

Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview – JFK#6, 01/30/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Robert W. Komer
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Biographical Note

Komer was a senior staff member of the National Security Council from 1961 through 1965. In this interview Komer discusses U.S. aid to India and Pakistan and some problems involved with it, including the question of long-term U.S. aid and a shift in focus from Pakistan to India; problems with the Agency for International Development; oil and U.S. policy; U.S. involvement in the Congo; Komer's meetings with President John F. Kennedy [JFK] and how Komer briefed him; the relations among JFK, Dean Rusk, John Kenneth Galbraith, Adlai E. Stevenson, and McGeorge Bundy; JFK's interest in India and Pakistan and his attempt at a mediation between the two on Kashmir; and JFK and Algeria and Morocco, among other issues.

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Robert W. Komer

Robert W. Komer

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Sixth Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT W. KOMER

January 30, 1970
Santa Monica, California

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

INDIA-PAKISTAN ISSUES

KOMER: In a sense, we and the Russians were competing to see who was going to get the inside track with the Indians in terms of helping them against China. The Indians were very coolly playing both sides against the middle and ended up getting support from both the United States and Russia. Interestingly, they got their heavy equipment from Russia because we wouldn't give the Indians heavy equipment that could be just as well used against Pakistan. We gave the Indians exclusively stuff that was useful against the Chinese, for which we got absolutely no credit from the Paks. And if I recall correctly, almost nothing that we gave them in the '62-'65 period was used in, what, the three weeks' war, as it was called. Was it the three weeks' or the seven weeks' war?

O'BRIEN: The seven weeks'. Let's get into some economic things. Well, we mentioned just briefly (inaudible) and also as I understand it there was a case of aid going to a state-sponsored steel mill in Pakistan in which a couple. . . .

KOMER: Karachi steel mill.

O'BRIEN: Right. In which this question of state-owned enterprises and then private enterprise come up.

KOMER: Correct.

O'BRIEN: Is the White House concerned about this problem or are they concerned about Congress's reaction to the problem?

KOMER: In this case, very clearly the White House is only concerned about Congress's reaction to the problem. (John Kenneth) Ken Galbraith sold the case for Bokaro to Kennedy with several others of us chiming in. (David E.) Dave Bell was pro-Bokaro, though not as much as Ken. I was pro-Bokaro. (Phillips) Talbot was pro-Bokaro. Kennedy was very pro-Bokaro. There was no constituency in the White House saying, you know, "Let's not support public enterprises." The theological issue was all with the Congress and a fair section of, you know, the pundits. And Kennedy detested theological issues like this but determined he was going to fight it, and got licked. Now, the Karachi steel mill I think was a different issue. It may have gotten dragged in. But the Paks wanted Karachi steel mill and we felt on economic grounds that it did not make sense for Pakistan to have its own steel industry. It just wouldn't be cost-effective.

O'BRIEN: And those judgments were mainly made by the AID (Agency for International Development) staff?

KOMER: Well, at that time you had Dave Bell there and there are just a few people who are better qualified to make judgments on questions like this. And I think Kennedy had great confidence in Dave's judgments on economic issues like this in the subcontinent. I suspect he had more confidence in Dave's judgments on economic development issues like this than he did in Ken Galbraith's.

O'BRIEN: Sure. Well, India's the recipient of a good deal of development funds that come through the World Bank--International Bank for Redevelopment (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development)--and IMF (International Monetary Fund). Now, do you see

at any time pressure by the White House, persuasion by the White House, which is directed towards the bank in behalf of, let's say, funds going from these international agencies to India? I guess the question is: Do these really become a kind of extension of American foreign policy, these international agencies?

KOMER: This is rather sensitive. The short answer to your question is: And how! The Americans are the main contributors to all of these international financial institutions. We set them up in order to multi-lateralize aid and get other countries' contributions and also to diffuse the client opposition to aid. If it's given through the World Bank, it looks more impersonal than if it's given by the American "imperialists".

Incidentally, I think the whole approach of economic consortia for aid-giving began in the Kennedy years (I think it is one of the great innovations of development financing) and deserves considerable praise. I've thought frequently of going back and writing a paper on this. I don't think anyone has. But I don't know whose idea this was. I'm sure Dave Bell had something to do with it. And I think the first consortia were for India-Pakistan. Maybe the idea was George Woods's or (Eugene R) Gene Black's. I don't know who had the idea originally. But at any rate, our aid budgets were going down at a time when the demands for development assistance were going up significantly and at a time when the concept of massive foreign capital infusions tied to development programs was becoming quite fashionable--Rostow making his contribution through, "You can get these guys to take-off point, then they get to self-sustaining growth, et cetera," which, however wobbly it might be as economic development theory, was great imagery, and still is.

But the Kennedy administration picked this up, and I think it was one of the great innovations in aid policy, because in a time when far-sighted people could see that we were not going to keep contributing as much proportionately as we had--or maybe even absolutely with the way Congress was creating aid bills--we managed to go out and use the leverage we still had through our big contributions to get all the other countries tied in, and using international financial institutions, which were, of course, very interested in this, since bankers by instinct favor a consortium. You

know, George Woods is an old underwriter and investment banker. The idea is you bring together six companies and each takes a piece of the action. That's great. And George, as I recall, was one of the prime movers in this exercise.

O'BRIEN: Are there any instances on specific programs for either India or Pakistan in which, let's say, the Indians come through the normal diplomatic channels and to the White House and then pressure is brought back to bear on the bank in behalf of any particular programs?

KOMER: No. We were pretty cozy about that. We would not let any of the other countries recognize that they could use us to put pressure on the international institutions because that would have been counterproductive. First, we had to maintain the myth that these institutions were independent. If we ever let the Indians know that we could get George Woods to do things behind the scene, then the Indians would just stop listening to George Woods and come constantly to us, whereas we were trying to hide behind George Woods.

Which leads me to the second point. We were trying to get the bank to tell all the bad news to these countries--to tell them they were going to have to shape up, more self-help, more this and that--and that it was disinterested advice from an international institution, not from the United States. So we would have been cutting off our noses to spite our faces if we had done too much of that. No, we were very careful. In fact, this was one of the sort of unwritten rules: "If you Indians or Paks want to get something from the bank, you've got to go and convince George Woods; or if you want it from the Fund, you've got to go and argue with (Pierre-Paul) Pierre Schweitzer.

But the nice thing about the consortium device, you know, you could all sort of get together in these periodic meetings of the donors and sort of thrash this out. And then everybody had a chance. And let's say the bank was being reluctant to invest what the U.S. government considered to be its fair share. Well, at the donor meeting of, let's say, the India consortium, we'd get together with the British, the French, the Dutch, the Germans, the Japanese and all put pressure on the bank. That was perfectly legitimate.

O'BRIEN: Well, one other question here on particularly India in her relations with Britain. In the White House, do you get involved in Britain's entry into the Common Market (European Economic Community) and what this will do to, let's say, a country like India?

KOMER: Negative. Negative. Only on the very periphery of that issue. The Indians, the Paks and all the other LDCs (less developed countries) that thought they would be adversely effected by the Common Market would come around to try and get us to intercede for them. We were much more interested in getting the Common Market going and getting Britain in than we were in interceding for all these other countries--I might add, including Australia. The only time when we raised hob with the Common Market or similar institutions was when they became discriminatory against us. Now, in the State Department you would have these conflicting interests. The African bureau (Bureau of African Affairs) was constantly arguing that the Common Market should be influenced to be more reasonable for the developing African countries. And then EUR (Bureau of European Affairs) and ECON (Bureau of Economic Affairs) would come in and say, "Christ, getting the Common Market going is much more important." You'd have one of these arguments and almost invariably the African bureau, or in the case of India-Pakistan the Middle East bureau, would lose.

