

Maxwell D. Taylor Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 6/21/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Maxwell D. Taylor (1901-1987) served as General of the U.S. Army; Military Representative of the President (1961-1962); Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962-1964); Ambassador to Vietnam (1964-1965); Special Consultant to the President (1965-1969). In this interview Taylor discusses the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vienna Summit, Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, Multilateral force and military trends during the Kennedy Administration among other topics.

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Maxwell D. Taylor
MAXWELL D. TAYLOR

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Maxwell D. Taylor – JFK #3

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Oral History Interview

with

Maxwell D. Taylor

June 21, 1964
Fort Myer, Virginia

By Elspeth Rostow

For the John F. Kennedy Library

ROSTOW: General Taylor, on October 1, 1962, you took command as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Cuban Missile Crisis broke about two weeks later – I'm suggesting no relationship between these two events. Did you find that your reactions and recommendations to the President were different from one side of the river than they might have been had you still been based on the other?

TAYLOR: I might say that I moved from the White House to the Pentagon with some misgivings. At first I hated the thought of leaving the immediate presence of President Kennedy. I had learned to appreciate the value of propinquity and the tremendous gain of having a direct access to the President and his thinking on the many important governmental subjects with which I had been involved. I knew it was inevitable that the closest of contacts would change once I found myself at the desk of the Chairman in the Pentagon. Also, I must say I was not entirely sure how my relations would be with Secretary McNamara. I had gotten to know and admire him during my year and a quarter at the White House, but I knew that he had been a very hard taskmaster for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the armed services. Hence, there was a real question as to how satisfactory I was going to find my work in the new assignment.

It did not take me very long to find out that my first concern – namely loss of direct contact with the President – was indeed inevitable. The tasks of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, as of all the Chiefs of Staff, runs from morning to night, and

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a tremendous amount of involvement in documents and papers which can not be put aside or ignored. Hence there is little mobility, so to speak, on the part of the incumbent to roam about Washington and maintain that feeling of contact which I did have when I was more or less a lone wolf in the White House era. And of course, I didn't see the President on a day-to-day basis as in the past.

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On the second score, my problems with Secretary McNamara fortunately did not arise and have not arisen. But I soon found that to serve him as an effective Chairman was indeed a full-time job seven days a week.

ROSTOW: Is there anything from the week of October 15th which might illuminate this point as to the difference of attitude?

TAYLOR: No, I don't believe so because, the week of October 15th was of course unusual in many respects, and my general comments which I have just given perhaps did not exactly apply to this period. As soon as the Cuban Missile Crisis was clearly on, as was the case at the end of the day on October 15, then the conferences with the President were virtually around the clock. Very shortly thereafter, as you know, the Executive Committee was set up of which the Chairman was a member and it was through meetings of this Executive Committee with the President that most of the decisions affecting the Cuban Crisis were taken. In this period of the Cuban Crisis I was really closer to the President than ever again during my tenure of office as Chairman.

ROSTOW: May I conclude from this that the Executive Committee was improvised during this period?

TAYLOR: I think it was the President giving some formality to a method of consultation of advisors which had grown up in the past. I think we have mentioned in previous discussions the obvious fact that the President did not like the National Security Council per se as a forum for serious discussions. It was just too large and did not conform to his style. So, most important discussions which I know anything about usually took place in his office with only those senior advisors who had direct concern with the matter. When Cuba came, the question then was how to steer the actions of government in this critical period. The President took the rather intermediate course of boiling down, so to speak, the Security Council, leaving off one or perhaps more of the regular attendees, and putting one or more additional on who represented this informal advisory group which had worked with him through the past two and a half years. He really was codifying and formalizing his own way of proceeding, at the same time meeting the criticism which one heard in some quarters that he was neglecting the National Security Council. The title given to this group was Executive Committee to the National Security Council so that he was at least tipping his hat to that statutory body.

ROSTOW: How did the Executive Committee operate? Was it as informal as you in a

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sense are suggesting?

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TAYLOR: Well, the leadership was generally as it should have been Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara. Secretary McNamara in particular was very jealous of the President's time, and constantly urged on all of us the need for preparing our homework before we ever saw the President. I will say we all made a conscientious effort to have preliminary meetings and then go to the President with something relatively agreed to present. The real problem was John F. Kennedy who wouldn't sit still for all this to take place. He very frequently precipitated these discussions before his advisers were ready to talk.

ROSTOW: Am I right in remembering that you had the problem of trying to disguise your sessions and try to appear in some way so that the press wouldn't know your presence?

TAYLOR: Yes, that was always the case. One had to try to carry water on both shoulders. First, the press and the public should know that the Government was taking the situation very seriously; secondly, we wanted to make clear we were not being stampeded, nor did we feel that the situation was so tragic that we should man the battlements. So in between those two extremes we tried to adjust our appearances and the releases which were made available to the press.

ROSTOW: The press, of course, was busy interpreting both during and after the missile crisis the views within the Government, and there was a good deal of rather colorful accounts of what went on in the Executive Committee. How did you view these accounts?

TAYLOR: Well, I always view with concern any accurate leak of events inside as high a consultative body as the Executive Committee. Most of the press reports were speculative, and I don't believe could be traced to deliberate leaking on the part of members of the Committee. There was one unexplained and highly worrisome leak, however, which involved, as you recall, the opinions of Adlai Stevenson.

ROSTOW: I do indeed. This came afterwards in the *Post*, I think. Nearly a month.

TAYLOR: I've forgotten the exact relation in time but presumably it related to discussions which were very much a part of the Cuban Crisis.

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ROSTOW: Aside from the opinions stated in that – I believe it was Stewart Alsop and then Charlie Bartlett – article which I believe you were referring to, were there

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differences within the Committee which had to be adjusted before you could take a position?

TAYLOR: Oh yes, very much so. The broad difference of the hawks and the doves was present. Generally, that distinction was not as commonly interpreted, namely those who wanted to invade Cuba versus those who didn't. I heard no one during the discussions ever suggest that it was a desirable thing to invade Cuba. The hawks with whom I was associated were most concerned about the need to destroy the strategic missiles before they could be hidden. I think the most pressing issue and, in fact, the hardest debate occurred prior to the President's speech of October 22nd. The question was whether, having identified the missiles – having seen where they were, and how clearly vulnerable to destruction by air – we dared indicate to either Khrushchev or to Castro our knowledge of the situation. Would that not lead to their being immediately dispersed or hidden so that we couldn't possibly use military means to destroy this threat which looked like a very real thing? I happened to be a hawk on that side of the case. Bobby Kennedy, who had been a hawk constantly, took a very strong position against any attack on these missiles without some prior notification. He said we could not allow the United States to become involved in a Pearl Harbor type attack. In retrospect I am sure that he was right; however, there was a great risk in that October 22nd speech, and I got up the next morning fully prepared to have evidence presented that the missiles had been dispersed and we had lost our target.

ROSTOW: You mentioned the speech – was this prepared within the Committee, or was his solely the President's responsibility?

