Charles F. Baldwin, Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 3/13/1969

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Biographical Note

Baldwin, Ambassador to the Federation of Malaysia from 1961 to 1964 (called the Federation of Malaya until 1963), discusses U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia during the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations, relations between Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and British influence in post-colonial Malaysia, among other issues.

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Charles F. Baldwin

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Charles F. Baldwin – JFK#1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Charles F. Baldwin

March 13, 1969
Charlottesville, Virginia

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: When was the first time that you met John Fitzgerald Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

BALDWIN: I had met him when he was Senator, briefly, but socially only, in Washington with Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]. But what could be called my first official contract with him was when I went in to call on him with Reischauer [Edwin Oldfather Reischauer], Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith], and Young [Kenneth T. Young] to say good-bye before going to my post. That was my first official meeting with the President.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any contact with the Kennedy aides prior to that?

BALDWIN: Yes, I had contact with Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] and others who were working with him, for whom at the President's request I did a paper indicating some changes that I thought might be brought about fruitfully in the Department of State, changes dealing largely with the operational processes: the extreme congestion of work at the decision-making top in the Department; and so some suggestions that I thought might make the Policy Planning Staff more of a planning and less of an emergency fire brigade kind agency.

[-1-]

O'BRIEN: Do you remember anyone else being present at meetings in which you discussed this?

BALDWIN: Tom Hughes [Thomas L. Hughes] was there occasionally; he was then working as one of Bowles' aides. I believe Bill Blair [William M. Blair Jr.] was in and out from time to time. These meetings usually occurred in Chester Bowles' house in Georgetown, which was--I hesitate to use the word "madhouse"--it was a pretty frenzied place from time to time. I remember one morning Martin Luther King, Jr., came in and joined the proceedings. He didn't stay very long, but seemed to be interested in a noncommittal way about foreign affairs. I could recall with difficulty the people that were there but that's all I remember offhand.

O'BRIEN: What in the way of specific recommendations did you make in your paper that you put together?

BALDWIN: I suggested that, as the Department grew, the curse of bigness was afflicting it and to some extent impairing the efficiency of the decision making process. Part of the problem was attributable to the work congestion at the extreme point of the Department's organizational pyramid, where the Secretary made a vast number of decisions about matters concerning which, at times, he had only a short time to become thoroughly informed. That, I believed, was wrong. The obverse should be the case. The higher the priority and the more important the decision, the more times the official should have to reflect upon it and reach a judgment. I made the obvious suggestion that one way to do this would be to use more people; I thought it might be worthwhile to create maybe a few additional deputy-undersecretaries and some deputy assistant secretaries, and then delegate more authority to the lower echelons to make decisions that the Secretary had been making. The other suggestion was that the Policy Planning Staff should be permitted to concentrate exclusively on planning policy--for which it was intended--and be less a troubleshooting group, whose members ran in and out of the Secretary's office, were used in emergencies to make studies, and so forth. It should be permitted to focus on the big job of long-range planning.

[-2-]

O'BRIEN: Were you satisfied with the Eisenhower-Dulles [Dwight D. Eisenhower; John Foster Dulles] policies in regard to Asia and Southeast Asia...

BALDWIN: Well, not entirely, although I have to pull myself back with a jerk, at this point, because I've found one of the common faults of analysts and critics of our foreign policy is the excessive use of wisdom after the fact. It's easy to see what's wrong with a policy when everybody can see it, but not so easy to foresee at the time the policy was formulated that it might be headed for trouble. In retrospect, we can find a good deal that could be criticized in Mr. Dulles' policies (I don't know if they were President

Eisenhower's policies; I think, basically, they were Mr. Dulles') with respect to Asia. But I have to recall the atmosphere, the climate in which those policies were formulated.

In retrospect, some of the things that SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] was supposed to do appear a bit naive today, certainly to the Asians, as well as to informed Americans. It's also quite possible that some of the ways in which the Vietnam situation was handled might have been different. But, as I look back, in my own recollection, I realize that, when those actions were taken, Europe, not Asia, had primary place in the thinking in Washington. Moreover, we were shocked by the Communist conquest of China in 1949. Only a few years before that Ho Chi Minh to us was little more than a doctrinaire, not very important Communist who had been trained in Peking and Moscow. His nationalism seemed a secondary consideration. The implications in the situation were less visible at the time than they became later. The main focus was on Europe, much less on Asia. We had never had a comprehensive Asian policy because most of Asia was colonized. We didn't have to deal directly; we went to Europe with our Asian problems. Suddenly great changes burst upon us.

At the time, I was pre-occupied by a personal problem which blew up like a balloon and eventually brought about my voluntary retirement from the State Department. Although a personal matter, it casts light on the atmosphere in the Department in those days and may be of interest for that reason.

[-3-]

I had been picked by Mr. Dulles to head a study of our foreign aid activities in the Far East, about which he had some reservations. He had doubts as to whether our aid programs were adequate. While he hadn't focused on this very much, he was aware that the Soviets were interested in developing aid programs in Asia and he wondered whether we should do more. I was asked to conduct a study of the matter.

I picked a committee of experts, and we prepared a report which, in the light of what happened later, was almost amusingly innocuous. We were aware of the legislative animus against foreign aid in Washington at the time. In our report we leaned toward the noncommittal partly because we were not too sure of the accuracy of all the information that we used in the report, although we used the best that was available. But we were aware also of the recent advent in the Department of Herbert Hoover, Jr., as Under Secretary, and knew that he had already manifested a dim view toward foreign aid. We did not want to earn the antagonism and opposition of the new Under Secretary perhaps before he'd had a chance to read the report which we were determined to make as objective, factual, and as honest as possible.

To our amazement--to my amazement, particularly, because I seemed to bear the brunt of the development--the report inflamed Mr. Hoover. He reportedly was infuriated by it and apparently regarded those who had a hand in its preparation as being, if not subversive, at least visionary crackpots. I learned about his attitude secondhand and sought an effort to discuss the matter with him, but I was never given an appointment. He never bothered to talk with me or the other members of the committee about our opinion; he just developed a strong prejudice.

Very frankly, I think this development affected my career--it certainly constituted a block to my advancement at the time. I was told that by Loy Henderson [Loy W. Henderson],

the Deputy Under Secretary, who was in a position to know. He said, with what seemed to be sincere regret, that he didn't believe that the Department could give me the kind of assignment that I was entitled to receive because they couldn't get it past the Under Secretary. Some alternative posts were offered to me. (I remember the job of Deputy Chief of Mission in Tel Aviv, Consul General in Istanbul, Economic Counselor in Rome). As my previous posts had been higher in position than those, I said, "No thanks," and quietly retired at the end of my two year stint as Deputy Assistant Secretary.

[-4-]

O'BRIEN: Why do you suppose Hoover responded this way?

BALDWIN: I've never known, largely because I never was given an opportunity to talk to the man after I submitted the report over my signature as chairman. He refused to receive me. The affair was a bit ludicrous and regrettable, especially in view of what we later did in Asia and the need for action at the time. Perhaps it is immodest to say so, but I think if a little more heed had been paid at that time--instead of two or three years later--to some of the things that we warned against in our report, there might have been some difference in our situation.

Hoover apparently had a curious quality of mind. I have no doubt that he was a fine petroleum engineer, but he had a very stubborn attitude with respect to things that he didn't like. He didn't like foreign aid, and the idea that we might have to appropriate more American dollars to speed economic development in Asia, seemed to be anathema to him. Nobody in the Department had any idea that he was so extreme on the subject, but he was.

Some of this is hearsay. My relations with Hoover prior to the report incident had been friendly. We had entertained him when I was at the embassy in Santiago, Chile, and he recalled, with pleasure, being a guest in our home there. Our brief relationship was pleasant until the report was submitted; from then on I never saw the man or talked with him.

O'BRIEN: Do you suppose it was a European orientation over…

BALDWIN: Perhaps. It was the case with Mr. Dulles because his preoccupation was certainly with Europe. He was interested in SEATO, but Europe was his major concern.

[-5-]

O'BRIEN: Who were some of the other people that served on this committee with you?