FOREIGN AID

O'BRIEN: Well, getting into some of the problems with AID. AID, as I understand it, in these years and (William S.) Gaud in particular are very much against long-term agreements in regard to AID. Now, what explains that?

KOMER: Oh, you ought to talk to them about it. I don't recall any big issues on which I voted differently from them. I suspect that in Bill Gaud's case this was largely protecting his congressional flank. He knew how hard it would be to get long-term agreements--get the Congress to make good on them.

O'BRIEN: In the transition of administrations between the Kennedy administration and the (Lyndon B.) Johnson administration do you see any change, any softening of attitudes on this question of AID? Is there any major shift involving AID?

KOMER: No, frankly. Bill Gaud was the element of continuity. When did Dave Bell leave AID?

O'BRIEN: He's in there until '64 - '65, isn't he?

KOMER: That's right. So Dave and Bill Gaud both were the continuity right through and then Bill Gaud succeeded Dave.

O'BRIEN: What is the White House reaction to the (Lucius D.) Clay committee and particularly what the Clay committee does to. . . . Well, what does the Clay committee do that makes them think . . .

KOMER: It was a goddamn Kennedy mistake--put that down. (McGeorge) Bundy, I think, and several others, including, Dave Bell, argued against the Clay exercise. They said, "You know, these guys. . . ." Now, I forget where this comes up. Is it in Arthur Schlesinger's book?

O'BRIEN: It's been in several places, as I recall.

KOMER: Well, I'll tell you. I was around and I heard the same stuff, and it did not work out very well. And this was one where I think even the president admitted that he'd been wrong. You know, this is the old thing: Can we get a blue-ribbon committee of some guys who are sort of impeccably conservative to revalidate the program? It didn't quite work because Clay didn't speak his lines. Well, he got mouse-trapped. He really got mouse-trapped and then had to recant. And by that time the cat was out of the bag. I forget whether it was the Clay committee that I had something to do with briefing. I was not very impressed with that exercise. And then in '64, was it, there was a private committee. When was the Clay committee, '62?

O'BRIEN: '62 and I think they reported in '63, wasn't it?

KOMER: Uh-huh. Well, there was another committee later that never saw the light of day which was sort of a kitchen cabinet but I think that was in the Johnson years. At any rate, I wrote several papers for that exercise. I wrote the staff papers justifying big programs for India, Pakistan and Turkey. The stuff that AID sent over was written under water.

O'BRIEN: Well, that's one thing I'm curious about AID. As I understand it, they had a practice when they first started of writing in--how do you put it? It's insurance. I don't know what the proper term is. Well, the principle of course, is asking . . .

KOMER: Escape clauses?

O'BRIEN: No, no. But the principle is asking for a number of programs up and above what AID really wanted. Of course, they sent this up to the Hill, so that it would have some things to be trimmed. Insurance factor, I think, is sometimes the term that's applied.

KOMER: Oh, yeah.

O'BRIEN: How did the White House react to this?

KOMER: I am not aware that AID did any of that kind of padding after Dave Bell got in. They may have done it early in the Fowler Hamilton years, but I would doubt it. Dave would have caught it at the Budget Bureau. Kennedy had a strong team at the Budget Bureau, too, so they. . . . I do not recall that being a significant issue.

Let me interject at this point that I think AID under Kennedy and also under Johnson is much maligned. By and large I would render a professional judgment that the Agency did a very good heads-up job under highly adverse circumstances. Sure, it had a lot of bureaucrats in it. Sure, it had a lot of time-servers. But in the first place, they cleaned an awful lot of them out of there in those reorganizations in early '61 when they got rid of (Dennis A.) Doc Fitzgerald and all those technical assistance types. And secondly, the proportion of time-servers in AID--you know, just second-raters--was very small compared to a bureaucracy like (Department of) Defense, let's say, or to one of the services of the Agriculture Department or (Department of the) Interior. By and large, I think that (Henry F.) Labouisse, Fowler Hamilton and above all (because they were far more effective) Dave Bell and then Bill Gaud really did an excellent job, all things considered, with AID. And they had the chief laboring oar. Let me tell you, the State Department was not dominating the aid business when Bell and then Gaud were in the saddle as it had in the

fifties. So I'm a defender of AID and of its top talent.

O'BRIEN: And would you conclude that Bundy and, let's say, the president had much the same kind of feelings towards AID?

KOMER: Emphatically, the president. Less so, Bundy. Much less so, LBJ. LBJ didn't really think much of the AID agency and used to sort of growl at me when I'd defend it.

O'BRIEN: How about Secretary (Dean) Rusk?

KOMER: Sort of kept out of that one.

O'BRIEN: I know this question of where AID should be is one that keeps cropping up, doesn't it?

KOMER: A hardy perennial. I would be flatly, violently and, since I am now a private citizen, publicly opposed to putting AID back into the State Department firmly. It is now under the policy guidance of the State Department. And that is as it should be. And the same goes for USIA (United States Information Agency). State cannot run operating programs. It can coordinate them, supervise them, give them policy guidance. But every time when State has been given a major operating responsibility, it's fallen on its face. When you've got a job to do like economic development abroad or propaganda operation, running the Voice of America, running the libraries and the cultural programs, et cetera, et cetera, set up an autonomous, independent agency to do it and put them under State's policy guidance. Every time it's been done the opposite way it's been a flop. It just violates the basic principles of management. If we'd given the moon program, the Apollo program, to the Air Force, we wouldn't be on the moon yet--for a rather different reason. Not reflecting discredit on the Air Force. These are just the iron laws of bureaucracy that I'm studying out here in Rand (Corporation) now. I discover that all of my instincts are amply confirmed by the guys who have studied it systematically.

THE SUBCONTINENT AND MIDDLE EAST OIL

O'BRIEN: Well, I'm curious about the--and you didn't discuss this with any depth in the transcript,

but I'm just curious about what happened in the mission that you were on with Walt Rostow to India in 1963.

KOMER: Not much.

O'BRIEN: What was it for?

KOMER: Well, we were generally out to see if there was any further play in the Kashmir thing, to sort out some issues on the military aid front in particular and to sort of touch base on what next steps ought to be. It was very largely a follow-up trip. I don't recall it having any single, dominant motivation. It was a very useful exercise I think for both Walt and myself. We got out there and we stirred things up.

O'BRIEN: Well, passing on to Ceylon, I guess the big thing in regard to relations with Ceylon is the nationalization of Caltex (Standard Oil of California) and Stanvac (Standard Vacuum).

KOMER: Piddling issue on which the (Bourke B.) Hickenlooper amendment was in effect. Because of Hickenlooper we had to get some kind of a deal, and we kept saying, "For Christ's sake, we're trying to give you guys the kind of deal in which you'll pay back ten cents on the dollar." And ideology and inertia being what it was in Colombo at the time, it just took us a God-awful time to get them to realize that they were going to have to go through the motions. And they finally went through the motions. And (Maitripala) Senanayake took over later, won the election, and everything has been going much, much better since.

Ceylon, by the way, now faces a new election and apparently Mrs. (Sirimavo) Bandaranaike wants to make a comeback. Oh, God! Charismatic mismanagement in the less-developed world. Well, and sometimes in the developed world, you know. I think that's a good phrase. I'm going to have to save that. Charismatic mismanagement. And it was Mrs. Bandaranaike.

O'BRIEN: But still you have the presence here of Esso (Esso Standard Eastern, Inc.) and Caltex which are a part of, well, what's sometimes called in the oil industry, the majors.

KOMER: They were being very decent.

