Can you describe what he said to you about this subject?

THORNEYCROFT: Surely, I think in general the theme he wished to pursue was that he wanted to see Europe more closer together. I think he regarded it as a very considerable set-back that the United Kingdom hadn't managed to get into the Common Market. He was worried about the divisions that existed.

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KLEIMAN: Of course this was while the negotiations were still in progress?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes. He was worried that we hadn't succeeded.

KLEIMAN: He thought already at that point that it was dragging on too long?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I don't say that he had written it off by any manner of means but he felt that the next step as it were to any wider Atlantic alliance was a closer European union and thought this might in the short-term be antagonistic to some of the immediate interests in the United States of America for obvious commercial reasons, it would mean a freely trading area which was in a sense technically discriminating against the United States. Despite that he thought that it was a necessary first-step in order to get the wider alliances which he had always got very much in the forefront of his mind. He didn't elaborate on that in any detail but I noticed he did return to it in the last great speech he made in Europe before his death.

KLEIMAN: Did he feel that Britain was moving too slowly in negotiations in Brussels?

THORNEYCROFT: No, he asked Plenty of questions about them. He asked a good number of questions as to why, how, and what we stood to lose and what the delay was about and what the issues were. He was a man who could question more than he chose to inform. This was part as you remember of his technique.

KLEIMAN: Well you got his views in a sense through the way he asked the

questions?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes.

KLEIMAN: Well now can you recall how he asked questions about these points you just mentioned, and what did you tell him about the reason for the British delay?

THORNEYCROFT: Oh well, I explained that - I can remember them all from my point of view. Things he wanted to know. In what way our position was different or distinct from that of other European countries and I was explaining to him that we had other difficulties too. One that our agricultural position was a bit different to theirs and secondly our relations in an external world were different from theirs. We were very much linked up in a way with the Commonwealth which was a problem different in kind to that which confronted say Germany or Italy or even France and this necessitated bringing a lot of other people at least to acquiesce in what we were doing.

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KLEIMAN: To situate this conversation, it took place I would presume between the Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference and the Conservative Party Conference. It was after the Commonwealth Conference I would presume and before the Conservative Party Conference.

THORNEYCROFT: No, it was before the Commonwealth Conference.

KLEIMAN: Did he discuss various personalities in English public life?

THORNEYCROFT: No, except from a political point of view. I think he always had a great admiration for Macmillan as a politician and indeed as a man and as an intellectual he was interested in Macmillan's mind I think, and he was interested in the political problem of a Conservative's leader for the Conservative Party to abandon the degree of sovereignty that might be necessary in order to establish wider unison.

KLEIMAN: Was there a special reason why the President should question you particularly on European problems?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, he knew I was familiar with them because I've been associated with the Board of Trade as Chancellor so I was familiar with the Commonwealth problems associated with it.

KLEIMAN: Had you special knowledge of the Commonwealth side of the problem and did he ask you about that?

THORNEYCROFT: I had been sent by Mr. Macmillan on a special mission to India, Malaysia and Pakistan to discuss the impact of the Common Market on them.

KLEIMAN: This was at the time when he sent three Ministers?

THORNEYCROFT: That's it and I was one and I had been to South East Asia so I was able to explain their attitude in that part of the world.

KLEIMAN: Now you have a special view of your own on Britain's relations with Europe which is not necessarily that of all the members of the Government as I understand it. Did he ask about the different views within the Conservative Party on this question of how important it was for Britain to look to wider frontiers and just how it should be done?

THORNEYCROFT: I don't recall that he particularly asked me about the views of different people in the Party. It was one of his habits that he rather concentrated on the person who was there. He wanted to know about what you thought. He'd wait until he saw the other man until he asked them what they thought. I think he was mostly concerned to see what was your view. What in your view is the problem, not what you think somebody else thinks, but what you think yourself - this is rather a characteristic.

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In this he was rather like Lloyd George and I remember old David Lloyd George in his latter day, he was still going to the House of Commons when I got there and he had in this way rather the same technique and interest in the views - and immense interest in the views of the chap he happened to be with.

KLEIMAN: Did he show great familiarity with defence problems?

THORNEYCROFT: He had of course great knowledge of defence problems but we had what you might call a working level with McNamara and myself in the Pentagon.