BALDWIN: Well, Bob Barnett [Robert W. Barnett], I think, was on it at the time. He had another job in the Department. It became an interdepartmental committee--I could dig up the information, but it would take a bit of time. It's a matter of record in the department; it's easy to find out. As I warned you before we began this interview, some of these things are a bit dim. I haven't tried to recall the names of some of these people for many years.

O'BRIEN: Did the contents of this report ever become public information?

BALDWIN: No, it didn't, but it became well-known in Washington. It was a matter of discussion, but it never became public.

O'BRIEN: Well, in light of some of the thinking that developed in later years, particularly around the MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] economists, people like Rostow [Walt W. Rostow], did you sense that your report or the content or the ideals of your report or assumptions of your report had any influence on these people?

BALDWIN: Let me put it this way: I think that many of them agreed completely with the report. Some of them had been interviewed in the course of our study.

The basis of the report was simply the premise that economic disadvantage, low standards of living at that time in Asia tended to offer opportunities for the development and expansion of communism and other kinds of trouble that could be damaging to the much-needed stability of those new countries. They were weak and inexperienced; they needed many things, but they needed desperately political and economic stability. We believed it would be to our advantage to help them achieve it as rapidly as possible. This was the simple postulate on which the committee's whole position was constructed.

[-6-]

That concept later became a cardinal principle in our foreign policy. As a matter of fact, I was amused to learn, after I was named Ambassador and was back in the Department on consultation, that the "Baldwin report" had been dusted off and was being used again in conferences in the Department.

O'BRIEN: Do you know whether President Kennedy had any contact with so-called Far East groups made up of business, government, academic people that frequent Washington?

BALDWIN: No, I don't. I wasn't in Washington except for brief visits after I was appointed and the President was killed while I was in Malaysia. My trips back were brief and for purposes of consultation. I'd go to the White House and talk with the President; we'd focus largely on the Southeast Asian problem, particularly the Indonesian and Malaysian situation. I don't know about his advisors. Obviously, he had been in contact with people like Reischauer, for example, who was a Far Eastern expert and, I assume, with others. But I don't know the nature and extent of his association.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever have any contact with these groups?

BALDWIN: What kind of groups, now, are you talking about, the Far Eastern Luncheon Club or the…

O'BRIEN: Well, I was thinking of the Luncheon Club for one…

BALDWIN: …the Far East Chamber of Commerce in New York and that kind of group?

O'BRIEN: Yes, and…

[-7-]

BALDWIN: I had contacts with them. I had made the contacts in my previous position in the Department. Then, I had been Consul General in Singapore for two years, in 1951 and 1952, before I came back to the Department. So I had spoken at meetings of some of the groups.

O'BRIEN: How did you react to the Algerian speech in which President Kennedy supported nationalism? You remember, it was in 1957. He supported the idea of national…

BALDWIN: Independence, national independence. Isn't that when it was coined, in that speech?

O'BRIEN: Right.

BALDWIN: I thought it was exactly what needed to be said. More than that, I was tremendously impressed with the impact on my foreign contacts. I have felt, perhaps incorrectly--and history will determine better than I that it was one of the brightest spots of President Kennedy's foreign policy record. The "stand up and be counted" doctrine, which fairly or unfairly had been associated with Mr. Dulles, was doing us immeasurable damage abroad. The Kennedy doctrine was, or at least was interpreted as being, the antithesis of that. "As long as you make your own decisions, we'll respect them even if we don't like them," was the essence, in a way, of that doctrine. And that was tremendously popular with foreigners, especially the Asians, whom I met.

O'BRIEN: Do you know how your appointment as Ambassador to the Federation of Malaya came about?

[-8-]

BALDWIN: Yes, I was first offered the ambassadorship to Cambodia. I said that my French wasn't good enough, that anyone sent to Phnom Penh should be fluent, in French, and my French wasn't that fluent. So I declined with thanks.

Then I was told that I was to be picked for an ambassadorship somewhere in Asia because it was felt that my qualifications like those of one or two others who had left the Service--George Kennan [George F. Kennan] was one of them--and my past experience, despite my age, could be useful in the Administration. The second offer then was made; I

was asked if I'd be interested in Malaya, and I said that I couldn't imagine any post that would interest me more. So that was settled.

O'BRIEN: Was Chester Bowles that…

BALDWIN: Chester Bowles communicated the offer, but it came, of course, from the White House and from Dean Rusk, whom I had known before. You asked about my connections, and I didn't mention Dean Rusk because at the time, when I was associated with elements of the Kennedy organization, he was not associated with them, as you know.

O'BRIEN: That's when he was Assistant Secretary of Far East Affairs, wasn't it?

BALDWIN: My previous association with Rusk had been when he was Assistant Secretary. I'd gone to Singapore as Consul General at that time, so I knew him. He also knew about--he and Bowles and a good many other people knew about the study of foreign aid in Asia that I mentioned in some detail.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever hear anything about any so-called talent lists or lists that were kept by people like Bowles or made up by people like Bowles…

BALDWIN: Oh yes, there apparently was such a list. I don't know when the list was made, but--again, this is hearsay--but I think Bowles was requested by the President to develop a so-called talent list of people in the Department and of outside talent.

Chester Bowles asked me on one or two occasions if I knew certain people. I can remember, for example, one inquiry he made: He asked me if I knew Ed Reischauer. I said, "Only by repute." He told me at the time that Reischauer was being considered for the ambassadorship to Japan, but there had been some feeling in the White House, and I think in the Department, that this might not be a desirable appointment because Mrs. Reischauer [Haru M. Reischauer] was Japanese. I was asked what I thought about that, and I said I couldn't express a judgment because I'd never met Mrs. Reischauer, nor was I an expert on Japan, but it seemed to me that the answer to the question depended on Mrs. Reischauer. That turned out to be the case. She was a great success as an American, not as a Japanese, and embellished her husband's distinguished career very effectively.

There's no doubt that there was a certain amount of scouting and recruiting going on at that time--there always is at such a time.

O'BRIEN: Did you suggest anyone else?

BALDWIN: To be perfectly honest, I'll have to say yes. I mentioned two people--I'd rather not mention their names--in the Foreign Service. I was asked who I believed

might qualify for ambassadorships in certain areas, not by countries. I mentioned two men whose value I esteemed highly, and one of them, subsequently, was named responsible for his appointment; he would probably have been named anyway. But I did no recruiting; let's put it that way.

O'BRIEN: Do you know whether there was any opposition to your appointment in the Department or in Congress?

[-10-]

BALDWIN: I've never heard of any opposition. There certainly wasn't in Congress. I

Bruce [David K.E. Bruce], Harry Labouisse [Henry R. Labouisse], and Marietta Tree [Marietta Endicott Peabody Tree], and it was a brief, delightful session so far as I was concerned. Bruce and I were the only ambassadorial appointments before the Committee at the time.

O'BRIEN: Why did you decide to come out of retirement?

BALDWIN: To be an ambassador?

O'BRIEN: To be an ambassador.

BALDWIN: Well, I suppose because any career Foreign Service officer who wouldn't should have his head examined. [Laughter] I'll be very frank about this. I had left the Department somewhat prematurely--not in pique; I didn't stalk out. Few persons knew anything about the reasons for my retirement except my wife [Helen Baldwin] and one or two very close friends. It wasn't a protest action at all; I simply felt that as long as Mr. Hoover was in the department it would be an uncongenial place for me to work. I was at a level where I had some voice in making policy, and if I was against certain policies, I felt that I couldn't sincerely go along with them. I was eligible for retirement, and I elected to retire. I wasn't happy about it. No Foreign Service officer is happy if he doesn't reach the apogee of his career if he can, and I was reasonably close to it. However, it was my decision.

I quit, went to Europe, lived in Europe for three years, and came back and associated myself with various Washington activities. I was one of the first trustees of the meridian House Foundation and engaged in other interests. I was living reasonably happily, but I still had enough energy and, I thought, enough experience to contribute something. Mistakenly or not, the President and Mr. Rusk and others felt the same way about it.

[-11-]

Mark Childs [Marquis W. Childs], shortly after I was appointed, wrote a column in which he mentioned my appointment and George Kennan's. I hadn't seen Mark for several months before the column appeared, but he cited Kennan's appointment and mine as

evidence of action by the Administration which was taken regardless of age, or previous conditions of servitude, or political associations, or anything else. The President, Childs said, picked a man named Baldwin because he happened to know something about a part of the world that the President thought was critical. He picked a man named Kennan for the same reason and brought both out of retirement.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any contact with the task forces that functioned between the election and the Inauguration at all?