O'BRIEN: The big, international producers. Now, in your responsibilities for the Middle East and South Asia you're dealing with a number of companies in which you have one of the largest segments of foreign investment, the oil companies in Saudi Arabia and all this through Iran and all. How do these people, in a sense, approach the government of the United States in regard to their problem . . .

KOMER: You're asking the question rather delicately: How much influence-peddling was there by the big international oil companies in the Kennedy administration?

O'BRIEN: Fine. Okay.

KOMER: Surprising to me, because of all I'd read about the problem, almost none that ever came to my attention. And this continued on in the Johnson administration. I am really surprised. Even in the Arab-Israeli business, I notice the big oil companies are being flagellated again, because they supposedly had a great deal to do with Mr. (William P.) Roger's leaning toward a more even-handed policy. I doubt it very much. This was one of the myths of economic influence on American foreign policy that during my entire six years in the Middle East-South Asia business never really proved out. I have never had any pressure put on me or even any attempted influence-peddling by major or minor oil companies, nor am I aware of anything from the president that came back to me or Bell or State or whatever. Really quite surprising.

O'BRIEN: It does get involved in a strategic way, doesn't it? I mean as far as . . .

KOMER: Yes, there are strategic points about oil, but incidentally, they were given far less credence in the sixties than in the fifties. In the fifties in the NSC (National Security Council) I remember we wrote at least two major papers, had at least two major studies on the importance of Middle East oil. In the sixties we didn't even bother to restudy the problem. And it was never regarded as a really major factor. Interesting. Now, representatives of the Washington foreign policy operators for the major companies--Kermit Roosevelt, (Christian A.) Chris Herter, Jr., in particular--were around to see me periodically. We exchanged views on what the situation was, and they expressed points of view. But they were quite well-informed, and there was never any attempt at pressure. And I always had the feeling they were as much in to find out what the policy really was as to try and work in little

thoughts of one kind or another.

No, I mean this quite sincerely. This was one of the images with which I came to the policy business which turned out to be quite wrong. I never got any sense of a big international oil lobby really sort of wheeling and dealing in a big way. Now, I am aware of many things that the oil companies did that were sort of modestly adverse to our interests, but they went out and did them themselves. For example, (Arabian-American Oil Company) Aramco is beholden to the Saudis. The Saudis try and use Aramco to do various dirty work here and there. Aramco was probably providing advice to the Saudis on how to support the Yemeni royalists when we were officially supporting the Yemeni republicans. I might add, the British did a lot more supporting the Yemeni royalists, I'm sure, than Aramco ever did. And the French. But just no big issue there.

Now, before you ask me your next question, let me go back to Stanvac and Caltex in Ceylon, because it was a piddling issue. In my judgment, both companies were quite reasonable, and they made very clear that their stake in an interest in Ceylon was peanuts and they couldn't care less. Their point was that a highly unfavorable settlement in Ceylon could have an impact on much, much larger issues that could arise in other countries. That was their only point. That was a damn reasonable point, and they finally settled for a very sensible, modest settlement. So I didn't find the oil companies all that benighted or aggressive or evil or whatever. In fact, I was grateful they left me alone.

O'BRIEN: In terms of strategic importance, now, is there any great concern about the Russians at this point getting into . . .

KOMER: Negative. I mean in what sense?

O'BRIEN: Well, these are producing countries. Is there any great fear that the Russians are going to get in terms of transportation, in terms of refining, in terms of eventually marketing?

KOMER: None. None. By this time Russia had become a major international oil competitor. The idea that the Arabs could sell oil to the Russians had been finally and definitively torpedoed. In fact, various Middle

East companies were around complaining that the Russians were undercutting Middle East markets. In other words, the Russians were selling to European countries in competition with the Middle East companies, and we had a number of complaints that the Russians were employing unfair competition. In fact, the shah of Iran got a little pissed off about this on one occasion as I recall. No, no fear that. . . . You see, there was never in all the long history of this problem much concern that the Russians would try to take over Middle East oil so they could use it. The concern was exclusively that they might get in there so they could deny it to Western Europe. As you know, we are not very dependent on Middle East oil, but Western Europe is heavily, of course. We're not strategically dependent. Financially, it's a very good thing.

O'BRIEN: Well, I know the countries have some objection to the way that oil is handled--purchased, marketed, some of the arrangements that are made. Did they ever come to the State Department or did they ever make any representations to the president directly in an attempt to get at the companies, to bring about pressure on the companies?

KOMER: Yes. And interestingly enough it was not Arabs. It was the shah. I'd say the one who tried to use the most influence to get a more favorable deal--the most political influence--was the shah with the Iranian consortium. Second, as you know, Kennedy always had his sentimental soft spot for the Algerians, if they got a little unhappy with their companies. And I think probably he talked with them, or they tried to talk to him a little bit.

KENNEDY AND AFRICAN ISSUES

Incidentally, I've never been interviewed on Kennedy in Africa and I'm just as happy, because my memory has really flown on that. You know, the Congo exercise is a great little exercise in some pretty fancy diplomacy and undercover work to prevent the Congo from going sour.

O'BRIEN: Okay. Do you have a few minutes? In what way?

KOMER: Yeah, but I don't remember anything . . .

O'BRIEN: Oh, I see.

KOMER: . . . except the big picture.

O'BRIEN: Okay, well, let's talk about the big picture for a few moments.

KOMER: I forget when the Congo thing got started, but I think we sort of inherited it, didn't we?

O'BRIEN: Yeah, it was boiling when Kennedy comes into office.

KOMER: It was boiling when I took over. And of course, the first year, '61, I had nothing to do with Africa, except North Africa. See, I had the Maghreb. But the second year, as I recall, I think it was Christmas 1961 that I acquired Africa, or was it Christmas 1962? May have been Christmas '62. See, I can't even remember when I took over the African account which, by the way, I took--yeah, I think it was '62. So I only had really eleven months under Kennedy. And most of the important stuff in the Congo had been done. I was in on the final cleanup, the (Joseph D.) Mobuto period. But Mr. (Michael) Struelens was around to see me all the time. You know, it's one of the functions of the White House staff to act as a lightning rod for all these influence-peddlers of one kind or another. But here's an example of a very important country--area really; it wasn't a country--very important area in the heartland of Africa, one of the richest areas in all of Africa, sort of falling apart in excess of anti-colonial zeal, graft, tribalism and everything else, and us trying to keep the thing together and to prevent fragmentation, to prevent the Soviets, the French or other people from messing the whole thing up. Sort of like a pre-play of Nigeria. And us doing this with the use of some of the instruments of counterinsurgency. You know, we gave military aid to the Congolese army and government, we gave a lot of covert assistance of one kind or another. We never sent U.S. troops. At one point we sent U.S. transport planes. They were operating there for quite a time, and it worked out. You know, this damned thing went back and forth--the Katanga rebellion and then other revolts and the use of the white mercenaries; it was quite a deal. And with Senator (Thomas J.) Dodd and others saying, why the hell were we backing (Cyrille) Adoula and then (Moise) Tshombe and then Mobutu, and oh, God.

O'BRIEN: I'm curious. There is a kind of domestic problem here that's related with diplomacy. I know it wasn't your thing in a sense, but did you ever

get involved in any of the problems of the diplomats from the Middle East countries or the South Asian countries and the problems they had just living in Washington? As I understand it, there's . . .

KOMER: Dennis, why do you think we have a State Department? I can assure you that there are some issues in which I, at least, on the White House staff, and I think I can also speak for "By George McBungle" (McGeorge Bundy), we just stayed so far away we were above that. That they took up with the State Department.

O'BRIEN: Oh, okay.