KLEIMAN: Now what was his view on Britain's future role in terms of Anglo-American relationship as against European relationship - did he go into that at all?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I think his view always was that the two ran together. He was very anxious to see Europe included - not as a third force but as an

equal partner in an Atlantic Alliance. This was as you know broadly his view and he was a man who pursued, was to pursue views externally - if I may say so internally, beyond sometimes what could perhaps be immediately achieved.

KLEIMAN: Can you explain that?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, I mean speaking of the outside, if he believed in something, say an Atlantic Alliance, he was prepared to develop that argument, to press it to expand on it, to ask questions about it to see how it could be done, even though many of the facts appeared to make it an unlikely event anywhere in the next few years. Similarly perhaps, and this is not for me to say, inside the United States of America. If he believed in non-segregation or whatever it is or racial equality or whatever it may be and really believed it was the truth that he was after I think he was always willing to press for it, to argue for it and defend it even at the sacrifice of personal and Party popularity. I think this was an aspect of the man, he was a big man in that way, perhaps a bigger Statesman than he was a good politician.

KLEIMAN: Did you feel that he was not sure that this concept of the United Europe and Atlantic partnership was something that would be realised move in that direction or was he optimistic about it?

KLEIMAN: Yes, I don't say that he thought it was just round the corner. He obviously didn't, but

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it was obviously the way his mind was working. He was man to pursue visions and dream dreams you know. I don't say that in a pretentious way, I think it's a necessary adjunct to a great man that he should see these things and he thought about them a great deal, he asked about them and all the things he did were in a sense angled to try to get a little nearer to them.

KLEIMAN: I believe that in Spring of 1961 when Macmillan came to Washington for his first Washington visit, this was before the decision was made to apply to enter the Common Market. I believe that Kennedy said to Macmillan "There is no future for the Anglo-American Special Relationship. There will have to be a special relationship between the United States and a United Europe" and he urged him very strongly at that time to go ahead with the idea that Macmillan had already broached with subsequent decision to try to go into the Common Market. Did you sense any of that point of view when he came over?

THORNEYCROFT: I don't say that he was as specific as that. I don't recall that he used the precise words "there's no future in a special relationship." Indeed

in a way a good deal of our talks with him and with McNamara was concerned with trying to get a rather special relationship in building up research and development in building up research and development in matters of that type. Not that he would have excluded doing it to anyone else. I think a lot of our talks was concerned with building relationships between the United Kingdom and the United States.

KLEIMAN: I have the impression that although he said that to Macmillan yet he and Rusk particularly had a very close feeling for the British and American relationship despite that.

THORNEYCROFT: I am sure he did and indeed I think even if and when he was saying "there isn't so much future in a special relationship" I think he meant in a formalistic special relationship. I think he had a very special relationship. I think he had a very special relationship in a way but I could expand on that when I come onto the Nassau and the relationship with the men he dealt with and there is no doubt he had a special relationship with Harold Macmillan, because he could talk to him in ways in which men in public life in two countries which aren't the same very seldom can talk to one another. I mean they could speak with a frankness to one another and with an intellectual equality which people don't often master.

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KLEIMAN: Did he give you any message to carry back to the Prime Minister.

THORNEYCROFT: No, I don't think so.

KLEIMAN: He had a great sense of humour, as you know. Did he make any remarks that you remember?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I don't remember. He was, he had a great gaiety. You do always remember the gaiety and I remember him in the swimming pool with his daughter, and throwing her to me and asking me to throw her back to him. He was a very gay man, he enjoyed life.

KLEIMAN: Well now did he make any comments about his relations with the French and de Gaulle?

THORNEYCROFT: No, he didn't make comments. He was careful not to make comments. He asked questions. I don't know. We did discuss France I remember. It is always much easier, particularly with people like the President what one said oneself which really isn't so interesting and far harder to remember what he said. This is partly because of his technique which is not to go on the record or is off the record. He was concerned obviously about the French attitude. I know my own view was that very strongly France was there right in the centre of Europe and you

couldn't consider Europe without France and I am reasonably certain that I took the opportunity of saying this to him and he didn't - beyond you could see his interest, he didn't express a view about it.

KLEIMAN: What about the Germans?