BALDWIN: No, I didn't.

O'BRIEN: Do you remember anything about that meeting that took place with President Kennedy in which you and Ambassador Reischauer…

BALDWIN: I remember it very clearly, for a variety of reasons, some of which might not be quite germane to your study, but they're interesting from a human interest standpoint. One sharp recollection was the President's calmness and good humor, although the day was the Saturday when the Laos crisis seemed to be at a peak.

The President started the conversation with Galbraith, Reischauer, and moved clockwise. He teased Ken Galbraith about the little tussle he'd had with the Senate Committee during the hearing on his confirmation. Then he turned to Reischauer and asked him a few questions about Japan. He questioned Ken Young about Thailand.

Then he turned to me and said, "Tell me. There is a Commonwealth Brigade of troops barracked near Malacca." I believe they're six or seven thousand in number. If we should consider it necessary to ask Britain and the others to use the Commonwealth Brigade in Laos, what do you think the reaction in Malaya would be?"

I said I thought that it would depend to a considerable extent upon what the Tunku [Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj], the Prime Minister of Malaya, believed. I added that the Tunku, up to that point, hadn't been greatly exercised about our problem in Laos, or in Vietnam, but he had been well disposed toward us. He certainly wasn't unfriendly, and I felt that if the Commonwealth Brigade had to be used, it shouldn't be difficult perhaps to impress the importance of the need upon the Tunku and upon his people. The President smiled, and said, "Well, you're going out as the Ambassador." I replied, "I hope it won't become necessary to have to sell the idea of using the Brigade to the Tunku, but I will do so if necessary."

The President then spoke of the crisis in Laos. I said, "This is a horseback opinion, but if it were my decision, and if I had the power to decide exactly what could be done about Laos, short of a complete and total sealing off and immunization of the area--neutralization of it--I think I'd be constrained to do what we did in Korea." The President was silent for a moment then said, "Let's look at the map." He walked over to a big illuminated globe that he kept on the right side of his desk. He said to Kenneth Young, "Ken, you come over, too." The President said to me, "Now where would you draw the line?" We stood there and

divided Laos, in effect, and cogitated about what would happen if we could do this, what the ultimate effect would be, then turned to other matters. Later--in retrospect, I have wondered what might have happened if that had become our policy.

This is a digression--but I've also thought about something else in relation to the conversation. When Sir Robert Menzies [Robert G. Menzies] was here at the University of Virginia as a colleague of mine, as Scholar in Residence, we talked about the difficulty of being fair in retrospect when one writes his memoirs, of not being tempted by choice, little tidbits to exaggerate the importance of something. I have read some books dealing with the Kennedy period written by men who certainly saw a great deal more of the President than I did. But I wondered, sometimes, if their commitment of the President to certain ideas was always exactly accurate.

[-13-]

For example, if I were writing my memoirs, I could, with historic accuracy, say that I gained the impression from the remarks of the President that day in his office that he was seriously considering a policy of dividing Laos. I could justify that to my conscience and, I suppose, to a historian, but it would have been a misleading statement. He was momentarily attracted by the idea, but it may have been no more than a passing fancy. I've often thought about this incident as demonstrating the necessity of being extremely careful when one records recollections of the past.

As we left the Executive office that day, I said to the President that my wife and I had dined the evening before at an embassy in Washington at which a distinguished Democratic senator and a very anti-Administration Republican congressman from the Midwest were jubilating across the table because of the defeat that day of the, I believe, minimum wage bill, in which the President was much interested. I said it was a curious spectacle to see a member of the President's party rejoicing with a member of the opposition over the defeat of the bill.

We were on our way out of the President's office, on an extremely important day, but the President stopped and delivered a brief dissertation, on domestic politics. He expressed doubts that the views of some highly important Democratic politicians in the South, who, he said, had reached their eminence by sticking to the Democratic trail, which the President called "the trial of political respectability," really reflected the opinion of a large percentage of the people of the South. He was foreseeing, in those remarks, the fact that there would be an ideological cleavage in the South one day which might change the political scene. The President's abrupt shift from a discussion of foreign policy to the domestic scene was interesting.

O'BRIEN: This may point out the interrelationship.

BALDWIN: It might indeed. Another remark of the President that day, which I recall clearly, revealed the weight of the burden borne by a President. Referring to demands of some people that we use strong military measures in Laos, the President said, almost bitterly, "It's easy for them to make those demands; they don't sit here."

[-14-]

O'BRIEN: Before you went off to the Federation of Malaya, did you receive any briefing from people in the State Department, the White House, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], or other governmental agencies?

BALDWIN: Oh, yes, I did. I'd been in charge of Foreign Service post before I was appointed Ambassador, and it was a fixed routine of mine to make calls in Washington on all of the agencies whose activities I would direct abroad. So I called on them again. I went to the Treasury and Commerce Departments, to Agriculture, and to Labor. I spent a good deal of time in the CIA. I was briefed by all of them. During calls at the White House I talked to Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], and the President. I talked to young Forrestal [Michael V. Forrestal], who was there at that time (Mike Forrestal) and several others. In the State Department, I received a briefing. However, the people there recognized that, as I was going back as Ambassador to a country where I had spent two years not too long before as Consul General, a country where I had friendly relations with many officials, including the Prime Minister, I didn't need as much briefing as someone who was going to a completely new post. What I did need, and got, was familiarization with the latest developments.

O'BRIEN: Do you recall anything significant about any of those briefings in the way of content?

BALDWIN: No. Possibly because they could hardly be called briefings because, in a sense, I knew a good deal about the area. They were bringing me up to date on recent personalities and that kind of thing. For example, the big problem in Malaya and Malaysia during much of the time I was Ambassador was not political; it was economic. It was the fact that, as one of the biggest producers of rubber and tin, the Malayan economy and the prosperity of the country rested upon the price of rubber and tin. This caused Malayans to be immediately apprehensive whenever, as frequently happened, there were proposals to dump some of our surplus strategic rubber or tin which forced down the price. I wanted to be thoroughly briefed on the latest developments in those matters, and I was well-briefed by the economic people.

O'BRIEN: You didn't run into any differences of opinion or any difference of…

[-15-]

BALDWIN: No, not at that time. That was, of course, long before the confrontation, so-called, between Malaya and Indonesia. There were differences of opinions then, and we can cover that if you like.

O'BRIEN: Did you gain any insight into it, or did you attend any of the many top-level meetings that took place in regard to Southeast Asia? Most of these, of course,

were primarily focused on Laos.

BALDWIN: They were almost entirely focused on Laos. Indonesia was not seen as a problem at the time, although it should have been. One of the problems, as you well know, in the so-called decision-making echelons in Washington is the difficulty of shifting focus. Our people tend to focus on the current problem and sometimes forget other developments or possible developments. I fear sometimes that our enemies are well aware of that tendency.

O'BRIEN: I have a list of some of those meetings, if you would care to look at it. I think there's one with Phillips Talbot that shouldn't be in that list, but somehow or other got into it. But most of those pertain to the Far East or Southeast Asia.

BALDWIN: Here's one on Indonesia. Most of these are January-June 1961.

O'BRIEN: Right.

BALDWIN: I was only in the Department, as you recall, for about four weeks for familiarization, and during that time only three or four of these meetings were held. I didn't attend them, actually. You see, Malaya, the country to which I was going, was not then a problem country for us. Relations were good; the Indonesian trouble hadn't developed; the trouble with the Philippines hadn't developed. ASA, the Association of Southeast Asia, had just been born; it hadn't reached it's later growing pains and wasn't much more than a baby. So Malaya was not scheduled for discussion at those meetings. It was regarded as a fairly tranquil little place that was important but not causing any trouble. It was Vietnam, Laos and, to a minor extent, a few Indonesian items, largely, West New Guinea or West Irian, as the Indonesians called it, that the meetings focused on.

[-16-]

O'BRIEN: Before you left, did you have much contact with J. Graham Parsons?

BALDWIN: Some.