KOMER: Hell, yes. At cocktail parties, at dinners the ambassador of XYZ would sidle up, "Oh, I've got a problem," et cetera, et cetera. Boy, let me tell you, we just referred them to Dean Rusk or to Phil-- not to Dean Rusk, to the Department of State. No, no, no. Absolutely not. The only case I can remember in which I got dragged was that the former vice-president then president of the United States right after the assassination sold his house--you know, the big one up in Spring Valley-- because he had moved into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. And Cherif Guellal, whom I happened to know fairly well, the Algerian ambassador--by the way, quite an operator and a very bright young man. I think he was twenty-eight at the time. He's still living in Washington. He was a (Ahmed) Ben Bella man, and (Houari) Boumedienne kicked Ben Bella out after a year or so, and left, and he's now in Washington.

But the only issue I got involved in was when the president was going to sell his house to Guellal, to the Algerians for their embassy. And I got involved, because he came around. You know, here we were involved with something involving the president, so I went across the street to sort of find out if I could be of help and I quickly found out that I was not able to be of help. But that was the only issue. As you can imagine, that was a really sensitive one, and that didn't go to the State Department. My own personal view on the matter was, as I said to Cherif, "God damn it, you're supposed to be representing a new revolutionary, proletarian government, and you go buy the second most expensive house in Washington. Now, what does that look like?" And then I shut up, because it dawned on me maybe the president wanted to sell

it. Here's this new government, doesn't have a nickel to its name, buys a house for a couple of hundred thousand dollars.

O'BRIEN: Well, we've covered the waterfront.

KOMER: We sure have.

O'BRIEN: Is there anything that comes to mind that we could get into?

KOMER: No, unless a few more things on Africa.

O'BRIEN: Okay.

KOMER: Let me think.

MORE ON HOW THE WHITE HOUSE OPERATED

O'BRIEN: I don't know whether I gave this to you last time, a list of White House appointments?

KOMER: No, you didn't.

O'BRIEN: You might want to go down it and just see if anything there jogs your memory that we really haven't covered in some way.

KOMER: What sort of a way? What is this list?

O'BRIEN: Well, this is (Kenneth P.) Kenny O'Donnell's list, sort of the official White House appointment book that was kept. And it's not accurate. I've discovered a lot of inaccuracies in the thing, but it's sort of, oh, 60 percent, 70 percent right. There are a lot of people that got in to see the president that are not listed on there, and there are some people who are listed on there that never saw him--or I should say in the six volumes of the thing or whatever it is.

KOMER: You mean these are the meetings I was involved in?

O'BRIEN: Yeah, these are some of the places where your name comes up.

KOMER: Notice how little I get to see the president in

'61? Now, this is a very limited list, because the way we did business was to walk in the back door with the items unannounced. . . . Kennedy was the most informal guy I have ever seen and it was just great to work for him. You sort of just walked on in and he. . . . As a matter of fact, he had this habit of asking you what you thought about problems that were not in your bailiwick at all. You know, I'd be standing in there. Bundy would be there. (Theodore C.) Ted Sorensen might be there. Arthur might be there. A couple other guys. They were all. . . . And I would sort of wait, because I was usually the junior present, till they got through with their business. Except that on occasion Kennedy would sort of, just to let them know that he didn't have to do it their way, he would say, "Okay, Bob, what's your problem?" and leave the rest of them standing there which embarrassed me. But they knew how he played games too. At any rate, he would be dealing with Sorensen on a problem or with Schlesinger on a problem, he was perfectly capable of looking up and saying, "Say, Bob, what do you think about this?" And, you know, it might be something that sometimes I answered. Sometimes I got in trouble. And he used to do that with other guys about my problems.

But let's say just on the on-the-record meetings, that were in the log, that were set up by Kenny, you notice only one in 1961, but '62 we're up to a couple of dozen or more than a couple of dozen. And by '63 it is very frequent. Official sessions.

O'BRIEN: Official sessions, right.

KOMER: Yeah, yeah. (Inaudible) . . . here we can take up the other thing. That was usually the case. (Interruption) "Off-the-record meeting with the president, Rusk, Bell, (George W.) Ball, Gaud, (Lawrence F.) Larry O'Brien and (Ralph A.) Dungan." I'll bet that must have been on some big AID program matter. (Interruption) . . . these meetings must have been about.

It said in the State briefing book that the Somalis were known as the Irish of Africa. We always used to--is that still on?

O'BRIEN: Yeah.

KOMER: Good. We used to throw away the State briefing books. Kennedy used to get mad as hops at them. Every White House staff tries for its first year

if office to get the State Department to do things the way the president wants. Same thing with LBJ. State can never get through its head the way briefings ought to be done for a president, that he cannot read all of this stuff. The State desk officer's philosophy is you've got to have a briefing book that covers every conceivable topic because if it comes up and you're not covered, you're in Dutch. The White House staffers' approach is the exact opposite. I want to be sure that my principal hits this guy on at least the key three or four things and the hell with the rest, because you can't cover the waterfront. Or at least let's really brief him on the one thing that he's going to take up and the one thing that we're going to take up. So Kennedy, who was very profane about these matters, just couldn't stand the State stuff, and Bundy very quickly said, "Okay. We will have the State books available or we may even send them in, but there will be a two-page or a three-page covering memo. You better write it the way he wants it." You see, handling all of the Middle East nineteen countries, plus the North Africans, et cetera, and then acquiring thirty countries in Africa; Jesus, the number of briefing books and visits that I had to deal with was staggering. More than anybody else. When I got Africa, it was much more than Latin America.

So I very quickly evolved a quite simple and breezy art form and really focused on the key things we wanted to get across and the key things he was likely to get hit with and then just a few little mood-setters. Then I would sometimes cross-reference to the State books or I would always put down at the end so the secretary of state wouldn't be able to get mad that, "The State briefing books are attached" or "Mrs. (Evelyn N.) Lincoln has the State briefing books in case you want to look at them, and if you have time, I suggest you read tab 3a because it's pretty interesting" or something like that.

So on the Somali one, Abdirascid (Shermarke) I put down, "These guys are known as the Irishmen of Africa." Well, that caught the old Kennedy eye. In the opening, welcoming statement he ad-libbed in "the Irishmen of Africa." He mentioned it again in the toast of the state dinner. And he and this Somali. . . . The Somalis are very attractive--tall, slim. You know, they pride themselves on being quite different from the rest of the Africans. They

apparently are quite distinct; I've never been clear why. And, oh, he got along famously. And afterwards, you know, he sort of said to me, "Listen, can't we help these guys? They're a very impressive bunch." I said, "Good God, Mr. President, they're the great irredentists of Africa. They sit on the least viable chunk of desert and scrub that exists. They're out to get a chunk of Kenya. They're out to take over a big chunk of Ethiopia where we have all . . . (Interruption)

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

WHITE HOUSE - STATE RELATIONSHIPS AGAIN

O'BRIEN: Well, should we begin?

KOMER: Yeah, go right ahead.

O'BRIEN: Well, I think an interesting place to begin would be with the relationship between Galbraith, Rusk and the president.

KOMER: Well, I don't know if you've read Galbraith on the subject.

O'BRIEN: Yes.

KOMER: Are we on the air?

O'BRIEN: Yes, we're on the air.

KOMER: As I pointed out back in '64 in my earlier interviews, Galbraith was peculiarly a White House man. As you can see from his own diary, he played it to the hilt. He made it sort of a point of pride, and with Ken points of pride are frequently carried to the point where they give pain. He just did it and redid it in spades, with the net result that I think there was a considerable amount of justifiable annoyance on the part of the department that one of their key ambassadors was not really reporting much to the department at all but on all key issues was trying to deal directly with the White House. I will say this for Dean Rusk: to my knowledge Rusk never made a big thing of it. Dean was much more tolerant of Ken's peccadilloes than Ken has ever given him credit for. In other words, Dean recognized this as being one of those things and never really sought to clamp down on Galbraith.