THORNEYCROFT: Only to the extent that his mind was very much set on the importance of keeping Germany within Europe and putting all the ideas of war behind us and trying to build Europe and part of the concept of Europe and Atlantic Alliance is to bring West Germany quickly in.

KLEIMAN: Did the question of the Berlin crisis come up and the military measures that have been taken in the pursuing years to strengthen the forces in Europe. Was this discussed at all?

THORNEYCROFT: Not to any great extent with the President.

KLEIMAN: Did you get into the NATO problem and NATO strategy or any of those questions?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I don't think we did discuss NATO in any close way.

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KLEIMAN: Did you discuss weapon production?

THORNEYCROFT: A little bit on the problems of complementarity. We discussed that and its difficulties.

KLEIMAN: What are the problems there?

THORNEYCROFT: The problem is that its very difficult for the Americans to clearly do combined research and development, and certainly very difficult for them to do combined production because it is very difficult in a country the size of America to be dependent on a country other than themselves for the production of any major weapon system.

KLEIMAN: Why, did he go into that?

THORNEYCROFT: I think it is recognised that...

KLEIMAN: A technical or political problem?

THORNEYCROFT: Political and military and sort of psychological. Whereas we can buy

a Phantom from the United States it would be harder for the United States to say "Well, we are not going to waste our time making an aircraft about the same as the TSR 2 but will leave that to the British - concrete upon some other aspect ourselves.

KLEIMAN: In all the defence problems within the alliance between the United States and Britain and on the Continent very often what lies behind some of the disputes and controversies is really a question of who's going to get the order for the product and who's going to make what arms. Did this come up in any of your discussions with President Kennedy and will you tell us again about this problem with the Concord aircraft?

THORNEYCROFT: The Concord, just to finish on that one, which isn't of course a weapon. This is supersonic transport. In connection with the possibilities of cooperation in technical matters in the United States. I told the President that we had tried to do a joint production, in research development production arrangement with the Americans before we approached the French and that when I was Minister of Aviation I had written to Mr. Quesada and put a firm proposition to him. And later I saw his successor Mr. Hallaby and made the same offer. They at that time believed in a Mach. III and we believed in a Mach. II and the proposition was that we should do a joint research project on the Mach. II if either of us decided in the end it would be better to do a Mach. III we would try to give the other the best opportunity of coming along with it, so I recognised if we were going to Mach. III the Americans undoubtedly would take the lead because of their knowledge in heat resistant metals and the rest but we would do our best to cooperate

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in either one we were going to do and we would try and make one of these aircraft and not two, and this broke down because the Americans couldn't bring themselves to split it with any European partner and I took this as an illustration of the difficulties which the Americans were facing - partly political and partly psychological - in doing any genuine production with the Europeans.

KLEIMAN: Why is that?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, there are great political pressures in the United States of America and we say the same ourselves, we are all under these pressures to some extent. But they are perhaps particularly powerful in the U.S.A.

KLEIMAN: To get the Arms orders?

THORNEYCROFT: To get the orders. I mean, it would mean giving 50% of the work on

a supersonic transport out of America.

KLEIMAN: When was this discussion. Do you recall?

THORNEYCROFT: I am talking about when I was in Newport. The proposal would have been about - when did I go to the Ministry of Aviation - '60.

KLEIMAN: You went there in July of '60.

THORNEYCROFT: July '60.

KLEIMAN: And when did you make the first approach to the French on this?

THORNEYCROFT: There had been some talks with the French before but the firm proposal was later. The first proposal to the Americans must have been in about either the end of '60 or the beginning of '61, but it was only after that that we really tied things up with the French.

KLEIMAN: When you saw Mr. Hallaby you had already gone to the French?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, but we hadn't got anywhere near an agreement with the French.

KLEIMAN: So the question was still open?

THORNEYCROFT: Oh, yes it was still open and we could have done a tripartite deal.

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KLEIMAN: Was this suggested at any point?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I didn't suggest. It wasn't for me to suggest what the French should do but had put the proposition that we should do it with the Americans.

KLEIMAN: And what was Kennedy's reaction?

THORNEYCROFT: Kennedy's spot reaction was that it is a pity they hadn't gone in with us. He couldn't do it then; it was over the dam.