O'BRIEN: Did he have much influence at that point in regard to Southeast Asia policy in general?

BALDWIN: I think it would be unfair of me to comment on that because I don't know enough about it. When I was in the Department, working with Walter Robertson [Walter S. Robertson]--I was deputy to Robertson who was Assistant Secretary--I was able to assess what might be called the sources of power and influence within the Department. It certainly is not disclosing a secret to say that at that time Livy Merchant [Livingston T. Merchant], who was Assistant Secretary for Europe, was regarded by almost everyone as having closest access, most direct access, to the ear of Mr. Dulles. Walter Robertson was listened to pretty carefully. He represented the strong pro-

Chiang [Chiang Kai-shek] element in the government, which was politically strong. He had very strong, very pronounced ideas. But if it came to a tussle in those days between the European and the Far Eastern Bureaus, as it did occasionally in the case, let's say, of West New Guinea and the attitude of the Dutch, generally the European Bureau would win out. I was close enough to the picture in those days, (I was a part of it) to see this. When I was back in the department after I was named Ambassador, I was there to get my briefing over with as fast as possible and get to my post.

There was a conversation then that may be of some interest. The last time I talked to Secretary of State Dean Rusk--I went in to say good-bye to him--he said, "I hope you'll visit Indonesia as soon as possible. I know you've been there, but I think you should go again as quickly as possible." And he added, "I would like to feel that you and your immediate colleagues would meet together often and discuss problems. Don't do it formally. No formal agenda, no publicity, if possible, so it will be inconspicuous. But I think it would be desirable if you would meet occasionally with the Ambassadors to Djakarta and Bangkok and Manila and maybe even Rangoon." I was Ambassador for three years and we never could arrange a session with the Department's approval. [Laughter] We had one--I arranged it informally. But that was all. The Secretary's idea was that the briefing time in Washington

would be minimized and work better coordinated if the people in the field would be together as often as necessary and exchange views. He seemed to feel that this would be the best briefing that ambassadors could have. I think that's true.

O'BRIEN: When you departed for Malaya, did you go by yourself, or were you accompanied by any other officials or ambassadors?

BALDWIN: No. I went directly to Malaya. I went across the Pacific. When I went to Singapore as Consul General in early 1951, it was a colony I went through London and conferred with the Colonial Office. Later, as Ambassador, I went the other way. I went direct.

O'BRIEN: Do you remember anything about the meetings that you had in London in regard to….

BALDWIN: When I was in Singapore as Consul General? This was in Singapore. I didn't go when I was…

O'BRIEN: I see, I see. I misunderstood you. I thought you said that…

BALDWIN: No, when I was Consul General with the rank of minister in a British Colony, I went out via the capital of the metropolitan power. Later, I recommended, and the Department supported me, that I not go via London because I wished to emphasize the independence that Malaya had acquired in the meantime and to make it

clear that I was going to an independent country, not through the capital of the former colonial ruler.

O'BRIEN: Passing on to your experience in Malaya, what were the major problems between the U.S. and Malaya at the point or the time that you assumed your…

[-18-]

BALDWIN: They were almost entirely economic, this is going to be very dull for you and dull for any subsequent readers of these notes.

O'BRIEN: …it amounts to something?

BALDWIN: The embassy in Kuala Lumpur was almost old fashioned in a sense. We had no aid program for Malaya then or later because the country has been relatively prosperous. The British had left it in good condition, and the Malayans were wise enough not to tamper with a going concern but to keep it that way. We had no military advisory group; I had the standard setup with the service attached and a small CIA unit, which was there largely for liaison purposes with the local intelligence people. I had a fairly sizeable USIA [United States Information Agency].

We didn't have the problems of so many of our diplomatic missions. There were no serious political problems. The Malayans were anti-Communist. They had fought with the British for twelve years against Communist guerrillas, and they had won. They had no illusions about what the Communists would do if they could get control of Malaya, or illusions about what has now become a term of contempt, the "falling domino theory." There was no doubt in the minds of the Malayans that their domino might fall, sooner or later, if Vietnam collapsed.

Annually, I discussed with the Tunku the question of Communist China's admission to the United Nations. He'd once taken a public stand on that in Europe when he suggested that China should become the Republic of Formosa. While not voting for admission of Communist China, the Malayans abstained at times, but there were no serious differences here.

My major problem, as I have said, was the fact that the economy, the well-being, the very high standards of living in Malaya, which was second only to Japan in those days, depended largely upon the price of rubber and tin. We greatly influenced those through our stockpiles disposals. There would be a periodic flap, and I would be the "bad boy" in the newspapers whenever a new policy of selling rubber and tin came out of Washington. I'd have some pouring of oil to do, and some recommending to the Department. But Malaya then was not a serious problem area.

[-19-]

Now, when the confrontation, so-called, began between Sukarno and the Tunku (between Malaya and Indonesia) with the Philippines unhappily joining in, there were problems. If you're interested, I'll mention those. We haven't reached that point yet, though.

O'BRIEN: I think we can get into those a little later.

BALDWIN: All right, fine.

O'BRIEN: You had the distinction of knowing the Tunku as well as Lee Kuan Yew.

BALDWIN: Yes, I did. I didn't know Kuan Yew well. I met him when I was Consul General in Singapore. He was just a bright young lawyer in those days. His political star hadn't yet gone into the ascendancy as it did very quickly later. But I did know the Tunku, who also had just moved into the political arena as head of UMNO [United Malays National Organization]. Fortunately, I had decided to pay some attention to this man. The British--all except McDonald [Malcolm McDonald], who took him more seriously--but most of the British officials tended to write him off as a flash in the pan. I think they did so largely because he had gone to Cambridge with a high-powered racing car and had played around a bit as a young Malay prince in England. He earned the reputation of playboy. And the British apparently couldn't forget that. They didn't seem to take him seriously as a politician for some time.

After he became head of UMNO, I'd had occasional meetings with him. We invariably invited him to Singapore if we gave a big party. When Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] came and stayed with us, we sent the Tunku an invitation. He came down from the northern part of Malaya to attend the reception. When the Nixons [Richard Milhous Nixon] came out on Nixon's round-the-world trip as Vice-President and were with us for three days, the Tunku was asked to a public reception. He came to that. Later, when I was ambassador, the Tunku used to say publicly, "This man was good to me when I was a nobody." Of course, he always was a "somebody" but the earlier attentions to him were remembered by him.

[-20-]

Before leaving Singapore in 1952, I wrote the Tunku and asked him if he would be good enough to meet me at any place that he would name. I said that I'd like to talk to him about the future of his country. This was when Malaya was a British colony and the war was going on against the guerrillas. He replied that he would come to our residence in Singapore. I asked him to have lunch with me--just a luncheon for two--which proved to be an event of interest. We had three hours of conversation after lunch, very good conversation. I was most impressed with the man. I went back the next morning to the office and wrote a long dispatch indicating that I thought it would be very unwise to write him off; that he had displayed to me qualities of intelligence, perception and potential statesmanship; and that while I didn't know how the wheel would turn, he was a man that should be watched carefully and taken into account. Of course, I didn't foresee at the time that he would later be Prime Minister of Malaya. Almost everyone in Malaya, including Malcolm McDonald, thought it would be someone else.

O'BRIEN: Did you meet Razak [Tun Abul Razak bin Hussein] in those years?

BALDWIN: No, I didn't meet Razak until I went back. No, that isn't correct; I did meet him briefly. You see, in those days, the center of the universe in Malaya was Singapore, where the Consulate General was located. There was a consulate in Kuala Lumpur with a USIA staff and no military service people and a much smaller consulate in Penang with a vice-consul in charge. During my entire tour of duty as Consul General, I had a standing arrangement with Sir Gerald Templer, who was in charge of both military and political operations in Kuala Lumpur--he was supreme commander of the anti-guerrilla forces. I would fly up once a month and be briefed by Templer. On those trips I would also inspect the consulate and do other work. I would meet people, some of whom, like Razak, I later saw. But the relationship with Razak then was not close. In fact, Consul Van Oss [Hendrik Van Oss] at that time, in Kuala Lumpur, was closer to many of the officials who later were ministers than I was. But I would see them. The fact that I did know them, although not well, was useful when I went back later as Ambassador.