Ken was also very lucky in having an exceedingly gentlemanly and decent assistant secretary in Phil Talbot, who gets even less credit from Ken who sort of regards Phil Talbot as the epitome of the department's bureaucratic position, whereas I think Phil was in the invidious position of being the official spokesman, the assistant secretary who dealt with Galbraith, and so he's blamed for an awful lot of things that were really beyond his control. However, even Phil went way out of his way to turn the other cheek to Galbraith insults.

Now, I was an interested participant, because, of course, I was the White House staff man. And while Galbraith might have thought he was communicating mostly with Kennedy, a fair amount of it was with me and through me, though I don't want to overstate that, because in that early period Kennedy was very interested in reading Galbraith's stuff. As Ken says in his book, the style and pungency were always very entertaining to the president. So I was sort of a friend of both sides. I tried to mediate on various occasions or to smooth things over between State and Ken Galbraith. I tried it more recently when his book came out. And he's unregenerate, I think, very unnecessarily harsh with Rusk and Talbot. But it was an edgy relationship, one kept edgy because Galbraith took a certain amount of perverse pleasure in keeping it alive.

O'BRIEN: Then the president didn't read all of Galbraith letters. How about some of the responses referring to Galbraith? Did you do these?

KOMER: A few. Bundy did a few. Several were done by the president himself. In other words, he regarded Ken as a personal friend. As you know, Ken was writing on a lot of things that really were not official business, or at any rate were not his official business. I remember one of the standard jokes around the White House was Galbraith's way-out view on the gold problem. I've never been very clear on where he stood and why, but Walter Heller and Rostow and others used to get quite annoyed with some of Galbraith's economic advice, given very freely in these letters. I forget, since I haven't finished his diary. I am not clear on how much. But I was involved only by being a bystander when remarks were passed on his.

O'BRIEN: Well, when it comes to policy now for South Asia,

of course, there's Talbot and there's yourself. Now, does Talbot have a man, in a sense, that has particular responsibilities for this area?

KOMER: Oh, yes. He had more than a man. He had a whole team.

O'BRIEN: Well, who are some of the people here in the department that . . .

KOMER: Well, one of the very best was the India desk officer at the time, Carol Laise, now ambassador in Nepal, who I think is just great and I think who Ken likes too--and his predecessor, Ellsworth Bunker. Was Ellsworth Bunker his predecessor?

O'BRIEN: No. It was Bowles, wasn't it? No, not Bowles.

KOMER: No, it wasn't Bowles. Who was Ken's predecessor?

O'BRIEN: I believe it was Bunker.

KOMER: It was Bunker. Well, Ellsworth thought Carol Laise was exceedingly competent when she was out there as political officer in his embassy. Of course, he later married her. It's been a great marriage. But Carol Laise was a key actor. There was a young fellow named (David T.) Dave Schneider, who has since gone up in the department. There was Turner Cameron, who was Carol's deputy. Initially there was (James P.) Jim Grant, who had been AID mission director in Ceylon--excellent man--who was deputy to Phil Talbot, deputy assistant secretary. So I guess he was number two. And then Carol was the third. And then fourth came Turner Cameron in the hierarchy at State. Then there were a number of junior people. And of course, there was Walter McConaughy, the heavy over in Karachi. But odds like this, you know, the fact that there were perhaps a half dozen senior bureaucrats involved, didn't bother Ken.

O'BRIEN: Well, you know, in your earlier interview you mentioned that you really didn't get involved in Goa at all. Why was that? Why didn't you get involved?

KOMER: Goa came when?

O'BRIEN: Late '61.

KOMER: Late '61. I forget why I didn't. It came very quickly. I remember it was a force majeure sort of thing. It was over fairly quickly, and I guess probably because it was a big stink, a ten-day wonder. Probably Bundy handled that. I'm very clear that I was not involved in the Goa thing except reading the traffic.

O'BRIEN: Well, do you recall. . . . The Indians are quite upset about some of the public statements of (Adlai E.) Stevenson in the UN. What was the White House reaction to this? Was Stevenson on his own in this?

KOMER: Dennis, I do not recall. Adlai, being a big wheel, had a tendency on occasion to go off on his own. With the wisdom of hindsight, I suspect that the issue, which may not have been as clear at the time, was that Stevenson was worried about the whole question of self-determination and forcible takeovers, and Goa was just a piddling example. So he thought he had to make the general principle very clear. And since the Indians had taken Goa and weren't going to give it back anyway, you know, we could get sort of a free ride.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever get any firsthand insight into, or well, just any insight into that relationship between Stevenson, the White House--either the president or Bundy . . .

KOMER: Definitely.

O'BRIEN: . . . and Rusk?

KOMER: Definitely.

O'BRIEN: I wonder if you could go into that?

KOMER: Now most of this is secondhand, is impression from being around when comments were passed, frequently firsthand. You know, frequently I was there when the president or Bundy or Rusk said something. On other occasions Bundy would say something about what others had said, you know, and it would be on the gossip circuit. I also, as you know, was very friendly with Arthur Schlesinger. And Arthur was, in effect, sort of the

backstairs, informal conduit through which Adlai presented his views to the White House when he didn't himself. Incidentally, I saw very little of Mr. Stevenson. Somehow mostly when he was down at meetings I wasn't there. But I have the very clear impression that the president, Rusk and Bundy thought that Stevenson was sort of a softie and not terribly action-oriented or--I want to seek the right word. It's not that they thought he was not enough of a hard-liner; that wasn't it.

O'BRIEN: Tough-minded.

KOMER: Tough-minded. I think tough-minded is as good as any phrase. And in general, they tended to regard Stevenson's advice as being sort of fuzzy and insufficiently tough-minded, if you will. Now, I remember this quite clearly from a whole series of comments that were passed over time: Stevenson's role, the amount of. . . . You know, I would get this in terms of Stevenson's sending in cables, or sending in messages making suggestions or complaining about particular lines. And they just weren't given much credence, either by the secretary of state or by the president and Bundy. So that was sort of an indicator of a decline in his influence. You know, you can go back and infer from things in which I was not personally involved in any way: the fact the president didn't pick Adlai as secretary of state: the fact that he was not involved in a lot of the great decisions; because he was involved in Cuba II because if you hadn't involved him, you know, you couldn't. . . . And the UN was more or less, at least peripherally, related to almost any issue. But by and large, I had the distinct impression from a lot that I heard and observed that Stevenson was not regarded as quite in tune with the Kennedy way of doing things.

O'BRIEN: Is there any specific instance in which you're involved in, let's say, an Arab-Israeli problem-- which of course, went to the UN--or with any of the India-Pakistan problems that went to the UN? Is there any particular instance in which Stevenson did not follow within the guidelines of White House and State Department policy in which there's some dissatisfaction?

KOMER: No, not in my business. Not in my business. I cannot recall offhand an issue on which there were big problems with New York. You know, we used

New York actively. The Yemen thing was ostensibly run through the UN, but essentially that was just a cover. The West Iranian negotiation, incidentally with Bunker also the key negotiator as in Yemen, was really run as a bilateral exercise with the UN, by tacit understanding, just sort of serving as the cover. And, as I recall, most of these issues were not handled in New York by Adlai personally. I forget who his number two was.

O'BRIEN: Was it (Francis T. P.) Plimpton?