TAYLOR: It was prepared, of course, exclusively for the President. He was the ultimate judge. Several of us had a chance to look at it and make some suggestions. I looked at it, but I don't recall making any substantive comments.

ROSTOW: In respect to the speech, did you in advance – you indicated one of your worries – looking back at it would you guess that a quiet, bloodless revolution would have been easily achieved?

TAYLOR: No, I would no. It was hard for me to believe – before these events became history – that Khrushchev would walk away without taking some face-saving action. Of course, I did not know

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then and don't know now how he ever allowed himself to get into this position. But having got there, it seemed very hard for me to believe that he would not put up a better show than he did before falling back. On the other hand, I have never had any great concern over World War III arising from this or over our ability by military means if military means were required, to eject Khrushchev from Cuba. He was doing this right in our front yard; all the advantages of geography were in our favor; all military advantages were on our side. Hence

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the ultimate outcome if we used our resources wisely and effectively seemed to be quite clear.

ROSTOW: Then within the Committee the issue of nuclear war certainly was discussed. Was there some...?

TAYLOR: Very much so, and I would say that many members took a more serious view than I did of that possibility. In all military logic I couldn't see how that would be the case. On the other hand, I could well share the view that Berlin might be severely squeezed in retaliation for the actions in Cuba.

ROSTOW: As a kind of footnote to this, someone was suggesting – a Kremlinologist of some repute – that the Russians take our elections more seriously than we do, that they timed this for the mid-term elections thinking that we would be disrupted as perhaps Khrushchev thought we had been at the time he was here in 1960. Do you think there is anything in this?

TAYLOR: Well, I'm not a Kremlinologist; so I really wouldn't pass judgment on that. Certainly the motivation of Khrushchev and his advisors remains very obscure.

ROSTOW: Well, at the time the President gave his speech, in one sense the determination was taken which was raised, if I'm correct in recalling it, in the meeting the President had with Khrushchev in Vienna, when as it were, the seriousness, the gravity of the situation, was revealed. Did the President have any sense that if we met the missile crisis that we might have really gone around a significant turning point? Did he take it as a test of our intent?

TAYLOR: I have no doubt that the Vienna conference between Khrushchev and the President had a lasting effect on the latter – probably on the former also – I'd be very much interested to know what Khrushchev's impression was. But the effect on President Kennedy was to make him realize or recognize the toughness and the ruthlessness

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of his opponent. So that when this challenge came up, I'm sure that his Vienna experience was a strengthening force. He knew what kind of fellow was at the other end of that cable line, thus he was resolved not to do anything which would encourage Khrushchev to believe that he could or would gain through this kind of behavior.

ROSTOW: It seems that the President's performance after Vienna was on a quite different plane in respect to Russia. Do you regard this, looking back, as a...

TAYLOR: As you recall, he returned in a very somber state of mind. He was very much

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impressed with his problem. For the first time he had come face to face with the man that was his principal opponent, and he saw to a degree he hadn't before really what he was up against.

ROSTOW: In view of all this, do you recall his reaction when the news came in that the first ship had turned around?

TAYLOR: I don't recall his – I was too busy with my own.

ROSTOW: What was your own?

TAYLOR: Well, I would say that I have only experienced that feeling in actual military combat where day after day you are exchanging blows with a fellow and hurting him as much as you can, and he is hurting you, and then suddenly, you hit and he's not there, you find he is moving away from you. There is a tremendous feeling of relief and joy over the outcome. I think that we all had that feeling on that particular day.

ROSTOW: If you had the period between October 15th and 29th to do over again, would you change any of the American action?

TAYLOR: If we had the knowledge then that we have now, I think we would probably ask more of Khrushchev. We thought we were asking at the top level of demand when we asked him to get these strategic weapons out saying we would go to any recourse to get them out. I think we could probably even have got more had we insisted on the withdrawal of all his ground forces at the same time. However, again if you reflect on the results of the recent months, we are indeed getting that withdrawal without the added tension which would have been inherent in raising our demands at that particular time. So I suspect

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that historians, when they have a full view of this episode, will have to concede that the US Government performed quite well. Probably pretty near par for the course.

ROSTOW: I happen to be attached to a historian whose view is that if all goes well, this may prove to be the Gettysburg of the Cold War. Do you think there is anything to this?

TAYLOR: Depends on from which side you view the battle.

ROSTOW: That's true. I forgot I shouldn't raise that question here. Well, this is a northerner speaking.

TAYLOR: I think that may well be a fair analogy.

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ROSTOW: Did the political and psychological subtlety and complexity of the missile crisis pose any problems for the Joint Chiefs of Staff that we haven't gone into?

TAYLOR: Well, of course, we had many. Just as the Executive Committee was a forum of debate, I can assure the Joint Chiefs of Staff was also another forum, and sometimes the debate was even sharper. Inevitably, military men such as a Chief – particularly since the other Chiefs did not have the advantage of the day-to-day immersion in the total problem of Government – inevitably their tendency is to seek clean all-military solutions to problems. I can assure you that if I was classified as a hawk in the arena of the Executive Committee, I was definitely viewed as a dove in the arena of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There were several grounds for this criticism. One was the impatience of some of my colleagues over pettifogging ways of approaching these problems rather than standing back and striking them squarely in the middle and thereby destroying the problems by military means. It was often difficult to explain to them why we were so "timid" in our actions in the Executive Committee. Apart from the charge of being unduly cautious and timid with the use of our military resources as compared with those available to Khrushchev, there was the charge of over-political control of military actions. President Kennedy, very rightly in my judgment, wanted to know where every ship was every morning and to find out just what instructions went to every ship's captain. This appeared to my naval colleagues as being unpardonable intervention in the execution of purely military movements. The argument I made, and I believe correctly, was that this was not really a military situation, but a political situation; it

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just happened that the pawn being used by the government were military toys. Consequently, those sound military principles which dictate that a government give a clear mission to the military commander and leave to him the way that he execute that mission were not necessarily sound ground rules and didn't apply to this particular game. This was political chess and those ships were involved in that kind of game and very properly directed by the master player, namely the President of the United States. The arguments in the Joint Chiefs of Staff were generally in those two fields; over-timidity in the use of military resources; over-control in the actual employment of military resources once the decision was taken.

ROSTOW: In a sense saying the White House turned into a kind of Command Post must have been an unusual development for the Chiefs to observe.

TAYLOR: Indeed it was. It was interesting how we made decisions. The recommendation was made in the Cabinet Room by the Executive Committee, the President took it, he said yes, turned to Bob McNamara who turned to me, and I walked out to the next room and picked up a telephone, called over to the Joint Chiefs' room where they were generally in session, transmitting the orders that went out to the field. This type of command had never been anticipated in any previous studies, but it turned out to be a natural development of the way the President had been operating in time of peace.

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ROSTOW: Do you recall anything from this week that lightened it? As a layman from the outside looking back, it seemed a pretty tense period. Do you remember any moments when that tension was relieved?