[-21-]

O'BRIEN: Were you included at all in some of the--in an advisory capacity--the proposals that emerged for a unified Malaya and Singapore?

BALDWIN: Not at all. The idea was very closely held by the Tunku. As you know, it came out at a dinner before the Overseas Journalists' Association in Singapore in the spring of '61. The proposal seemed to come pretty much from the top of his head. The Tunku had been under some pressure (if it can be called that) from the British for a long time to incorporate Singapore into Malaya. He had refused steadfastly to do so for obvious reasons. The merger would have given the Chinese a heavy population majority and disturbed the nice political balance in the country. But as the Tunku learned more and more of the Communist activities that were taking place in Singapore, he formed the Malaysia idea, which wasn't really original. The British for years had toyed with the idea of having a single country that would include the Borneo colonies as well as Singapore and Malaya. I had discussed the idea in 1951 and 1952 with Malcolm McDonald when I was in Singapore as Consul General. The Tunku, of course, knew about the idea then. He dusted it off in 1961 and brought it out as his proposal, to form a Federation of Malaysia.

Within a week after the Singapore speech I called on the Tunku at his residence in Kuala Lumpur to be officially informed by him about the plan. I had already reported it with my interpretation. His explanation of it differed very little from what I had reported. It was pretty obvious why he made the proposal. One thing my discussion with the Tunku brought out was the anti-Communist motivation of the idea. Later, when the Tunku was accused of being a neo-colonialist by Sukarno, I harkened back to my talk with him in which, politely---and I hope tactfully--I had put words in his mouth. I had said, "Could I accurately say to my government that one of the motivations of the Malaysia plan is the fact that you don't want an Asian Cuba on your doorstep in Singapore?" He said, "That is exactly right."

[-22-]

O'BRIEN: What was the Department Advising you in this regard as far as an official response….

BALDWIN: Well, it went the other way, actually. I felt it was our responsibility, my responsibility as Ambassador, the responsibility of the embassy collectively, to recommend what we thought should be the United States policy towards the idea. I knew from experience that such recommendations coming from a diplomatic mission may be diluted or negated in Washington when it's put into the international framework. But our position from the beginning was that the Malaysia idea was desirable and should have our support, partly because there were no feasible alternatives. An increasingly communized Singapore could do nothing but cause trouble.

Sooner or later the British had to get out of Singapore. They were wise and farsighted enough to realize that their days as colonial rulers were numbered and that the Borneo territories and Singapore would be a cause of real trouble unless, somehow or other, they were incorporated in a political structure that would survive, would be viable. And there were many other reasons, economic and otherwise, which commanded the plan to us. All of this added up to a feeling on our part that the Malaysia concept was a desirable development which should be encouraged and supported by the United States.

There were some exchanges with the Department, but there was no opposition really, in the Department. There were questions, requests for elucidation, which we would provide. Finally, you will recall, the President came out with a statement at a press conference in which he virtually said what we had proposed.

O'BRIEN: Were you in close contact with the British at the embassy level?

[-23-]

BALDWIN: I was, because I thought it was desirable to find out [a] how they really felt about the Malaysia proposal; and [b] whether it was a kind of trick. In other words; whether it was, what Sukarno later alleged, a device of Britain to seem to be granting independence and still hold on to the strings. So I felt that close contact with the British was desirable, and I had it.

O'BRIEN: Did you urge the Department or the President to take an official stand on the Malaysia Federation in 1961?

BALDWIN: Yes, I did. I said that I felt that it was desirable for him to do so. We hadn't been asked by the Malayans for help. We had not been asked for an aid program. It seemed to me, and to every one of my advisors--for we talked about this at great length--that our encouragement of the Malaysia proposal was desirable. I felt that a demonstration of our support could have nothing but a good result, a beneficial result.

We were already embattled in Vietnam. The Communists, both the Chinese and the Russians, were contesting vigorously in Indonesia for domination of the P.K.I, the Indonesian Communist Party, which meant that both of the communist giants were trying to

get virtual control over Indonesia. It seemed then, and it still seems to me, that we were in grave danger of being outflanked in Southeast Asia by this communist maneuver, regardless of whether Moscow or Peking won. For them to have control over the fifth most populous nation in the world, while we were waging a war in Vietnam, seemed to us to be dangerous. I felt very strongly that manifestation of our support of the Malayan desire to maintain independence and absorb the rest of the British colonies in Southeast Asia would be desirable.

O'BRIEN: Why do you suppose the Department chose to be rather cautious in giving official support?

BALDWIN: Well, actually, the Department--the President did give official support.

[-24-]

O'BRIEN: Right, but was it late 1962 or '63? I was trying to think of that particular press conference. Was it March 1963?

BALDWIN: The press conference--yes, I think it was March 1963. Wait a minute. The statement was issued in May 1961 by the Tunku's…

O'BRIEN: Didn't the Department say something, it seems to me, in…

BALDWIN: Yes, the departmental spokesman said something. I was trying to recall exactly what he said, but it was generally favorable. I have the date of this somewhere. I think it's '62, sometime in '62, that the President made his statement. I'm not too sure about that, but it's a matter of record. There were no misgivings in the Department, that I was aware of, about our position vis-a-vis Malaysia until Sukarno began his act; then differences did develop.

O'BRIEN: How did you feel about what must have seemed to be overwhelming problems of race and race as involved with economic structure and religion and…

BALDWIN: Well, I felt then as I feel today, that the problem of race is potentially the Achilles heel of Malaysia. They make a brave effort to play it down and talk about the multi-racial society and what-not, and that is very good--that is the way it should be. But it's still clear to me that race continues to be a serious problem. Singapore proved this. The fact that Singapore was ejected from the Federation largely for reasons of race indicates that it's still a very sensitive issue, and that the problem of blending the politically powerful but economically weak Malays with the politically weak but economically powerful Chinese has not yet been solved.

[-25-]

O'BRIEN: Did you sense that the Department realized this?

BALDWIN: Yes, I think so. Although, very frankly, I was never able to get as much action at top levels on this as I wanted. For example, when Tun Razak (then Deputy Prime Minister) came back to Washington--I was in Washington and took him to the White House. Earlier I had gone to what I thought were great lengths in the Department and the White House to make certain that the President, when he talked with Razak, would emphasize the concern of our country and the keen interest of the United States in a resolution of the racial difficulties and problems. It was, of course, a very sensitive issue, and nothing that the President could speak about publicly. It was something that I had to handle with the greatest delicacy in talking to the Tunku or Razak--particularly to the Tunku. I was always careful to be as delicate and tactful as possible. But Razak's visit, I thought, was a heaven-sent opportunity for the President, in talking to the Deputy Prime Minister, who would one day probably be Prime Minister, to stress the importance of a resolution of the racial problems things, even to the extent of the Malays making sacrifices to do so.

I went to the White House a couple of days before the meeting and talking with some of the President's advisors and was assured that the matter would be presented in the President's briefing for the meeting and would be raised by the President. We were with the President for some twenty or thirty minutes, and the matter was not mentioned. I was unhappy about that. I believed it was an opportunity that should not have been missed.

O'BRIEN: Did you take any official or unofficial interest in the establishment of the Malayan Solidarity Consultative Committee?

BALDWIN: Not at all. It was purely a British-Malayan venture. I had nothing to do with it.

O'BRIEN: Were you kept informed of this by the British?

BALDWIN: Oh yes. I had excellent relations with Sir Geoffrey Tory, who was then the British High Commissioner. I had worked with the British before. I had served in London. I knew them pretty well, and always felt that Tory was very frank and sincere with me. The things he didn't want to talk about, he wouldn't talk about. But I think, by and large, he spoke quite openly to me.

O'BRIEN: Were you involved at all in the Cobbold-Lansdowne [Cameron F. Cobbold; George John Charles Mercer Nairne Petty-FitzMaurice, 8th Marquess of Lansdowne] sort of arrangements that were made?

BALDWIN: We had no involvement, neither I, individually, nor so far as I know, the United States government. We had no involvement in the mechanics of implementing the Malaysia plan. We carefully and scrupulously avoided involvement. We sensed, even then, that while the Indonesians had shown no evidence of causing any trouble about the proposal--Subandrio [Raden Subandrio] had told me what he later said publicly in the United Nations, that it was his policy and the policy of President

Sukarno to accept the proposition if the Malayans could bring it off--that we should not be too closely involved in the situation.