KOMER: I don't think it was Plimpton.

O'BRIEN: (Philip M.) Klutznick?

KOMER: No. Was it (Charles W.) Charlie Yost then?

O'BRIEN: Yost was there. It very well could have been.

KOMER: Yeah. I get the impression that most of these Middle East issues were handled by Charlie Yost or by someone else up there who was a pro. To sum up then: No, I do not.

MORE ON INDIA-PAKISTAN

O'BRIEN: Well, you were involved in some of the letters that were written in the attempt of the president to bring together (Mohammed) Ayub Khan and (Jawaharlal) Nehru on some kind of a settlement of some problems, Kashmir and so forth.

KOMER: Right.

O'BRIEN: Now, there were some letters written. What other pressures or persuasions were applied?

KOMER: Well, a fair amount of personal discussion. I notice in looking over those earlier interviews that Ayub came fairly early on in 1961 and Nehru followed that fall. Then I see that Ayub was there the next fall or winter again. Of course, the big Kennedy effort there took place in the immediate aftermath of the thing with China, where largely, as I recall, on British initiative we jumped in in a joint mediation effort thinking that the fact the Indians were petrified about the Chinese would lead them to want to protect their rear by reaching

an accomodation with the Paks. And there was the famous Duncan Sandys--it was (W. Averell) Harriman, wasn't it?

O'BRIEN: Harriman and Sandys.

KOMER: Effort which pooped out very quickly. And I was one of those, as I recall, who argued that we should let it poop out, that we were just not going to get very far down that road. Now, of course, while our hope was that we could convince the Indians that their newfound Chinese concerns provided a newly compelling rationale for an accommodation with Pakistan over Kashmir, simultaneously we were after the Paks saying, "Look, you. This gives you a better chance than you've ever had before, but you must modify your claims. We're not going to reach a meeting of minds if you continue to stick with the same old all-or-nothing approach."

O'BRIEN: Well, why is the president so concerned about this area?

KOMER: First, because it was heating up. You had the Chinese involved. Second, because of the intrinsic importance of the subcontinent as the greatest agglomeration of population in the world next to Red China. We got very interested in India. We got the more interested in India-Pakistan as China went sour. And from a geo-strategic viewpoint, there were many of us who were arguing that India and Japan were the only logical counterweights to Communist China, the only areas with sufficient economic and human potential to be able to stand up against the Chinese in Asia at a time, you remember, when the Chinese were allied with the Russians. Well, the balance of forces is somewhat different today. But lastly there was that great liberal and humanitarian fascination with India's teeming millions, which I think greatly influenced Ken Galbraith, and which to a lesser extent influenced Kennedy as well. You know, there were many reasons aside from the actual play of events which led people who were interested in thinking strategically to pay a lot more attention to India than had been paid to it in the previous fifteen years.

O'BRIEN: Did you get any insight into the president's personal feelings towards people like Ayub Khan and Nehru?

KOMER: Not much. You see, my personal dealings with Kennedy were much more on Arab-Israeli issues, Iranian issues, than they were on the Indian and Pak problems until fairly late in the day. And so on those early visits in the 1962 period Carl Kaysen was involved, and Carl was senior to me. For example, I was initially supposed to go out with Harriman and the general we sent out at the time of the '62 flareup--I forget who he was--and Carl went instead. I didn't go until considerably later with Walt Rostow.

O'BRIEN: Well, the question particularly in regard to aid matters, but the question of population control in India is one that the White House deals with. Did you get into any of this at all?

KOMER: Well, there's no question that Kennedy, as far as a place like India was concerned, was very strongly for population control. Population planning was regarded as just very sensible. It just hit you in the face. So Kennedy didn't have to worry too much with respect to a basically Hindu or Muslim constituency about the political repercussions as he always had to with respect to the United States, or Latin America or Western Europe. So my impression, as I recall, was that the president was thoroughly behind the increasing stress we were trying to place on population planning in India and Pakistan.

O'BRIEN: But he saw it basically as a political issue too, as well, domestically?

KOMER: Oh, yes. Look, for example, at the way in which LBJ was much, much more forthright on the whole subject of population control than Kennedy had been, although Kennedy was far more forthright than his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower. And in terms of background and inhibitions, it is perhaps even more impressive that Kennedy was as liberal as he was than that LBJ, who came from a different background, was much more so.

O'BRIEN: Well, in your earlier interviews, as well as some of the things that have been written about India and Pakistan and the United States, there's an indication that the Pentagon and State, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), were all very, very cool towards the

idea of long-term military, political aid for India. Well, this goes as well to Nasser. There's some disagreement between AID, as I understand it, and the State Department and the White House over these things. What's the foundation of that?

KOMER: Well, let's talk about India-Pakistan.

O'BRIEN: Okay.

KOMER: In the Pentagon it was primarily that Ayub was an ally. We had developed since about 1956 when the Paks started into the Baghdad Pact and then SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization)--or maybe it was SEATO and then the Baghdad Pact. They were officially allies in two pacts. We had a big military program. Institutional links developed between the Pentagon and the Pakistani. And this came, as you remember, simultaneously with the advent of an authoritarian, essentially military regime in Pakistan itself, first with (Iskander) Mirza, the defense secretary, and then he was replaced by the chief of staff, Ayub. So it is natural to see why the Pentagon had already developed institutional ties to the Paks. With respect to CIA it was primarily that we had intelligence facilities in Pakistan of, at the time, great importance. With respect to State, it was more both these issues plus a hangover of the earlier John Foster Dulles-type view of the world. And lastly, I would say, there is the inherent resistance of bureaucracy to change. So the conservators of past policies --in many cases the professional participants in past policy in State, AID, and CIA and Defense--were much slower to want to change than those of us New Frontiersmen, from the president on down, who came in and sort of sized up the situation without all this freight of past commitments or past scars, and said, "Look, we're betting on the wrong horse." So the cleavage between the White House and large chunks of the bureaucracy was a natural one.

I might add that on this issue Robert McNamara in Defense, having had no previous commitment to the Paks, was much more pro-Indian--I mean much more sensitive to the new strategic rationale than was Dean Rusk, who was one of the advocates of the chain of pacts and a participant and, as secretary of state, sort of the defender of existing commitments. I'm not saying that Rusk was anti-Indian and pro-Pak. Rusk was much more "let's not abandon the old at the time we're trying to shift over to something new," whereas McNamara was much more prepared to cut ties, espec-

ially since he was the one who was paying a large part of the freight in the military aid program to Pakistan, which he was convinced wasn't buying us anything militarily at all. You know, the idea that the Russians were going to attack across the Hindu Kush and invade the subcontinent through Afghanistan and Pakistan was for the birds. He had other places to spend money. So there was a natural cleavage between the old policy and the new, and the institutional guardians of the old policy died fairly hard.

Now, I might say that you have to differentiate between personalities in this. This was quite a serious debate. It never really focused. It sort of was a rolling discussion that would come to the fore as other issues--India-Pakistan issues--were flushed up. Phil Talbot, for example, was very clear on the primacy of our strategic interests in India, but at the same time felt that our interests in India required a rapprochement between India and Pakistan, because India had so many problems that this was one that if it could be solved would greatly ease our programs to build up India. In the Defense Department, (John T.) McNaughton and (Townsend W.) Tim Hoopes were very clear on the pro-Indian rationale--the strategic rationale for supporting India--and not continuing to throw good money after bad in Pakistan. So in Defense you have the senior civilians, in this case McNamara and ISA (International Security Affairs), being, I would say, more on the side of shifting our interests from Pakistan to India, whereas the uniformed military almost invariably still with a rather strong pro-Pak bias.