TAYLOR: Well, I had private problems because I was hosting two dinners in a row, one on October 15th and one on October 16th. Among the guests on October 15th were Ros Gilpatric, Alex Johnson, General Carroll, the head of DIA, and General Carter from CIA. It was in the cocktail hour that General Carroll edged over to me and whispered that he thought they had definite photography now showing the presence of missiles in Cuba. So we all went about whispering to each other in the corners of the sun porch at my quarters. That was the first time that these gentlemen I mentioned heard that we were right on the edge of this crisis. The next night I had two guests who included the British Ambassador and others whom I had to prevent from sensing the crisis we had faced in the course of the day.

ROSTOW: What have we failed to cover about the missile crisis?

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TAYLOR: I think we have done just about all we should except I would like to mention one very pleasant event that took place, namely the visit of the President to all the armed forces following the termination of the Cuban crisis. This event took place on the 26th of November. Up to that time, we still had all our forces massed – air, army, marine, naval forces – all concentrated in the southeastern part of the United States. By the 16th of November it was clear that we could safely start breaking up this concentration, but before doing so, I urged on the President a visit to the field so he could see some of his armed forces and also receive an impression of what his orders had generated. We took the entire day visiting all the principal areas in Florida, ending up at Key West at the end of a long day. I think it was a very impressive day for the President – certainly it was a great day for the Armed Forces who saw their Commander-in-Chief in the field under these circumstances. He was briefed by officers of various ranks and responsibilities so that he had the feel of the kind of men to whom he had turned over the military execution of this great project. I think he returned tremendously reassured with what he had seen. He mentioned to me that he never had pictured the vastness of the military preparations which had been generated.

ROSTOW: Turning away from the missile crisis, another subject we obviously should spend some time with is the Limited Test Ban Treaty. What was the calculus of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on atmospheric test ban?

TAYLOR: The Joint Chiefs always have grave difficulties in dealing with disarmament questions, and questions related thereto such as the Test Ban Treaty. Because of the very nature of the Joint Chiefs of Staff function in the government, and the background of the individuals making up the Joint Chiefs, they have no confidence basically in disarmament as

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a means for relaxing world tension. They don't think that peace can really be achieved through the kind of agreement we now talk about. Furthermore, they always make the assumption, and I believe a correct one, that the Soviets are very likely, almost certain, to cheat if they have an opportunity. Hence, any agreement in this field should be based upon some sound method of verification. I really think that if verification can be assured, the Joint Chiefs will be relatively reasonable in the position they take. However, their basic point of departure is that verification must be virtually complete yet by the terms of most of our discussion that completeness is not present.

Prior to the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the Chiefs often had put themselves on record as being opposed to the so-called comprehensive test ban. I told the President in discussion that the possibility of

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getting the Chiefs' concurrence to a comprehensive test ban treaty was nil. I personally could not join in supporting a comprehensive test ban treaty because of the clear danger of the undetected, underground testing, which we ourselves knew to be very effective. However, on the limited test ban treaty, I felt quite different and I would undertake to see if the Chiefs would not take an affirmative position. We Chiefs watched the negotiations; we saw Averell Harriman go to Europe for these discussions with considerable concern because we didn't feel that our own Government had really thought the matter all the way through. We certainly knew that we had not been consulted nor given an opportunity to comment on numerous features of this limited test ban treaty prior to Mr. Harriman going to Moscow for the negotiations. We found also in the exchange of cables back and forth on the various points as they were being developed in the negotiations, that it was quite difficult for the Chiefs to get what they felt were their views adequately incorporated in the treaty. I mentioned this to the President, and told him that I knew there was going to be difficulty from the Chiefs when the final draft paper came for consideration prior to the submission to the Senate. He assured me that the Chiefs would have their full day in court, once that paper became available, and not to be so concerned about the point-by-point development which was going on in Moscow. Well, in due course, the draft treaty was initialed, brought back to Washington and placed before the Chiefs.

I don't know of a harder subject upon which to get agreement. Generally speaking, as Chairman, I don't feel it is my duty to get unanimity. I think I made that point in previous discussions. The main thing is to get to the SecDef and the President an adequate military appreciation of the pros and cons of the subject so that they can make the final decision. The test ban treaty was obviously quite a different thing, however, Anyone could anticipate that if the Joint Chiefs did not approve it, or if they split on it, it would be a very serious blow to the proponents of the test ban treaty in defending it before Congress. Looking back on it, and the very sharp cross examination which we received in Congress, I am sure that had we divided on it, the chances of the test ban treaty passing would have been poor, very poor, indeed. We all recognized that we had a real responsibility and tried to get agreement in conscience, if we could. As you know, the outcome was endorsement of the treaty, qualified, and I think properly so, by the four safeguards which the Chiefs indicated as being essential to the secure implementation of this kind of treaty. I think in the end we had a very strong and sound case,

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one adequate to support the Administration's position in advancing the treaty, and one adequate for the Chiefs to convince Congress that if our safeguards were accepted, the entire government could accept the treaty since our interests were adequately protected.

ROSTOW: As a footnote, did you ever really enjoy testifying before Congress, or is this something you regard as a chore?

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TAYLOR: Well, I guess I did. Of course, it's a heavy burden on all senior officials in this government, the task of going up to testify before Congress. For us military people it is particularly so, because we have to repeat virtually everything before four different committees – two Senate committees and two House committees. Of course, there are many heterogeneous subjects on which we are called to testify, but we always have at least these four committees before which to testify regularly. I have always felt that it was inevitable, however, under our system of Government, that our military authorities be exposed to this kind of cross examination. I don't think that without the responsible Cabinet form of government, it is sound not to have the military voice speaking direct to Congress. Furthermore, our Congressmen would never accept the civilian secretaries alone speaking for the military. So I think in spite of the hard work, and the frequently rather disagreeable sessions to which the military leaders are exposed, I think the requirement is there, and I would not be the one to suggest changing it. Also, I think there is the certain pleasure in meeting the obvious desire of these many conscientious Congressmen to understand the military problems. Most of them are first-class citizens who take their duty very seriously and really want to know. Hence, that kind of curiosity certainly should be satisfied. On the other hand, every committee has at least one or two characters on it with whom it is very unpleasant to deal. However, that is part of the over-all business and has to be accepted, like the weather.

ROSTOW: In time they become Chairman, that's the only discouraging...

TAYLOR: Yes, that has happened.

ROSTOW: On the limited test ban what was the President's attitude? Did he regard this as a typical achievement?

TAYLOR: He regarded it as a very important achievement, one to which he attached tremendous personal importance feeling that beyond the cold text of the treaty it represented the opening of a door. I'm sure in that respect he was right.

ROSTOW: Would this be your view, looking back?

TAYLOR: It has had even greater importance in the psychological-political area than I thought at the time. It became very hard for us military people to list the pros and cons. You could

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make a long list of cons against it which obliged you to say that from a military point of view it was probably more disadvantageous than advantageous. But we could also recognize that from a psychological-political point of view the treaty was quite important. We talked to the Secretary of State and asked him to tell us how important he thought that it was. I took the Chiefs over to the President and had him personally tell all the Chiefs the importance he attached to it. It was those voices – the President and the Secretary of State – that outweighed the very serious military objections which we could list without any great trouble at all. This was one time, I would say, when the Chiefs took a position on a subject of great military importance based largely or at least to a significant degree, influenced by non-military factors.