Therefore, I avoided--and instructed my staff to avoid--any such involvement. We got all the information we needed. The Malayans were very frank in talking to us, briefing us about developments, but we didn't have any involvement.

O'BRIEN: Was the embassy caught unaware when the Brunei uprisings took place and the British sent troops in?

BALDWIN: We were watching Azahari pretty carefully. We reported very fully his recalcitrance and the trouble he was causing. We suffered a bit from not having any officer in Borneo at that time, and later, I went there and made arrangements to establish a Consulate in Sarawak, which was opened just after I left. We had reported, I think quite fully, the Azahari situation. Excuse me. [Interruption] The Borneo problem built up--it didn't burst out of thin air. Azahari had clearly become a recalcitrant element in Brunei; he had challenged the Sultan [Omar Ali Saifuddien III] on several occasions and was being very carefully watched by the British. But what I think eluded everybody, pretty much, was the extent to which the Indonesians had provided training facilities for some of the people who later became rebels. It was the Indonesian involvement which came as a surprise to almost everybody, including the Malayans. They were horrified. A really traumatic situation developed. The British moved, as you know, with skill and speed to nip it in the bud.

O'BRIEN: Were we prepared to militarily back them up or support them?

BALDWIN: So far as I know, it was never discussed. It may have been discussed in Washington, but we didn't become involved. My military attaché was closely in touch with the British military people and he kept assuring me, as my air attaché did, that the British were perfectly capable of handling the problem themselves.

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

BALDWIN: I was consistently advised by the British of their capability to handle both the Brunei uprising and, later, the more serious confrontation with the Indonesians.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any insights into the July meetings in Manila between Malaya and…

BALDWIN: I was pretty fully briefed by the Tunku upon his return from Manila. I was in Tokyo earlier when the Tunku and Sukarno had their famous meeting there,

the preliminary summit meeting. I called on the Tunku within an hour and a half after he ended his meeting with Sukarno. He was very generous of his time, I thought, and very frank in saying what he properly could and recognizing our interest in the event. The same thing happened after he returned from Manila; he briefed me then very fully.

O'BRIEN: And this was relayed on to Washington?

BALDWIN: Oh, yes, immediately.

O'BRIEN: What were you advising Washington in regard to these meetings and to the events that were taking place?

BALDWIN: You mean forecasting or advising?

O'BRIEN: Well, forecasting….

BALDWIN: Well, I forecast that Maphilindo would come to nothing. I realized that if Sukarno had been as great a statesman as he was a charismatic leader and orator, he could have taken the Maphilindo concept and within a couple of years developed close ties between Malaya and Indonesia and become perhaps the dominant figure in the picture. However, that was the kind of thing Sukarno couldn't seem to do. He was a romantic revolutionary who flourished on trouble, not a builder for the future. Feeling as I did about his limitations, and remembering the old adage about oil and water, it seemed to me that Maphilindo was doomed to ineffectuality.

[-29-]

I felt strongly--although I'm not sure Bill Stevenson [William E. Stevenson], who was my colleague in Manila, agreed with me--that we should do whatever we could to try to compose the differences between the Philippines and Malaya to the extent that we could influence the Philippine government. I could see nothing but trouble and damage in the fracture of relations between the two Asian nations, both our friends. Not only because damaged relations between two countries which should be friends, but also because it threatened ASA, the Association of Southeast Asia, which was a small hope that a regional organization might develop in the area. So I suggested from time to time that our embassy in Manila endeavor to point out to the Philippine government the danger of a heavy commitment in the direction of a leader so volatile and unpredictable as Sukarno and of tying in so closely with Indonesia.

O'BRIEN: What instructions did you receive in regard to the proposal for a U.N. survey of Sabahand Sarawat as far as what representations to--well, particularly…. Well, either Singapore….

BALDWIN: I don't recall any instructions to make an approach to the government. The survey had been agreed to at the Manila summit. The Tunku was reluctant to

accept it; he told me so. But he had to do it. He was unhappy about it primarily, I think, because it was, in effect, a reflection upon the integrity of the British. He was still beholden to the British and British power for protection, and acceptance of the proposal of a U.N. survey carried an implication that there might have been something questionable about the Borneo elections. He was not happy about this, but he did it. Once the three leaders agreed to the survey, it was just a matter of arranging in New York to get the U.N. Secretary-General to conduct it.

O'BRIEN: In retrospect, do you think it was a good idea?

[-30-]

BALDWIN: Yes, I do. It was the first time that the issue was lifted out of hopeless provincialism into the world arena--brought on the world stage. I think it was a good idea.

O'BRIEN: Did you advise the Department at the conclusion of that survey to support the findings of the survey? As I recall, the Department made, I think, two days after the formal….

BALDWIN: Yes, I believe I did because the findings were so conclusive. I had sent an officer from my embassy to Borneo at the time of the elections, not as an official observer, not as a participant, but just to take a trip to the area and at the same time to pick up whatever information he could about the elections. While I don't recall the details of his report, the burden of the report was that the elections were about as honest and fair and unpressured as elections could be. The officer was a good man. I rested my conviction that the British had conducted good elections on two points: one was his report; the other was my conviction that the British were not stupid enough to try to rig elections at that time. I think that would have been incredibly stupid. [Laughter]

O'BRIEN: When the U.S. made a firm commitment to the Malaysian Federation in that fall, was it received rather well in both Malaya and in Singapore?

BALDWIN: Yes, very well indeed. And very badly, of course, in Indonesia. I was singled out by the Indonesian information agency as the big devil for some time.

[-31-]

O'BRIEN: You returned that spring, and you met with President Kennedy in April of '63. Do you recall anything about that meeting?

BALDWIN: I do, indeed. I was with Razak, and we had a very pleasant meeting with the President. Razak, who is sometimes criticized for not being a very articulate man, can be articulate when he wants to be, and he was at the White House. He portrayed the Malaysian side of the confrontation very effectively for the President, and

the President seemed to agree with him. He asked few questions and accepted Razak's statements without question. The President emphasized the importance of finding a solution to the problem with Indonesia because it added to the instability of Southeast Asia. He pointed out that he and the United States government had given support to the concept of Malaysia; that he had done so at the risk of brooking the criticism of the Indonesians, and he felt that he could express the hope to his Malaysian friends that they do everything they could reasonably do to cooperate. He felt they had done that. Razak said, "We have, Mr. President," and he cited various cooperative actions of his government.

The conversation got around at that time to the broader question of Southeast Asia and the vulnerability of the Southeast Asian countries. As I recall it, the President said substantially what he later said in a press conference when he expressed belief in the so-called falling dominos theory. He was sure that the great menace to freedom in that part of the world was China and that an unrestrained China could bring an end to the freedom of nations in Southeast Asia.

O'BRIEN: How would you sum up U.S. policy in regard to the Federation of Malaysia in these years?

BALDWIN: Up to the end of my ambassadorship, it was one of moral and spiritual encouragement without very much else. Not much tangible aid was given. We had to tell the Malaysians from time to time (and they understood this) that to judge by the normal criteria of qualifying for our aid, they didn't have the qualifications. Their economy was in good condition and so on. They knew this; they didn't become supplicants for aid. Now and then someone would make a statement in the parliament, or a newspaper writer would criticize America for being so "parsimonious with its friends and so generous with its enemies," that kind of thing. [Laughter] But our official policy was clearly one in favor of Malaysia. During the trouble with Sukarno of course, there were--perhaps not second thoughts about it--but disagreement as to how our policy should be handled.

O'BRIEN: How do you view the formation of the Southeast Asia Friendship and Economic Treaty? And, of course, that led into ASA. Did you think this was a rather effective instrument to….

BALDWIN: I thought it was potentially an effective instrument. One of the great needs of Southeast Asian nations has been for closer cooperation with each other. As colonies, they were not encouraged to fraternize with each other by the metropolitan powers, consequently they really didn't know each other very well. This has been a handicap. Anything that could bring them together socially, economically, and, I would hope, eventually, politically, would tend to have a stabilizing effect in what is essentially a very unstable area. To the extent that ASA might offer some hope of that, it seemed to me to be something that we should applaud. I didn't think we should do very much about it; I think this is the kind of development that needs to be indigenous. If it is contrived or too strongly supported from the outside, it's less likely to succeed.