O'BRIEN: As a kind of continuing debate, in a sense are the people who are arguing a similar kind of policy towards (Gamel Abdel) Nasser and (Achmed) Sukarno--more of a cooperation policy with them--do they, in a sense, fall in the same camps?

KOMER: Partly. Where you had the . . .

O'BRIEN: Is there any connection at all?

KOMER: . . . same people dealing with the problems. For example, Talbot would have nothing to do on Sukarno. Talbot was very much for the effort to do something about Nasser. because that was in his bailiwick, to try and do business with Nasser. In Defense, yes. McNamara, McNaughton, Hoopes (Peter O.) Solbert were all

partisans of the Kennedy policy, whereas the uniformed military tended to be quite anti-Sukarno, anti-Nasser, anti-Nehru, et cetera. So, roughly speaking, I think you've got a valid point.

THE INDIAN OCEAN AGAIN--and U.S./U.K. RELATIONS

O'BRIEN: Well, going back to this Indian Ocean task force and the way that it not only relates to India but also relates to Britain. Basically the British, what's their position in these years? Are they attempting to pull out of their military commitment; out of the Indian Ocean?

KOMER: It varies considerably with the issue at stake: the British in the sixties, or at least in the earlier sixties, trying desperately to figure ways to hang on in the India Ocean; seeing Malaya going independent; having lost their position in India, Pakistan and Burma and Ceylon. . . . And remember we had Bandaranaike in Ceylon--there were the two of them. And the British, sensing that it would be desirable from the standpoint of their strategic interests to get the Americans involved in yet another area where they could no longer carry the can, and also willing to work jointly with the Americans if it didn't cost too much to develop alternatives to the former British-owned base structure in the area--the British were, I would say, quite interested in having us come in.

O'BRIEN: And we were quite interested in keeping them there?

KOMER: Some were, some weren't. This is one of the things that's always baffled me about American post-war policy. I have never understood why we didn't go into more of a partnership basis with the British. In the first place, it would have kept them there longer. They'd be there still in greater strength. In the second place, it would have been more rational and cost-effective. And in the third place, it would have been less politically painful, although at the time many Americans were arguing it would be more, that we would be tying up with the old colonialists. As a matter of fact, the British have a better reputation these days in that general area, from Suez to Singapore, than we do. And it's not because they've already pulled out.

O'BRIEN: Does this ever come up and find its way into the (Harold) Macmillan-Kennedy conversations?

KOMER: Not very much. Not very much. You see, that Indian Ocean thing really didn't get going very much before the assassination. It was a low-key thing. It was one of those things where Kennedy was interested and willing to say, "Okay. Go see what you can do." But not a major issue.

O'BRIEN: Now, you're one of the major proponents of that, aren't you?

KOMER: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Now, who else, in a sense are the proponents of this?

KOMER: Of the Indian Ocean task force?

O'BRIEN: Of the Indian Ocean task force.

KOMER: Not much. Not many. Quite naturally Talbot and company's sort of interested. Interesting enough, I think McNaughton's sort of negative, and McNamara very lukewarm--in their case largely on the grounds, "God, we've got enough other problems to worry about and here you're having us take on yet another one." And I was pointing out, "Look, this whole area from Suez to Singapore is heating up. We've had the Chinese making trouble in '62. We have the Paks starting to play footsie with the Chicoms and then with the Russians. We have Bandaranaike in Ceylon. We have Sukarno over on the eastern end. We have (Julius K.) Nyerere in Tanzania sort of playing games with our friends the Chinese as well as the Russians. We have the Zanzibar business." I was saying, "Look, this is an area of the world that is becoming more volatile at the very time when the former strategic balance-holders, the British essentially, are pulling back and that projecting the trend, it's a more important area."

I had in mind backing up the Indian sub-continent in particular and India above all, recognizing that in peacetime the Indians weren't going to be very receptive to American help. They'd take anything we could give them free in the way of equipment, but they wouldn't want any

American forces in India or Americans building bases in India even if the Chinese thing did heat up. But, boy, look at how they came running to us for help when the Chinese finally smacked them and taught them a little lesson. So the idea of having sea power--offshore, largely invisible, based on one of these island complexes, readily available--just made a lot of sense. Besides which the sea power was very flexible. I kept pointing out you could use it one week over around Indonesia, and the other week you'd be over in the Red Sea. This was a largely a personal feeling of mine that here in this area between Suez and Singapore, which happened to be largely my bailiwick, we did not have disposable US power to back up the kind of active diplomacy that was much more the Kennedy forte than that of the previous administration, which had relied on chains of pacts.

O'BRIEN: Well, how do people like Bundy and Rostow line up on this?

KOMER: As I recall, Walt wasn't heavily involved because he'd left the White House by this time. But insofar as he was, Walt was much more of an enthusiast for it than Mac. Bear in mind, if Mac had been actively opposed, he would not have agreed to my dealing with the president on this matter or added it in. Therefore, Mac was sort of tacitly friendly to this thing but not prepared to invest a great deal of capital in it. He had much larger issues on his personal plate at the time.

O'BRIEN: How about Rusk?

KOMER: The secretary was fairly sphinx-like on this one. I don't recall whether he ever registered. One of the big problems we ran into was the U. S. Navy.

O'BRIEN: Oh, is that right?

KOMER: There had been a strong school of thought in the U. S. Navy that had proposed an Indian Ocean fleet, a so-called Eighth Fleet, some years earlier or a year or two earlier. It never got off the ground for the simple reason that the Navy figured it wasn't going to get any more carriers, therefore carriers in the Indian Ocean would be at the expense of carriers someplace else. The Navy wanted to keep its carriers in the Atlantic, in the Med

(Mediterranean Sea), and in the Pacific. So that group of the Navy which was saying, "Here is a new area of strategic interest for which sea power seems peculiarly suited," was running into the vested interests in the Atlantic-Mediterranean on one hand and Pacific deployments on the other, which meant the Navy Department was not actively supporting this because they feared that they would have to rob Peter to pay Paul. One of the reasons why this very interesting little gambit didn't move along much faster. . . .

Well, let me say, here's an interesting area where I played a role that was quite significant even though I did not have of and by myself great personal status or influence. And not so much the Indian Ocean thing, which is just an offshoot, but the whole question of doing business with Nasser, making an attempt to do what we should have done (and started abortively to do in '52-'54 and then John Foster (Dulles) cut it off for reasons I've never been clear on). But the shift to greater reliance on India and less reliance on Pakistan, the attempt to do business with Nasser I think were a combination of an activist, innovative, imaginative president and a staff officer who was constantly agitating these issues and putting them in those strategic terms. In other words, these were all Komer proposals, in a sense. I was the intellectual innovator, and Kennedy said, "Here's a guy who sends me a memo, 'We ought to be doing this.'" I kept trying to put these various lesser issues in this larger strategic context. But the role of a fellow who is in a sufficiently important spot that he can get the ear of the top policymakers or the eye and innovative people in the role of the top policymakers, it's an interesting combination. Because you ask why the Indian Ocean thing didn't go much farther. Well, among other things, there was only one guy sort of pushing it. There were others who were acquiescent or interested. And the only reason I could push it was because I had tried it out on the president with the acquiescence of Bundy, and he was interested. And the same thing with the shift to India, which was a much larger issue--the Indian Ocean squadron just sort of a part of that--to do business with Nasser. I just had been. . . . These were some of the problems that had really bothered me in the fifties during my NSC period, you see. We go back to that original memo that got me my job with Bundy.

O'BRIEN: And this was one of the things that . . .