ROSTOW: You mentioned taking the Chiefs into see the President. Was he effective as an advocate of the treaty?

TAYLOR: Yes, very much so. Of course, I had known the President well enough that I was quite prepared to argue with him on any subject. And, I think he enjoyed it, I always did. The other Chiefs, had not been exposed to the President as much as I was, and my problem was to get them to come forward and lay their misgivings on the table so we could have something to talk about. Unfortunately, most of our calls ended in a rather stiff monologue, and I'm sure the President didn't enjoy them. He rather dreaded them for the Chief's were a sort of stiff group of strangers, not quite sure of just what to say to him. I always told him that he succeeded in saying about the right thing; but we never had a really relaxed, easy, give-and-take discussion. I think, in fact, I've never known any group of Chiefs who were really effective as an informal discussion group with any President. Inevitably, as a body, they are more awkward than they would be as individual advisers.

ROSTOW: I was just about to ask whether this reflected in any way to the fact that the President had only been a naval lieutenant and that he might have been a bit stiff; but obviously you've seen a President who had been a general.

TAYLOR: Well, I don't know. I've always been interested in reflecting on the President's attitude toward military people. I think he had the common civilian point of view that the senior people are pretty stiff characters and not particularly catholic in their views of the world. I think eventually he got to recognize some of us as people, but he still had some doubts.

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ROSTOW: Well, on the test ban then, the most impressive thing that you have said to me that I hadn't realized before was that there would be any doubt as to the real net advantage.

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TAYLOR: Furthermore, we were assisted in our doubts, if we wanted to doubt, by the scientific community. They were split over it themselves. There were so many factors about which a layman really had no right to a qualified opinion.

Hence, we turned to our scientific advisors, and we found that community divided – therefore, we had nothing really firm to tie to in forming judgment on these technical questions. If one were then inclined to be on the pessimistic side, or on the side that could see no good in this kind of thing, one could find support in the scientific world for opposing it – just as anyone of the opposite complexion could find support for being in favor of the treaty.

ROSTOW: Would you say there has been a difference between the atmosphere in the 50s and the 60s in the increased importance of science? Is this just one new variable in the political/military equation?

TAYLOR: Unquestionably. With the tremendous complication of military weapons systems, the scientists have come to play an extremely important role. If I were going to make a statement comparable to President Eisenhower's famous statement of his fear of the military/industrial complex, I would certainly throw in the scientist now as a third factor which must be watched very closely. The need for qualified scientists of integrity around the seats of power in Washington is very apparent. A scientist has the very special advantage of being beyond criticism in certain areas. For example, a layman cannot give direct critical judgment in the area of electronics because he usually knows nothing about electronics. Unfortunately, most of our scientists are giving judgments in fields where very few people can check up on them.

ROSTOW: This might possibly bring up the delicate question of Whiz Kids. I don't know if we should bring that up now or not.

TAYLOR: The Whiz Kids are a different breed, as I view them, from the scientific group. Many of them have been exposed to some science as most of us around Washington have. But I think of them rather as the group who apply methods of business efficiency to the solution of government problems. I have always said there is room in Washington for the Whiz Kid, if the Whiz Kid knows what his limitations are.

ROSTOW: I shan't ask for specific evidence on this score. Again, is there anything on the test ban treaty that we should cover before we turn to another subject?

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TAYLOR: No, I don't believe so, except that I think most of us who had misgivings – most of the military would be in that class – most of us feel that we did the right thing, and that the treaty is definitely a step forward in changing the world atmosphere.

ROSTOW: Turning from the test ban treaty to the multilateral force, do you recall when this first surfaced as an issue in Washington?

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TAYLOR: I first discovered this issue was about when I came back to duty in the White House in 1961. I remember attending a State/Defense meeting where I asked some very naïve questions, such as “Really, who would want to have such a thing if the control of weapons still rested where it does now, in the hands of the United States?” This seemed to be the wrong thing to say, because it brought a silence and from that time on I was labeled in certain quarters as being anti-MLF. Of course, subsequently, I examined very closely the origin and concept and came to understand perfectly well what the proponents have in mind. To a large degree, I share their objectives, although I have always had real doubt as to whether the MLF will solve our problems. But then, of course, one can always hope. The MLF issue became entwined with the Nassau meeting, and the Nassau outcome. Incidentally, the Nassau meeting was very interesting, and I’m sorry I don’t have my detailed notes here. But I recall with how little concern we dispatched our emissaries to Nassau. They were going there primarily to give some reassurance to the British as a result of the cancellation of the Skybolt missile program. You must never forget that was really the purpose of the Nassau meeting – to do something good for the British because of their great consternation over the cancellation of Skybolt.

At the outset, it was only a State delegation to go down; more or less as an afterthought did they decide to take Mr. McNamara. Someone asked me if I was going to Nassau, and I said, “Well, no, I haven’t been asked, and nothing’s going to happen down there.” So I can remember my tremendous surprise, and my gratification to some degree, when the cables started coming in from Nassau and I saw in the end they were coming out with what I thought quite a forward step in facing up to some of the nuclear problems. But it was done entirely without the benefit of military advice. Lord Mountbatten and I since have often discussed this and wondered what would have happened had he and I been present. Certainly, we would have point out certain phrases which I don’t think meant what the gentlemen thought they meant, and which conveyed military connotations not known at the time. But if our presence would have brought forth a better or worse agreement, I’m not sure. But it certainly would have been different. We often say this is what happens when we let our civilian masters get away without having at least one uniform in the party.

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ROSTOW: SecState was also absent.

TAYLOR: That’s so. If anyone had anticipated the events at Nassau, it would have been quite a different delegation that went down. But it literally caught everyone by surprise as far as I know. I never found anyone who anticipated or had in mind the outcome at Nassau.

ROSTOW: I recall the SecState was hosting a dinner to half the diplomatic corps when the word came in what was going on at Nassau and he looked rather the troubled host the rest of the evening.

TAYLOR: Well, many people were surprised around Washington and London.

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ROSTOW: Were the doubts about the MLF reflected within the Chiefs?

TAYLOR: Yes, following Nassau, it was obvious that the military people had better get together and try to agree – the British and the U.S. – as to what Nassau really meant. I immediately wired Mountbatten and suggested that he come to Washington for consultation. We then agreed on an agenda in advance. The meeting took place, and it was the first time that the military communities of these two nations agreed on what had been said and where we should go in the development of various paragraphs – 6, 7 and 8 – of the Nassau Agreement. Also, we verified what I had suspected, namely that Mountbatten in particular, and most of the British, were dead against an MLF. In the submarine form Mountbatten said it was the most stupid suggestion he had ever heard advanced seriously by any government. He eventually did concede, rather reluctantly, that the surface fleet concept had fewer objections – I think that was about as far as he would go – than the submarine concept. He always twitted Admiral Anderson, who was a good loyal Navy man, and who said he could make anything work if he had to, even the submarine concept. Mountbatten assured him that he couldn't believe a real sailor would ever believe that in conscience. Of course, to this date, the British views have not changed. They are not going to support the MLF, regardless of what has been said in past communications. At the present time, Mountbatten is suggesting that it will really be the Labor government is inevitable, so we might as well accept the fact.