KLEIMAN: Was it primarily who was going to get the orders, or was there also the question of American secret information that they were not prepared to share it with other countries?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, I think the Americans at that time had two things in mind. One

was that they wanted to go straight to Mach. III and they wanted to do this in the main because I think they thought the Russians would do it and they didn't want to be dubbed as slow coaches plodding along at Mach. II while the Russians could go at Mk. III. I think this was very much in their mind, and the other was that in Mk. III at that time they would be able to deal with a supersonic transport really on the back of a supersonic bomber.

KLEIMAN: This was tied in with the Hustler?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes and then that programme slipped a bit and problems got bigger and bigger, though it's technically possible to go to Mk. III to try and use a transport for carrying people about at what then and still is about the speed record of an aircraft that actually takes from land.

KLEIMAN: Do you think it is still possible to merge the two projects or is that over the dam?

THORNEYCROFT: No, we are already cutting metal on the Mach. II so with that one my Government will go ahead. I would still not rule out the possibilities beyond, these things are getting more difficult and more and more complex. The sensible thing here would be for the Americans to buy the Mk. II Concord and to do a joint project with the French ourselves and the Americans to do its successor Mk. III. Perhaps we would provide the engines, somebody else would provide the electronic equipment, somebody else the air frame, put it anyway you like. We would find a way and we would have one of these aircraft in the West and this would make a lot of difference.

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KLEIMAN: Do you recall any quotations of Kennedy's about this general subject?

THORNEYCROFT: He was keen to get co-operation, there is no doubt about it and he was a very big man I mean he looked beyond the area of his own ambition and party and indeed his own country. You know he was looking at things on a world scale and he was anxious to overcome some of these inherent difficulties that all countries have in co-operative arrangements of that category.

KLEIMAN: Did he think Franco-British cooperation on this project was a good thing or not?

THORNEYCROFT: I think he would have liked to have seen it. I think in a way he approached these things like any of us would have approached them. It was a good thing in principle. Of course he wasn't as familiar as McNamara with the industrialists and the pressures that build up on the production side.

KLEIMAN: Were there any other subjects that you went into with him in Newport? Well then shall we go on to Nassau? Did you have any private conversations with him at Nassau or were these business meetings?

THORNEYCROFT: Well no, I was really there as one of the Prime Minister's advisers. I think the main thing that struck me about Nassau, leaving aside the Skybolt issue and concentrating in the mass on the President himself, the real thing that struck me was this technique of his, and the relationship between these two men and countries. Whether you could call it a special relationship or not I don't know but what his technique was - which was unique really was to ask the English some damned awful questions and make them answer it in front of the Americans and then turn to the Americans and cross-examine them up hill and down dale and make them answer in front of the English. This was a method which I had never seen adopted between two foreign countries in my life and it was the most refreshing thing I have ever seen.

KLEIMAN: In a room containing, say, how many people?

THORNEYCROFT: In a room containing ten or twelve people, but the top people, I mean McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, the British Ambassador to America, the British Minister of Defence, and he would simply turn to one, any one of them, he didn't mind a bit which nation they belonged to and ask the question that he had in mind and really in a way which demanded that he should have some form of answer and the result was instead of as normally in negotiations

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between foreign countries people fumble in their pockets and produce some bit of paper which they then read out which has been carefully prepared, instead everybody then starts to think things out and really probe the problems.

KLEIMAN: Do you remember one of the most startling questions you heard?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, I remember one question when he knew that a lot of my Advisers thought Skybolt a wonderful weapon. He asked -- why don't you buy it, why don't you go ahead with it. We will go in it with you. McNamara says if you want to do this thing why don't you go ahead with it.

KLEIMAN: That's the 50/50 proposal?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, that's the 50/50 proposal - if you are telling me that this is a good thing that we are dropping why don't you go ahead with it.

KLEIMAN: And what did you reply?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, I replied that Mr. McNamara was one of the best businessmen in the United States and that he just sold these shares. I didn't think it was the moment to buy them. No, it was that sort of conversation. You know it was the real sort of searching for the truth that he had in his mind. He appeared to be really interested whatever the eventual decision was going to be. He had a great feeling about it and he really wanted to know the truth about something.

KLEIMAN: Can you remember another question of this kind?