KOMER: This was one of the things. Are we putting our money on the wrong horse in the subcontinent? was one of them, I think. Can we do business with Nasser? was another one of them. And we better do something about West New Guinea was a third one of them, you see. So these were problems that I had on my plate as to what U. S. policy ought to look like for a long time. So here came along a new guy--boy, he took them--said, you know, "This makes sense. Let's do something about it." And then kept after it, in some cases much more than others. But second, I followed through. I just didn't sort of sit around. I float the first memo on the Indian Ocean squadron. Kennedy says, "Let's try it out for size. Take it up with McNamara." McNamara sits on it for six months or three or four months, because it ain't very important in his lexicon, and it could have dropped right there, you know. Another little trial balloon had been assayed. A president had said, "Well, this is interesting. Let's do something or let's look into it." And then it gets dropped.

But I didn't let these things drop is the interesting thing. I sort of needled McNaughton, "Where's McNamara's answer on this thing?" you know, which obviously was a staff product initially. And the India-Pak thing, of course, that I was always after. That was one of the things that really bothered me, that in this very important area of the world we had let our rather doctrinaire, cold war stance permit us to be conned by two very shrewd and charming Pakistani, Mirza and Ayub, into putting more emphasis on Pakistan's hundred million than India's five hundred million.

Now I might add, I share the standard British, Anglo-American preference for Paks over Indians. No Westerner who goes, unless he's a terrible romantic or a mystic--few Americans who go to India and Pakistan and spend any time with Indians and Pakistani end up liking Indians better than Paks. The Paks are just much more engaging. They're much more like us, if you want to put it very crudely. And I might add, the same thing in Washington. The Pak ambassador and the Paks here were just much more engaging, whereas the Indians were constantly causing us trouble. You know, it was by no means as bad as during the (Vengalil Krishnan) Krishna Menon period which ended with the Chinese attack on India. And even Krishna was calming down a little bit by 1960. But it was almost despite our prejudices that we were

going in that direction. And I'll tell you, I am sure JFK found Ayub more congenial than Jawaharlal.

O'BRIEN: There was a great deal of concern though about Krishna Menon in those first years.

KOMER: Yes, there was, which was an inheritance from the fifties when he had been a real thorn in everybody's side. And Menon bears a very real share of the responsibility for India's failure to awaken in time and to do anything about the Chinese threat. You know, Menon used to say, "I was put in as defense minister precisely because I don't know anything about military matters. The generals must be kept in their place. We can't afford to waste a lot of money on the Indian military establishment." Those chickens came home to roost. And he, of course, got canned and he's never been able to make a comeback.

O'BRIEN: Well, after that, after, of course, his downfall which comes with the Chinese Communist attack on India, you move rather quickly to get some kind of an arrangement to get military aid to India. Now, is this basically something that's coming out of the White House? Is the momentum of this and the push. . . . Is there any resistance in the White House, in Defense or in State?

KOMER: In the White House, none. A little bit in Defense. None in State.

O'BRIEN: From where in Defense?

KOMER: The chiefs (Joint Chiefs of Staff) largely, who are receptive to the Pak argument. You know, you're arming those guys. They say they want arms against the Chinese, but they're going to turn around and use them on us. So the residual of what I've previously described as the pro-Pakistani sentiment--you know, one doesn't want to overdo these things--is still there and leads to a certain amount of footdragging. Because, of course, the Paks were coming in constantly screaming, you know, "You say you give the stuff to India for use against the Chinese on the northeast frontier, but what's to stop them from bringing it over and using it on the northwest frontier? And, if you're going to give that to India, then you ought to give us more in compensation." You know, that was the fallback position. And this was a fairly active dialogue or triologue,

whatever you want to call it. See, the Chinese attack on India opened a whole new avenue of American linkage with the Indian government. Before that, they hadn't wanted our military aid; we hadn't wanted to give them military aid, so it had been exclusively economic. Now, all of a sudden, the Indians wake up and see, "God, we have a strategic interest in common with the Americans and, interestingly, with the Russians," because by that time the Sino-Soviet split was pretty deep. And we found ourselves, I might add, in one of those reciprocally competitive situations where if we didn't provide some help to the Indians they were going to go to the Russians, and if the Russians didn't provide some help to the Indians they were going to come to us. So there was that factor to be thrown into the calculus.

O'BRIEN: Well, in regard to that, did you get any insight into Russia? Were there any contacts from the White House or the department with the Russians in feeling them out or trying to get an idea of how they stood in regard to the terms?

KOMER: Very little that I can recall. Very little. This may have been mentioned. There was sort of a tacit understanding. In many cases, you do these things tacitly, because we didn't want to commit ourselves to the Soviets. They didn't want to commit themselves to us.

MORE ON AFRICA

BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II

KOMER: . . . because he had been, you know, in the Senate, one of the few who had correctly seen the likely outcome of the Algerian revolt going on essentially since '54. The Algerians loved him. You know, he was a national hero to the Algerians. And naturally they lost no time in trying to exploit that. He was always a bit sentimental about Algeria. I think what finally tore it was in '61--the end of '61, or the end of '62, I forget which; I think it was the end of '61--Ben Bella came over to see him. Ben Bella had been up at New York at the GA (General Assembly), had come down to see him, and then takes off in a plane, and the next place he stops is Havana. And he apparently said a couple of nasty things down there which I don't recall at the moment. But it really irked Kennedy that here after he had been so nice to the Algerians--he'd made a special effort to get Ben Bella down and do right by him, and they'd had some very good talks, and Ben Bella had been exceedingly

reasonable--vroom, just before Christmas, just after leaving the White House, next stop to smoke cigars with Fidel and make a few cracks at Yankee imperialism. That led to a certain cooling off. But he was always most interested in how things were going in Algeria, as a result of which I had to be an Algerian expert.

O'BRIEN: The Algerians were pretty responsive too, weren't they?

KOMER: Yeah, but they didn't give us much. You know they loved Kennedy and they were always very nice to Kennedy, but as far as the policy was concerned they were pretty outré. Zulifigar Ali Bhutto. The president did not like Bhutto, a feeling which I heartily seconded.

O'BRIEN: That might be an interesting, you know, point to pursue, your insights into the president's personal reactions. (Interruption) How about the president's personal reaction towards a number of these people, particularly the people who came on state visits?

KOMER: I note a reference to the Moroccan-Algerian affair which I think came in the winter of--was it '63 or '62? Let's see. I think it was the winter of '63, remember, the Algerians and the Moroccans got into quite a spat. And my strong feeling was hands-off policy. All we're going to end up doing is getting ourselves in the middle again in one of these little things, and we'll end up losing with both sides, because we can satisfy neither. The hardliners, which means mostly the military again, were all hot to help the Moroccans. And King Hassan thought that he had a special in with us, because after all, Morocco was very pro-Western, and they were allowing us to keep on at the base at Kenitra. There was no doubt that the Algerians were being bad boys and playing footsie with the Soviets and getting all those MIGs and things like that.

So then down south beyond the Atlas (Mountains) they got into this little frontier argument and they had themselves a little war down there. Interestingly enough, the professional French-trained, and partly American-trained, Moroccan army gave a very good account of itself against the Algerians, who were rather more numerous and had more equipment. But we were under considerable pressure, as you can imagine, from both sides. And Kennedy was very clear

that he did not want to get overinvolved. Now, let's see, where was this. . . . (Interruption) Well, I can't think of anything else offhand. I'm sure that if I went over my chrono on Africa, I'd have a lot of interesting things to say, but I just ain't got.

O'BRIEN: I don't know whether we'll ever have an opportunity to take a look at it. Well, thank you, Robert Komer for another good interview.

KOMER: You are welcome, Dennis O'Brien.

O'BRIEN: I suppose it's the last.