ROSTOW: Does this lead one to conclude that you don't feel that the whole concept of mixed manning is the shape of the future?

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TAYLOR: It's largely a political gimmick. It certainly is undesirable from the military point of view. We tried this concept in NATO ground forces and made a sincere effort to see to what extent this could be done. First experimenting at the platoon, then the company and the battalion, we ended by having national forces from the division level down. So in a much more simple environment than the naval environment we found that tactically we couldn't work out the problems of mixed manning.

ROSTOW: Then the concept of MLF is not based from the Kennedy Administration. The idea has been walking around for quite awhile.

TAYLOR: No, it goes back at least to the Eisenhower Administration – as I recall Mr. Herter was one of the principal proponents.

ROSTOW: Girard Smith was one.

TAYLOR: Yes, he has been an enthusiast for a long time.

ROSTOW: Well, would you say then on the whole there has been an adequate

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understanding of the political and military problems involved in MLF, as between State and Defense?

TAYLOR: I think progressively there was. But MLF was a State Concept, and its great advocates were in State. This was an example, unfortunately, I would say, where one department gets unduly committed before the other one comes up alongside. There has never been any real enthusiasm in the Pentagon for the MLF; however, once it became a government policy, then of course we became for it and will defend it against all comers. But I would just point out that President Kennedy over and over again refused to say that he supported the MLF – he didn't want the American flag to be put on top of it. Unfortunately, some of the very zealous advocates got to Europe and made statements which created the impression which inevitably committed the United States but committed it over the objections of President Kennedy. He at no time said he was for the MLF. Never did anyone in his administration say he was for the MLF. If it was to the interest of our Allies in Europe, certainly we would support it, contribute to it, and favor it; but if they had no interest in it, if they wanted to put it down or push it, we would accept this also. Unfortunately, by the time all the explanations were made, the American label was clearly on the MLF.

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ROSTOW: I think your position on this is quite clear. Perhaps we can turn away from this to another subject unless you have something...

TAYLOR: No, I think we have covered it quite well.

ROSTOW: How would you say, General Taylor, that the Joint Chiefs tend to calculate U.S. strategic advantages in tactical nuclear weapons versus the danger of automatic use which the U.S. could not control?

TAYLOR: The Joint Chiefs have always felt that tactical nuclear weapons offer a very useful and very important landing, so to speak, in the scale of escalation, that between completely non-nuclear war and general nuclear war – which is usually equated to the annihilation of all parties – there is indeed the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons in a limited, restricted, and discriminating way. This possibility is becoming clearer and definitely more feasible as we refine the characteristics of battlefield nuclear weapons. We now have weapons which are so small, in effect, they are little more than highly effective chemical munitions. These can be put down close to one's own troops; there is virtually no fallout, and no greater danger to civilian populations than the dangers which are attendant on all military operations. We feel that the possession of a flexible, wide-ranging arsenal of these tactical nuclear weapons is indeed very useful, and is an offsetting factor for the preponderant manpower which we have allowed the enemy to accumulate. Now I might point out that we don't need to have it all that way; but I see no tendency on the part of governments to raise the non-nuclear forces necessary to offset the Soviet Bloc manpower. I might say that President Kennedy was very cool on the subject of all nuclear weapons. He felt we had more than enough of all types. He had been reached by those who

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say that any use of nuclear weapons would inevitably escalate. I don't know whether he was really convinced, but he always used that argument with me whenever I discussed the matter with him. So I was never entirely sure whether he was a convinced opponent of tactical nuclear weapons, or just wanted to make me fight for my case.

ROSTOW: President Kennedy used to say that without Berlin, our European strategy could be improved, and we could rely less on conventional forces. Would you agree with this?

TAYLOR: I never quite heard him say it exactly as you phrased that. He did indicate frequently that he need for most of our military readiness in Europe resulted from the weakness of our posture in Berlin. Of course, I cannot deny that. On the other hand, if Berlin didn't exist, and the same world tensions existed between the Warsaw and the NATO areas, I wouldn't agree that there would be much difference

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in our requirement for forces in Europe. On the other hand, that is hardly sensible either because if the Berlin problems didn't exist, that would mean that tensions had subsided to a point we had reached some kind of agreement. So, in some ways, I would certainly agree that Berlin does add to our military burdens and really prevents our laying down those burdens as long as Berlin remains unresolved.

ROSTOW: Someone was saying the other day that the wall in Berlin might be regarded not as an instance of U.S. reluctance to act, but rather as a great achievement because the wall really solved a problem for us that we could not have solved otherwise. The leakage from East Berlin was obviously shut down, but that from every other point of view, the wall was a net gain for the U.S. Do you think this is true?

TAYLOR: You mean on the grounds that it stopped the flow of refugees? Ended that problem?

ROSTOW: Also that it externalized the problem that the East Germans were facing.

TAYLOR: We, I would be inclined to agree up to a point. I believe in discussing this matter on another day. I mentioned that if anyone had told me in advance that the creation of the wall was likely to happen, I would have pooh-poohed it on the grounds you have suggested. This would have appeared to be too great a price to pay for stopping the refugee flow. It would be a confession that Communist Germany was indeed a great concentration camp and needed a wall around that part of Berlin. It looked to me that it would be such a propaganda defeat in the eyes of the world that the Soviets would not take the step.

ROSTOW: A great many of these issues look clearer now from the vantage point of '64 than they did at the moment.

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TAYLOR: Well, on the other hand, I suppose we don't know how painful that loss of East German population was and how much their escape from bondage affected Soviet problems within other satellites. Probably we didn't see then and don't see yet just how that problem looked in Soviet eyes.

ROSTOW: General, do you believe that American strategy and our strategic posture improved in the period between '61 and '63 insofar as Europe is concerned?

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TAYLOR: Let me put it on a broader basis and comment rather on what had been the military trend. What were the military trends or strategy under President Kennedy? It was a very active period, active because it reflected the presence of a new administration, new leadership – vigorous leadership – both in the White House and in the Pentagon. If I were asked what were the trends in which President Kennedy was directly involved – I make this distinction because there were some trends in the weapons systems, for example, in which he had no personal commitment – I would say there were three or four areas in which he was personally responsible for the overall leadership and energy which was expended. In general terms, he was responsible for the increased effort, the increased resources allocated to military purposes. Under the Eisenhower Administration the military budget averaged about \$37 billion. Very quickly under the Kennedy Administration the budget was up to \$50, \$51, \$52 billion. So just in terms of money that measured, I would say, the increased effort which was suddenly injected into the military program. Now why did he do this?