THORNEYCROFT: I can't remember, they are certainly difficult to remember these things but I mean it was all round the hat, he didn't just concentrate on the English, and he didn't in my judgment hesitate to over-rule anybody. You know in the meeting or in his final decisions.

KLEIMAN: Can you recall a specific instance?

THORNEYCROFT: I am not talking about individual questions but whenever he came to decisions in my judgment he had a lot of advice, he liked a lot of advice really, sometimes from this end it seemed as if he had too much advice. It must have been very exhausting getting it, but he never committed himself to any of them on the way. You know he was asking these questions of them all the time and in the last resort I suppose it was the same with Cuba.

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He made up his own mind but those who were associated with him, speaking for myself, one had the impression that here was a man at any rate who really had tried to find out, you know he had really wanted to know what the right answer was. Very often you get the impression that men are reading a brief - they think they have been told what's in the interest of their country or their Party and I don't say he ignored that at all. He was a very loyal American and all that, but he did want to know the truth about things.

KLEIMAN: You mean that you had a feeling that he didn't have a definite decision when he went into the negotiations and that he made up his mind in the course of it?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, I did. I got that impression very much. I got the impression that he was a man who kept a fairly flexible position when he went into negotiations. He liked to feel his way round, he liked to get a mass of advice and he liked to be able to cross-examine the best advisers that there were about of any country that was available - and then he made up his mind. This was the impression he gave at any rate. He was cross-examining. I do remember him cross-examining. I mean some of

the Americans aren't too keen on the British Independent deterrent and he was quite prepared to cross-examine the Americans in front of the English on just why they thought the British would rely on everybody else except themselves. He was quite prepared to do that.

KLEIMAN: This all came out in the open?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, it all came out in the open.

KLEIMAN: And what was the argument? Who was this- was this McNamara?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I can't remember which one he was but it was quite open and frank and they spoke the Prime Minister and the President, speaking very frankly to one another. I remember the Prime Minister, one moment he looked as if we couldn't come to an agreement.

KLEIMAN: What was the issue at this point?

THORNEYCROFT: The issue was, whether we would, if Skybolt was abandoned, get Polaris on broadly the same terms. That is to say whether we could get it on terms that we were free to use it. The fact was that when McNamara had come over to see me, he had

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offered me everything except Polaris and Polaris was the only thing that was any damn good. I mean it was no good offering us defence weapons or weapons clearly not under our control. His instructions were to offer everything except Polaris. It was obvious that we couldn't take the others. We went to Nassau and had to fight for Polaris in the full glare of Publicity. This did a good deal of harm in my judgment to Anglo-American relations.

KLEIMAN: I thought Polaris had been discussed with McNamara?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, but refused.

KLEIMAN: Did you mean that he refused it?

THORNEYCROFT: Well when I say that he refused it, he hadn't been put in a position to offer it. He came over with a lot of clubs in the golf bag but not that one.

KLEIMAN: Well, I had the impression that you were still focused on Skybolt and he was expecting a firm proposal on Polaris which didn't come and finally he raised the Polaris question?

THORNEYCROFT: No, that's not so. When this thing first broke down and he spoke to me on the telephone I asked him at once and specifically about Polaris and our Ambassador asked him specifically about Polaris and our instructions from here, and so when he came over here he came without Polaris and there is no doubt there was a great feeling in the United States, they didn't want us to have Polaris because this was a really effective independent deterrent. The great argument at Nassau was whether we should get it or we shouldn't and there is no doubt at Nassau that we went into these negotiations with the President having received a tremendous lot of advice that we shouldn't have sold Polaris for a variety of reasons.

KLEIMAN: Did you discuss the possibilities which would have flowed from *not* getting Polaris?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, those possibilities were run over but dismissed by us as not being worth pursuing and so this was a very great issue because if we hadn't had Polaris history might have been a bit different. It might have been better in some ways, I don't know. We would have returned then having broken with the United States on any cooperation in this particular field. The Skybolt would have collapsed and we would be back and had to cooperate in manufacture with someone else or do it ourselves.

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KLEIMAN: Was this discussed around the table?

THORNEYCROFT: Very much so.