[-33-]

O'BRIEN: In regard to America's status in Southeast Asia, did you ever see any instances in which ASA and SEATO perhaps worked at cross-purposes?

BALDWIN: I wouldn't say they worked at cross-purposes, but they certainly did not parallel each other, let me put it that way. ASA was properly regarded as an indigenous instrument, as it was. SEATO was regarded by some Asians as a means of getting Asians to fight in Southeast Asia. "Getting Asians to fight American battles." SEATO was not popular in Malaya, largely because it was never popular with the Tunku. He said to me once, "You know, I'm afraid your Mr. Dulles did a very bad selling job in this part of the world." That was the way they felt about it. They regarded it, I think, in the way--I don't like to make this comparison because it's valid in only one respect--the way the French tended to regard NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. SEATO was a nice umbrella to have over their heads, but they didn't want to hold on to the handle. The protective effect, if any, of SEATO was welcomed, certainly by the Malaysians, and I think by the Indonesians, but they didn't want to have any involvement in it.

O'BRIEN: The Tunku has a great deal of influence on thinking in terms of foreign policy, doesn't he?

BALDWIN: Yes, because he is the government in many ways--with certain limitations, of course, but he's still strong. He has had the trust of the people. He's a remarkable politician and a remarkable man. He lacks oratorical skills; he lacks the charisma Sukarno had at the peak of his power, the great leadership quality of Sukarno; but the Tunku has had an incredibly effective way of getting the trust and confidence of the people. That's his leadership quality; not the bombast and the oratory and the flair of Sukarno, but the father image. People feel, "Well, we can let the Tunku take care of it." Even the Chinese do--or did when I was there.

[-34-]

O'BRIEN: Did the proposals for Maphilindo surprise you when Sukarno made them?

BALDWIN: They did. I'd heard rumors before the meeting that the Filipinos and Indonesians were trying to produce some kind of device that would provide a graceful way out of the controversy. But the idea of a political association of two strongly anticommunist nations with a nation that was certainly permissive, to say the least, with respect to communism did surprise me.

O'BRIEN: Well, how did the Tunku react to it?

BALDWIN: I think all Malayan officials felt that it was destined not to bear fruit, that it was a sort of compromise arrangement. They didn't have confidence in it.

Very frankly, they didn't believe trust could be imposed in Indonesia's intentions so long as Sukarno was running Indonesia. They had no confidence at all in him or Subandrio. They felt that Sukarno was a man who was moved more by memories of the bygone glories of the Majupahit dynasty and so on--that he wanted to recapture the former power of Indonesia; that Malaysia was a thorn in his flesh, and any way he could find to pull out the thorn he would use.

O'BRIEN: Yet they were willing to acquiesce to the suggestion and carry on through to the…

BALDWIN: They had to. The Tunku was very frank about this. He felt that his opposition to the proposal, even though I don't think he had very much confidence in it, would have looked like recalcitrance, stubbornness, and at that time he didn't feel that he could do that.

At that meeting with Macapagal [Diosado Macapagal] and Sukarno, the Tunku had a feeling, I believe, that he was--what should I say--he was sort of backed into a corner by two strong leaders, and that he had to be very careful.

O'BRIEN: Was he conscious of world opinion?

BALDWIN: Yes, I think he was, I think he was. He was good about that. He was a well-traveled man; and he had a capable advisor named Ghazali [Mohamed Ghazali] in the Foreign Office. You see, the Tunku was the Foreign Minister as well as the Prime Minister, but the operating head of the Foreign Office was Mohamed Ghazali, who was a very shrewd Malay. He kept a watch on world affairs for the Tunku and was responsive to world opinion.

O'BRIEN: Were the British or the United States, either, advising the Tunku in this regard to go along with Maphilindo.

BALDWIN: I didn't. I don't know whether the British did or not, but I'm not aware of any British advice of that kind. We felt that it would have been gratuitous to advise him. It was the kind of decision issue that the Tunku had to make himself. As a matter of fact, he'd made the decision, you see, in Manila. He had it confirmed later by his cabinet, but the confirmation was a foregone conclusion. When he made the commitment in Manila, there was no question that it would be kept.

O'BRIEN: How did the Department react when ASA fell apart, the Philippines pulled out?

BALDWIN: I think they regarded it as an inevitable result of the shock of the

confrontation. They deplored it. I think the Department felt, at least up to the time I left the Service, that ASA was a constructive move. They deplored the effect of the confrontation upon it.

O'BRIEN: Were you in Kuala Lumpur when the Indonesian embassy was stoned?

BALDWIN: Oh yes.

O'BRIEN: Did you have an opportunity to witness any of the mob action?

BALDWIN: Very little. I didn't feel that the American Ambassador should be a spectator of the demonstration. I knew it would be commented upon and that photographs would be taken. The Indonesian Ambassador was a personal friend of mine; he'd been my colleague in Singapore when I was Consul General there. I saw some street demonstrations and things of that sort. Compared with some of the disturbances in American cities, it was a drop in a bucket: a few hundred people threw stones.

O'BRIEN: Were these spontaneous demonstrations, or were they things that…

BALDWIN: I don't know whether they were contrived or not. If they were contrived, I can say it would have been easy to do it because passions were running pretty high at that time against the Indonesians.

O'BRIEN: Did you accompany Senator Kennedy, Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], on his visit to…

BALDWIN: His last visit?

O'BRIEN: Right--or his first visit.

BALDWIN: Not on his first visit. I wasn't there at the time of his first visit. Robert Kennedy visited three times to my knowledge. The first time, with Jack, when Jack was in Congress and I was Consul General at Singapore. They visited Malaya on a tour of the world. I was back in Washington heading a selection board in the State Department. I missed them. The acting Consul General hosted them the day they were in Singapore, and the Consul took care of them in Kuala Lumpur.

O'BRIEN: Do you happen to--now, of course, this would be, in a sense, hearsay--but do you happen to recall from your conversations with people in the Consulate at Singapore, do you happen to recall the incidents or, in the sense, happenings that took place?

BALDWIN: I certainly do; one in particular. When I tell this, I do so because I think it

illustrates one of the finest qualities that John Kennedy possessed, the ability to profit from his mistakes and change his mind. Entirely apart from his style, his charm, his flair, and other qualities, he was wise enough to look back and see when he had made a mistake. He made a mistake on the trip to Malaya.

When I got back to Singapore, I found my deputy, who had been in charge a few weeks before when the Kennedy brothers had visited, still slightly shaken by the event. After a briefing session for the Kennedy brothers, the meeting produced a strong argument. The Kennedy brothers both insisted, and apparently, expected the officers of the Consulate General to agree, that the emergency that was then going on in Malaya--the guerrilla war--was really a result of British blunders. My people, who knew this was not the case at all, refused to budge and said it was not true. Apparently that antagonized and irritated both the Kennedy brothers. The meeting ended in some unpleasantness.

Then the Kennedys went to Kuala Lumpur and met with the consul there. His name is Van Oss, a very capable officer, still in the Service. He was of Dutch extraction and a man who wasn't easily pushed around. The Vice-Consul in Penang came down, and the two of them were exposed to the same argument, that the guerrilla war was obviously a result of he failure of British colonia1 techniques. There was no collusion with our people in Singapore, because there hadn't been time, (the plane with the Kennedys flew directly to Kuala Lumpur) but the two consuls were equally firm in saying that this was not true. They explained, as had the Consul in Singapore, that the emergency was a result of the Calcutta Communist meeting in 1948 when the decision was reached an effort would be made by the communists to seize power in all the countries of Southeast Asia The outbreak of trouble in Malaya was apparently direct result of that command decision.

I've never known why John and Robert Kennedy took the position that I've mentioned. I never discussed it with either of them. It was water over the dam by the time I saw them. And it was quite evident from Jack's later behavior that he had abandoned the idea completely. I didn't know whether it was a carry-over of their father's [Joseph P. Kennedy] reputedly anti-British feeling--you know, his attitude when he was Ambassador in England, the anti-British feeling that he carried away with him. I never knew what caused it.