President Kennedy had serious doubts as to the balance in our forces achieved under the previous administration. He had so written and spoken during the campaign, and now, as the Commander-in-Chief, he was resolved to examine the balance in our military strength and direct the necessary adjustments. He had to assist him, Secretary McNamara in the Pentagon, who immediately began to take a more personal part in the consideration of the structure of our military posture than had been normal under former Secretaries.

If I were asked what were the trends in our military strategy for which the President was either personally responsible, or in which he had a personal interest, I would mention three or four. The first as I mentioned, was the willingness to commit greater resources to the military budget than had been true of the former administration. This increase in expenditures was necessary, in the President's mind, to attain greater non-nuclear strength and to bring somewhat abreast of our nuclear power the capability to react by means less than nuclear. So that the first trend would be toward greater expenditures for military purposes. This recognition of the importance of non-nuclear warfare tended to favor the Army, certain parts of the Air Force, and also the Navy in the anti-submarine warfare field. These were the beneficiaries of the new look in our military posture.

Very quickly concentration of attention on the non-nuclear area was felt in Europe where the word got around that the U.S. had a new "strategy" which tended to do-emphasize the use of nuclear weapons. This was

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received with mixed emotions, generally with feelings of opposition among our NATO Allies. They had come to believe in massive retaliation, having accepted the lessons which we had taught them during the period of our own concentration on the development of strategic forces. Our NATO friends in Europe were quick to suspect several things. The first was that the U.S. would be urging them to commit greater resources to their military budget for non-nuclear purposes to parallel our own actions. The other was the fear that the U.S. was becoming impressed with the dangers of nuclear war as the Soviets equipped themselves with these weapons. Hence, our Allies were becoming more reluctant and uncertain as to the willingness of the U.S. to employ nuclear weapons in the defense of Western Europe. So very shortly, we found ourselves beginning an argument which has continued and has not been settled as to the way and the direction in which NATO strategy should be reoriented to be generally in consonance with the new thinking in the United States.

A third area of national defense in which the President took a personal interest I've already mentioned; namely, he had a great interest in the wars of liberation – counterinsurgency movements which were appearing or had appeared in the world since 1945. We had before us the problem of Southeast Asia, and the President saw very clearly the need for new thinking, new organization, new types of military equipment to cope with this threat which had been posed by Khrushchev in his now famous speech of January 6, 1961.

Finally, I would say the President was responsible for the trend toward what I would call multiple option, the insistence – and the proper insistence – on the part of our civilian leadership to have military options which could be varied with changing situations. The objective was never to have our national response confined to a single strategy, to a single reaction, or to a single weapons system. All of this I think was good. These developments then, which I have just mentioned, stemmed very largely from President Kennedy's own interest in these subjects.

ROSTOW: I gather that you can sympathize with the President's reluctance to use nuclear weapons. Did his anxiety not to use them seriously inhibit U.S. strategy in your opinion?

TAYLOR: No, not in the slightest. I think he very properly wanted to be able to move a step at a time, being sure that he had control of the situation and that it never slipped through his fingers. Certainly the Cuban crisis was an excellent example of the proper

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application of the ascending scale of options. One can, of course, fear – and many of my military friends do fear – that this policy of edging up slowly toward a decision can encourage precipitant action on the part of an enemy and actually give the impression of timidity which would defeat our purpose.

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ROSTOW: In terms of the counterinsurgency thrust you mentioned, what theory did President Kennedy leave behind in the way of strategy to meet wars of liberation?

TAYLOR: I don't think we can say that he personally put together such a strategy. But he was pressing his advisors constantly to improve our government performance in this field, so that virtually everything we have done since 1961 – and I can assure you the list would be quite impressive – all of these things stem directly or indirectly from the President's insistence on better governmental performance in countering subversive insurgency.

ROSTOW: Do you think that the program which focused attention on the Foreign Service Institute led to discussion of upgrading of the Foreign Service Institute into something more like one of the War Colleges. Was this a reflection of part of this policy that you were discussing?

TAYLOR: I would say that this was one aspect of it – a rather indirect development. One of the things which the Counterinsurgency Committee did early in the campaign was to look at the school system of all Services which have a stake in counterinsurgency to verify whether sufficient weight in theoretical instruction was being given. In the course of examining these various institutions, we took a look at the advanced seminar which was being conducted by the State Department for the Foreign Service. It was felt that this really should be a sort of senior seminar to be attended by ambassadors going into areas with counterinsurgency problems, heads of military missions going to these areas, and the chiefs of CIA sections in countries. Thus, the members of country teams in areas where counterinsurgency represents a threat would have been pretrained, preconditioned, for the problems which they found. I think that to some extent these goals have been achieved; but I don't think any of us feel that we still have really synthesized our efforts throughout all the school systems to produce the final result, the optimum result.

ROSTOW: Related to this is the question of the Foreign Service Academy. Did you and do you favor such a development?

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TAYLOR: I have testified in favor of it, never being quite sure of the specifics of the recommendation. In other words, the concept I'm definitely for, but I've never seen the fine print. I don't think that the last time I was called upon to testify that really the concept had been put down as clearly as it must before it can be realized.

ROSTOW: On the whole then, you feel that the Kennedy period did open new policy lines, did have some concrete achievements, did leave certain institutional residues, but also left certain unfinished problems...

TAYLOR: I would agree with that statement wholeheartedly, and add that no

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administration can ever leave all problems in a state of resolution. Although the tragic departure of President Kennedy from the scene left us with perhaps deeper feelings of regret than would have been normal had this been the termination of an administration of four years, I'm sure we would still have the feeling that there were many things which President Kennedy had started which were left to his successors to execute.

ROSTOW: On the President as a human being, do you have a net assessment of him, do you feel that you can now describe what were his greatest strengths or greatest weaknesses?

TAYLOR: No, I cannot because I would say that there were many President Kennedy's. There was the President Kennedy I first met in shock after the Bay of Pigs. Then there was the confident President after the Cuban crisis when he was entirely different. He was different in many ways following Cuba from what he had been in the early part of the Administration. He had confidence in himself; he had confidence in his team; he had victories to show; and he was on his way to great leadership. His personality and his performance of duty were changing constantly as he grew with the requirements of his task.

ROSTOW: It used to be fashionable to write essays and think pieces on John Kennedy's style. Could you define his style or at least his styles if you are talking about two men?

TAYLOR: Style by its nature is indefinable probably, but I think you could divide the question into several parts: his style as the government leader, how he sat with his advisors and reached his decisions; his style as an individual; his personality, which he was able to inject into the discharge of the duties of the most honored office in the world. I think you could probably get meaningful statements for a number of sectors that are very difficult as a single definition.

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ROSTOW: Did he have a sense of humor?