KLEIMAN: How did this fit in with the conversation?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, I remember the Prime Minister saying "Well, Mr. President we have had a long and honourable road together and if we have now reached a point where we can't go forward, let us part with honour. Don't let us fudge up some compromise agreement and then everybody will have a different interpretation about it afterwards.

Let's part with honour and go our ways. As far as we are concerned we will honour our agreement with you in the letter and the spirit. Your submarines may stay in the Holy Loch, we shall honour our obligations to you there, but we will not go along with an agreement that means absolutely nothing. I remember this very well. There were two very big men in that room I may add. It was one of the best negotiations I have ever listened to.

KLEIMAN: This was on the issue of withdrawal?

THORNEYCROFT: The issue was either they were going to cooperate with us in a weapon of the calibre of Skybolt or Polaris in which we could use in

our own defences and as a last resort on our own authority or not at all. It would be better to leave and go our own way and do the best we can, perhaps with an inferior weapon but on our own.

KLEIMAN: With others?

THORNEYCROFT: With others perhaps.

KLEIMAN: How far was this discussed?

THORNEYCROFT: Well to some extent this possibility was mentioned but of course in effect it didn't become so relevant because in effect we were given Polaris on very favourable terms and with the right to use it in our own defence. For us it was a wonderful agreement.

KLEIMAN: Would it have been a better agreement if the President had said "Well, I think it might be better if you did do this with France?"

THORNEYCROFT: Well history might have been different. I don't say that I would have despaired if this was so. There were great advantages in that, but it would have been the end of a very long and wonderful road together. The attractions of Polaris to us are very great indeed.

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I mean we got an enormous sum out of research and development in effect for free. We got the best weapon in the world in that particular sphere available to us and available on terms which met all our requirements. It would be very difficult to turn that down if it was available.

KLEIMAN: But you would probably be in the Common Market still if you had?

THORNEYCROFT: I don't know.

KLEIMAN: Was this your view at the time?

THORNEYCROFT: No, I don't think so. The problem of the Common Market was wider and deeper than that. I think there is no doubt that if we could cooperate with the French - leave Polaris aside, over the whole of the defence field this would help in getting Britain into Europe and I think not now but after these elections are over if the Parties and men are still there and want it to happen, somebody has got to think about that.

KLEIMAN: Do you think it is still possible?

THORNEYCROFT: I think it is not only possible, but in the longer term inevitable.

KLEIMAN: Do you think de Gaulle himself would be prepared to accept this?

THORNEYCROFT: I don't know. I think that if an American Government were prepared to say "look we want you to join together and we recognise that you must join together in many things beside trade. This will involve your cooperation in foreign policy and in defence including nuclear matters" this would affect the issue.

KLEIMAN: Do you yourself consider that this approach could advance the cause of European unity?

THORNEYCROFT: If they were to say that, it would be the biggest advance in unity in Europe. I think at the same time if they were to say it, it would be reasonable to say to the French who hold a crucial position in all this and to the Europeans that if you are going to do that play fair with it. Work out a means whereby you join with us in joint targeting and planning, make it a real alliance.

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KLEIMAN: It would have to be a Tripartite negotiation?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes.

KLEIMAN: With the French, British and Americans?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, I think it would in the final analysis. Though it could be started if America gave us the "go ahead" to try and negotiate ourselves with the French. I think this is a problem in abeyance.

KLEIMAN: You could still make a deal with the French to get into the Common Market? With de Gaulle while he is still in power?

THORNEYCROFT: I wouldn't rule it out.

KLEIMAN: Then to come back to Nassau. If this had been the decision at Nassau to proceed that way do you think de Gaulle would still have vetoed British entry into the Common Market?

THORNEYCROFT: I don't think it would have been possible at that time even with Kennedy to have got to a point where we would have had a sufficient

freedom in the nuclear world to be able to negotiate something with the French. I think the French were deeply suspicious of the American tie, for psychological reasons, a strange mixture of reasons and I don't think it would have been possible to get very much further and I don't think it was absolutely decisive on the Common Market in this particular arrangement. After all the French were offered Polaris on precisely the same terms. It would have been very valuable to them at that stage. They are terribly suspicious of any American interest.

KLEIMAN: Some of the Americans have the impression that you really would have preferred not to have the Polaris deal and to have made the proposal with France. Your own views?

THORNEYCROFT: The British views?