TAYLOR: Oh, very much so. And he had a greater patience than you would expect in a young man – quite different from Bobby. It's always been quite interesting to me to contrast Bobby and his brother. They were quite different and one's strength was another's weakness, which accounted for that admirable complementation which went on in that brother-to-brother relationship. But the President was extremely patient. I never saw him lose his temper. I was never close to him when he lost his temper except once, and that was in the famous case with Mr. Blough and the steel price. I was an innocent bystander. This had nothing to do with my obligations. I saw him fuming after other episodes which I'm not sure about, but never during the Cuban times when the tension was on. Usually an official under tension becomes snappy with the people around him – I am. I tell my people I never get angry at them, I get angry at life. There are very few men that

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don't show that tendency from time to time; but I never saw President Kennedy, young and naturally impatient as you would assume him to be, ever get into that snappy mood with the people around him. He was always most considerate of hearing points of view, he never resented objections to courses of action he wanted to take; he was willing to listen once he made his decision, he expected it to be followed.

ROSTOW: You mentioned the Blough episode. Someone wrote that President Kennedy was unable to understand businessmen. Earlier you said he didn't understand military men, or at least had a certain reserve with them. Do you think it is fair to say he was equally unaccustomed to dealing with businessmen?

TAYLOR: I'm told that was the case. I never saw that aspect directly enough to have a firm opinion. It is true that he had never worked closely with either the hard facts of business, or the hard facts of military life, except as a participant as a junior officer.

ROSTOW: You contrasted the two older surviving Kennedy brothers – surviving during the President's lifetime. Again, do you think that the fact that Jack Kennedy was in England at the time he was maturing had anything to do with the personality that emerged because he has in one sense been described as being less typically American than perhaps, one would say, the Attorney General, who typifies the American personality.

TAYLOR: I had never thought of it in those terms and would never have made the distinction that you make. The difference between

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Jack and Bobby was fundamentally two different personalities. Of course, Bobby became to an extent the hatchet man. He did the unpleasant things. I must say he has a rugged nature, and I don't think he ever shied away from it. On the other hand, I don't think the President shied away either. But he wisely took the point of view that as President it is always preferable for the hard work, the unpleasant work, to be done by a subordinate, if possible. President Kennedy, however, never had the feeling that President Eisenhower had of the need to protect the President at all cost. That was an outstanding impression of President Eisenhower. He never wanted to be quoted – to be caught saying or doing anything unpleasant that might have adverse political consequences. I never detected in President Kennedy any desire to hide behind his advisors. Usually his advisors were trying to get him to stand behind them. I always admired Bob McNamara for his great desire to get out in front and take the rap for the President. He always did this on a volunteer basis, sometimes pressing this approach on President Kennedy, who never seemed fully to sense the desirability of this kind of action. I don't say this critically of President Eisenhower, because it is important to shield the President. But I don't think Jack Kennedy ever had a feeling of the need for it – for a shield.

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ROSTOW: On a more frivolous level, you left Lincoln Center to come down here. Did you ever feel, given the amount of showmanship that accompanied the Kennedy years, that you perhaps had moved into a larger Lincoln Center?

TAYLOR: No, I never had any regret except one of having to some degree let down my associates in Lincoln Center after all their trouble to get me installed up there. Apart from that regret, I wouldn't have missed being with President Kennedy for anything.

ROSTOW: What is your clearest recollection of President Kennedy? I'd like to take just one episode that typifies your dealings with the man. Could you chose among the many that obviously occur to you?

TAYLOR: No, I couldn't. I really couldn't. Of course, the last time I saw him alive, the Black Watch came to the White House and gave their parade and concert.

ROSTOW: Do you have any feeling of the way in which he will shape up in history?

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TAYLOR: I think it will be very difficult to evaluate President Kennedy because of the shortness of his life. I think the historians will always be trying to decide how the world would have looked had he lived. But really, three years is a pitifully short time for him to do all the things he wanted to do.

ROSTOW: But it's clear, and must be a source of satisfaction to you that, had the reaction to the missile crisis been different, he would have left an indelible mark, and presumably a negative one.

TAYLOR: Oh yes, he had plenty of opportunities to make a bad record. But he never had a long enough time to reach the goal that he had in mind.

ROSTOW: Where were you at the time of the assassination?

TAYLOR: I was at the office in the Pentagon. I have the lazy habit right after lunch of lying down on my divan and locking all the doors for about fifteen minutes. I had just lain down and my buzzer rang – it was Brigadier General Tibbetts on duty in the Command Post, the National Military Command Center. He apologized for interrupting me but said he had just received word from Dallas that the President had been shot and was probably dying. Well, I asked him what the story said, and he said nothing, that it came over public radio. I then buzzed Bob McNamara right above me. He was in a budget meeting. I told them to call him out, and then I told him. That was our first indication. I had the German Chief of Staff visiting – this was a very terrible day. In pursuance of NATO problems, I had worked out an agreement with Bob McNamara and the President that I would recurrently have the Chiefs of Staff of the principal NATO countries come over and

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try to talk out as military people some of these strategic problems. I'd had the British on two occasions. We then were going to have the Germans, and that was the day when the German Chief of Staff and his principal assistants were here. We met in the morning and did about half a day's work, broke for lunch – we had lunch together – and the Germans had gone back to their offices in the Pentagon for a few minutes before we met again at 2 o'clock.

All this took place just in that interval. I went to General Foertsch, the German Chief of Staff, and told him. But first I delayed the meeting long enough to assemble the Joint Chiefs of Staff and decide what we should do. It was clear we had no idea what the political and international complications might be. We alerted all our overseas commands,

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I touched base with Bob McNamara and asked if there was anything we should do we had not done. We decided there was nothing. This conference delayed the opening at 2 o'clock for the meeting with the Germans; so I went to see General Foertsch and told him the news. I've never seen a man more stricken. I assured him that there was nothing we could do. I didn't tell him how critical it was, although I felt virtually sure the President was dead then. But I didn't tell him that. I didn't know positively the President was dead until shortly after we convened in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Conference Room. Then we didn't tell the Germans. I just passed the note to my colleagues; we were all sitting around the table. When we finished our conference around 4 o'clock and started to break up and adjourn, I told them the President was dead.

ROSTOW: You're mentioning the German reaction really leads me to my next question. Why do you think President Kennedy had such impact on nationals of other countries?

TAYLOR: Very strange. I didn't know he did; and I don't think the world really did while he was alive. He had become a symbol of a sort to people that really seized their imagination without their really knowing it.

ROSTOW: Do you think it was an appeal? In part it has been said it has become a cliché to the youth of the world. The fact that he was to the youth of the world...

TAYLOR: I think so, to a degree. Here was a young hope coming forward, and with all the strength of the United States behind him, every country felt it had a stake in him.

ROSTOW: Well, I would gather, then, that you have very real regrets about the President himself, but no regrets that you were here to share this much of the Kennedy Administration.

TAYLOR: No, not at all. There couldn't have been any place else that I would have wanted to be.

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ROSTOW: Well, General Taylor as I look over a list of possible items for discussion, I think we probably have 59 that we haven't mentioned.

TAYLOR: I think we've done quite well, haven't we?

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ROSTOW: Would you like to look over the list and see if there is anything more that should be mentioned?

TAYLOR: Well, the President frequently insisted that our alleged lack of some forms of military strength was just as phony as the missile gap. Now and then he would say, "Who ever believed in the missile gap?" whereupon I always raised my hand, and said I did. And I'd go over the very good reasons for it. But I never convinced him, for the next time the missile gap was mentioned, he always said, "Whoever was for that?"

ROSTOW: I think maybe it was his conscience troubling him for he refused to believe in it during the campaign of 1960.

TAYLOR: Yes, I think he was...

Of course, I was somewhat involved in the civil rights actions and use of military troops. I was only involved, however, as something of a bystander, since the use of these forces was directed by the Army and very closely supervised not by the Joint Chiefs of Staff but by the Attorney General. I always urged the President to keep the regular Army, the regular armed forces, out of these things, if possible, feeling that to resolve them with the National Guard, which is a local force, was far preferable. Toward the end, I think the President accepted that, but at the outset I think he was so impressed with the need to have the best troops, the most reliable troops. Also at the outset the uncertainty as to how the National Guard in a state like Alabama would react led him to use the regular Army. After some experience, he tended to use the regular forces simply as a backup for the local forces.

ROSTOW: Had you had comparable involvement during the Eisenhower period?

TAYLOR: I had the unhappy experience of being Chief of Staff at the time of Little Rock. I made the same arguments against using the regular Army with President Eisenhower, and got the same answer. "I want this handled right; send the 101st Airborne Division."

ROSTOW: Generally then, there is nothing in the performance of the two Presidents that you have known best that relates to the military training of the one and the civilian of the other. Apparently in the office of the Presidency, men tend to react in a similar fashion.

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TAYLOR: Well, it is very interesting to reflect on that. I have always thought that a military man as a President is not necessarily an advantage for the Armed Forces. President Eisenhower, unfortunately, having had a military education, and being the world's most famous soldier, military leader, at the time he came to the Presidency, recognized this as the area where his strength lay and that he'd better concentrate on the political side where he felt his weaknesses. As a result, he did very well on the latter side because it received almost his entire attention and he assumed the world hadn't moved forward militarily since 1945. It created a real problem for all of us who were trying to direct the evolving forces of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

President Kennedy was very much aware of his lack of military knowledge, and I think I mentioned that was one of the reasons he wanted a military advisor in his own family at the outset. Also, the Bay of Pigs, as I mentioned previously, had created a real doubt in his mind as to the quality of military advice he was getting from the Joint Chiefs. However, after that bad year of 1961 had passed, and the team became better known, and the Chiefs became men that he himself had appointed, then I would say that he had greater confidence in turning these matters over to Secretary McNamara and the Chiefs. Still, at no time with his growing acquaintance did he ever show any desire to get intimately into the military business. I think his attitude was a correct one, as a civilian Commander-in-Chief, to insist on the performance of certain tasks and leave the execution of the content of programs to the people in the Pentagon. That is not in contradiction to what I mentioned before that when he got down to the really political game of using military tools, he insisted on being the fellow that directed the moves.

ROSTOW: We're taking up odds and ends in one sense here. Did he ever discuss with you the kind of publication, say like *Seven Days in May*, or any of the recent publications that suggest the military might attempt to take over?

TAYLOR: No, we never shared any concern along those lines. The only book I ever heard him discuss along those lines was *The Guns of August* which he read with great interest and always twitted me then on the inflexibility of the military commanders we had at that time.

ROSTOW: Well, we began with a reference to your book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*. Is it fair to ask whether you feel that the call is clearer now, has been and how would you conclude a comparable book were you writing one in 1964?

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TAYLOR: Well, the so-called *Uncertain Trumpet*, if that title were justified, was selected to point to the uncertain guidance which was being given in the military services in the development of the means to execute agreed strategy. I would say that with the Pentagon the call now is very clear, the call is that of Robert McNamara – and his statements and directives have perfect clarity. I think there is still unfinished business, however, in getting the military and the political branches of the government to sit

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down together and be sure that the forces which we are constructing and maintaining in the Pentagon are indeed able to cover all the political situations which they might be called upon to support. There is still division in our government as to the circumstances that might justify the use of nuclear weapons, for example. As a result, in the Pentagon we simply have to be prepared for any contingency – to use them or not to use them. We could develop much more economical forces, much more effectively trained forces, if we could be more precise as to the likely political decisions which will bear upon the use of our military forces. I suspect there is no perfect solution in this field but it does distress me at times to find how far apart certain individuals – at least in State and Defense – how widely they are separated on some of these points. But in the absence of that over-all guidance, Robert McNamara is providing us with that trumpet that is clear, if not always melodious.

ROSTOW: It isn't wholly then a quantity problem. It isn't then that Washington has become so big and so many people are on each subject or each problem that communication is, by that definition, hampered?

TAYLOR: I would say that the greatest weakness in our system of government does not bear necessarily on military questions. It is the question of being able to take all the resources of our government, focus them on a single objective and move toward that objective completely in step. We see that so frequently now in counterinsurgency countries where we have the problem of utilizing resources of State, Defense, CIA, AID and all the rest of them in a common program. Here in Washington, as you know, our executive organization comes up in parallel by departments – State, Defense, Treasury, etc. – coming up to the President. No place below the President are these all pulled up together. The National Security Council was supposed to be that body with regard to national security questions alone, however. At the present time, the NSC, deprived as it has been of its supporting agencies – the Planning Board, and the OCB – is really inadequate as a place to do this pulling together of the resources short of the President himself. I think this is an unresolved problem of organization that has been with us for a long

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time. I think we are feeling it more keenly as our problems world-wide become more and more complex.

ROSTOW: Might be a good note on which to end the comment of Fisher Ames on the 19th Century. He said monarchy is like a clipper ship with all sails set going straight for a reef. Democracy is like a barge, going rather slowly with all hands constantly bailing but will make its destination.

TAYLOR: Well, I hope that is a correct figure of speech. I think I'm always a little worried, though, when we point to the fact that in the past we have muddled along quite well and that in a crisis the great strength of democracy will always exhibit itself. Because the time-space factors of reaction are so compressed in the

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present world, I don't think it necessarily follows that because we have pulled up our socks in time in the past that we can do it again under modern conditions.

ROSTOW: What is your greatest worry?

TAYLOR: Don't have any.

ROSTOW: No, but in terms of what might happen. You said time-space factors have been compressed. How might a well-intentioned democracy founder if it didn't...

TAYLOR: Well, my greatest concern wouldn't be in the military field at all. I just have the feeling that a great democracy like this country tends to go downhill in a sense that it loses its breeding to some degree, when it believes that quality is no more a worry; in fact, that quality is somewhat suspect, and that mediocrity is the accepted way – indeed the encouraged way. So it is not in dramatic military terms that I think our real problems will present themselves.

ROSTOW: Thank you very much General Taylor.

TAYLOR: It's been a great pleasure Mrs. Rostow. This has been a very happy relationship, although unfortunately, very much interrupted.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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