KLEIMAN: No, no, your personal views as distinct from those of say the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary. You would have preferred to have gone the European route rather than the American route?

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THORNEYCROFT: My task was to negotiate for Polaris but I have never regarded them as wholly inconsistent. I mean there is nothing to prevent even today an American Government saying to the British "We want you to go in with the French and we will come to an arrangement. If we have some very highly sensitive information about the future we may not wish to share it with you both or either of you, but go ahead, make a deal, go and help them. Go ahead and help them make their weapon it won't be as good as Polaris, but make it as a second string only. Try and get an arrangement whereby you share the responsibility of targeting, planning and try to get them to work it in as far as you can into NATO, but go and help them." I mean this would be a tremendous advantage, and it isn't inconsistent with us doing a weapon with the United States at all.

KLEIMAN: I don't think so either. Did this come up in the discussions at Nassau?

THORNEYCROFT: There was a limit to the number of problems which you can face and Nassau was strictly limited to a really quite simple issue. If the Americans were to decide not to go ahead with Skybolt which they were entitled to do, I mean under their arrangements. They could say that they didn't wish to proceed. Where did you go from there as far as deals with Americans were concerned. It was an important decision because in the field of complementarity, sharing things with another country, the biggest thing we have shared was Skybolt. Because the whole future of interdependence turned on this and therefore we were concerned not with the breakdown of just on weapon but with the whole future of Anglo-American relations and the question

therefore is were they going to break on that and put nothing in its place or were they going to say “Well, look technically, we can’t go ahead with this, it doesn’t make much sense but we will put in something as good and you can have it broadly on the same terms. This is what eventually they did.

KLEIMAN: I understand that the Prime Minister actually said that really the whole future of Anglo-American turns on this. What was Kennedy’s response when this was said to him?

THORNEYCROFT: Well, Kennedy’s eventual response was to provide us with Polaris - there was no doubt about it. I think that Kennedy was very clear in his mind about the importance to Anglo-American relations and the effect on the future of the alliance as far as we were concerned.

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KLEIMAN: Do you recall any of Mr. Kennedy’s remarks on this issue of whether the Anglo-American Alliance could continue without this deal? I believe this was the turning point actually of the Conference as from the American point of view?

THORNEYCROFT: Oh yes, I think it was. It didn’t turn on the technicalities, it turned on the politics as to whether it would really be possible to break with the English on a project of this kind, to put nothing comparable in its place and expect an Anglo-American Alliance to go on and it's obvious that the view which Jack Kennedy eventually took was that it wasn’t.

KLEIMAN: Was there a discussion on this aspect that took place between the two sides?

THORNEYCROFT: Yes, rather on the lines I have told you about and this was, I think, the turning point, when the Prime Minister was saying the things I have described.

KLEIMAN: Were you able to see where the President stood or were the different positions coming from the American Delegation?

THORNEYCROFT: I had the impression throughout that the President was disposed to be helpful if he possibly could. He realised more clearly than most the political implications of cancelling Skybolt and its implications on the Anglo-American alliance.

KLEIMAN: Wasn’t there a question asked at one time, didn’t the President ask

how this would affect your negotiations to get into the Common Market?

THORNEYCROFT: Not the question as to what effect it might have on the Europeans, but the general view was that if we were offered Polaris it really didn't alter the situation in the slightest.... one was a missile from under the sea and the other from the air, but I mean it was still an American missile.

KLEIMAN: Was it the President himself who raised this question or somebody else on the American side?

THORNEYCROFT: I think Rusk raised it.

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KLEIMAN: Rusk wasn't there.

THORNEYCROFT: No you are quite right. It was the State Department, probably Ball.

KLEIMAN: Was the central issue whether Britain was to get Polaris or whether Polaris was to be irrevocably committed to NATO?

THORNEYCROFT: It was whether we should have Polaris but we weren't interested to have Polaris unless we could get it free of ties as we got Skybolt.

KLEIMAN: How much of the conference was devoted to finding out that you could have Polaris and how much to the conditions under which you could have it?

THORNEYCROFT: The main issue was whether we were to buy Polaris. I had suggested already in London to McNamara that there was no reason why weapons shouldn't be assigned to NATO provided people had the freedom to use these in the last resort....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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