I was impressed with the fact that John Kennedy, when he as a congressman, could have such a strong opinion as he pressed in Malaya (one of the brothers even suggested that back in Washington they might talk to the Secretary of State, and who wouldn't be too happy to learn about the lack of political judgment displayed by Foreign Service officers in Malaya) and then later to change his views when he saw the facts clearly.

Let's go on until a quarter of four and then take a look at the situation and see what we've covered.

O'BRIEN: Fine. Did you get any insights into Robert Kennedy's later visits?

BALDWIN: I did, about his last visit and in a rather amusing way, which I think I can talk

about now. I learned about the visit about six days before his arrival, when the story broke in the press that he was to visit Tokyo. I said to my wife (this was Bob Kennedy's last trip in the spring of '64) "I hope very much that Bob doesn't come here. I think it would be a mistake." It would also be inconvenient and possibly embarrassing personally because I had made my farewell calls; I had called on the King, I had gone through the farewell parties. I had an engagement to make a farewell speech in Singapore and was scheduled to leave Singapore the day Kennedy was to arrive here. Well, as matters turned out, it was decided that Bob should visit Malaysia. I received instructions from the Department to notify the government but under no circumstances to overplay the reasons for the visit. Washington didn't want to make the Attorney General's visit a great show.

Now, the papers had reported my impending departure. Everyone knew that we were leaving. They knew the date that we were to leave. I called a meeting of my country team and asked their opinion about what I should do. They were unanimous in saying that I should not change my plans; that to so would clearly overemphasize the importance of the visit. So I informed the Department of our collective opinion and sent a copy of the message to Bob Kennedy in Tokyo. The reply the Department supported my position and asked if I would meet the Attorney General at the airport in Singapore, briefly, as we passed. I did so. We had about an hour together, most of which was devoted to a talk between Bob Kennedy and the acting Prime Minister of Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew was not in Singapore at the time, I think he was in Africa. Bob properly devoted most of his attention to the two Asian officials who were there at the time. I had very little time with him. When it was over, we chatted briefly, and off we went.

The Malaysian Government, I think, found it a bit difficult to understand why he came to Kuala Lumpur. They had the old-fashioned idea that an ambassador was the President's representative. I had briefed them at length on our Indonesian policy. They knew it as well as I did, and they saw little reason for any further elucidation of the policy by an official from Washington. Neither did I, and I think the results of the trip may have confirmed my opinion.

O'BRIEN: That turned out to be a rather significant trip, didn't it, in the sense that he called on the Manila government, he called on the Djakarta government, as well as the Malaysia?

BALDWIN: Yes, it was significant in indicating the extent of U.S. interest in the termination of the controversy. You see, actually, it was the previous trip that Bob had made to Indonesia which helped--perhaps almost laid the foundation…

O'BRIEN: That was the 1962 trip?

BALDWIN: Yes. It almost laid the foundation for our subsequent Indonesian policy. Kennedy stayed at Bogor, on that occasion, at the presidential palace. He had

long talks with Ambassador Jones [Howard P. Jones] in the embassy and long talks with Sukarno. I was later informed that when he came back and reported to his brother, the President, he pretty much set the tune for the subsequent policy toward Indonesia.

Bob Kennedy was identified in the minds of the Tunku and there Malaysian officials as being pro-Sukarno. I believe that was another reason why they displayed little enthusiasm about the trio. They received Kennedy with customary Malayan hospitality, not only because he was the President's brother but because he was a high official of the United States. He was treated courteously, but I sensed a feeling that the visit was not necessary. They had already been told by the American Ambassador exactly what our policy was.

O'BRIEN: Did his visit later lead to another meeting in Bangkok?

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BALDWIN: I don't know. You see, when I left Malaysia I was away from the United States for several months. I went to Camberra and talked there with people like Keith Waller, now Australian Ambassador in Washington, and to others about the Malaysian situation. That, of course, was unofficial. For a while I was out of touch with the Malaysian situation. I don't know whether Kennedy's trip laid the groundwork for the Bangkok meeting or not.

O'BRIEN: Did you see any change in regard to the new administration with President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] in regard to policy towards Malaysia, particularly Indonesia?

BALDWIN: I wasn't aware of any substantial change in policies, with one possible exception: I think, perhaps, the attitude towards Sukarno may have been a little tougher when Lyndon Johnson became President. I think Bob Kennedy felt--I don't want to commit myself on this because I don't have enough facts. But I have a feeling that appeasement is not the word--but I have a feeling that Kennedy was convinced that Sukarno was the crux of the situation, and that we simply had to be tolerant of him, that this should be the basis, the foundation of American policy. The Malaysians, as might be expected, misunderstood this as being captivated by Sukarno. I talked to Bob Kennedy later, and didn't gain the impression that he was enamored of Sukarno. I think he honestly felt that what has been called the "Howard Jones method" was the way to handle the situation. My feeling was about halfway between the two extremes, and that seemed to be the way the Johnson Administration was trending when I turned over my duties a Ambassador. I believed that there was a limit beyond which shouldn't go with respect to the rather disreputable but powerful Sukarno, that it tended to demean us in a way if we kowtowed to him too much.

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O'BRIEN: Did Robert Kennedy ever mention anything to you in your meeting with him in Singapore, or when you later saw him, in regard to President Johnson's

applying some of the provisions of the Broomfield [William S. Broomfield] amendment? If you remember, that was the amendment in regard….

BALDWIN: No, he didn't. When I came back to Washington I was vice-chairman of the committee of which Robert Kennedy was chairman, executive committee of the Foreign Student Service Council. He was chairman, and I was vice-chairman; and we met occasionally concerning foreign student matters. Only on one occasion did he ever talk about Indonesia; that was when we were lunching together in the Senate dining room. We were talking briefly about the Indonesian situation, and he said, "My, that man Sukarno is a handful, isn't he?" That was all.

O'BRIEN: Do you recall anything that you feel might be important about his involvement with the foreign student committee?

BALDWIN: No, except that it was another example of an extremely preoccupied and well-intentioned man who took on more jobs than he could handle. I was vice-chairman of the committee, but, in effect, I was the operating head of the Council because the Senator was too busy and too preoccupied. Bill Douglas [William O. Douglas], who had been his predecessor and an old acquaintance of mine, asked Bob to take the job, and he agreed. It was incumbent on me to extend the invitation formally. He was then Attorney General and it was the first time I'd seen him since we'd talked in Singapore. It was a very amiable meeting. I conveyed the invitation which he accepted and said, I think with great sincerity, "You know how terribly interested I am in youth, don't you? That's the reason I'm willing to do this." He added, "I want to make this an active participation. How often does your committee meet, the executive committee of which you're chairman?" I said, "On an average of once a month or once every two months." He said, "I want to attend the meetings."

But he never did and I didn't expect him to. He was too busy otherwise. But when we wanted to use his home for a big reception for the foreign students or to have him and his wife attend an important public meeting for foreign students, they would do it. Of course, he was tremendously popular with the students.

O'BRIEN: Passing over to some things that are more specifically involved with Malaysian foreign policy rather than U.S. relations, why did Malaysia furnish troops for the Congo operation? Did the United States urge them to?

BALDWIN: No, it was the Tunku's idea, and it was, I think, an inspiration. Malaya then had virtually no foreign policy at all. It was a new country with continuing connections with Britain and some relations with Thailand and other neighboring nations if that could be called a foreign policy. It had, however, taken a strong position on the Tibetan issue and on the matter of apartheid in South Africa. Then the Congo

crisis came up, and the Tunku seized upon it as a chance to show what a loyal and willing member of the international community Malaya was. This represented the kind of action that my British colleague used to call the Tunku's "off-the-cuffmanship." The Tunku was a master of "off-the-cuffmanship."

O'BRIEN: What factors brought Malaya to support the entrance of Communist China into the U.N.? This was a switch from previous…

BALDWIN: It never did during my ambassadorship. The Malaysian delegation to the U.N. did not then vote for admission. But, on the three occasions when I called on the Tunku to discuss with him the question of the position of his government in respect to the matter we would have almost the same conversation. The Tunku would say to me, "I'm going to bring up again the point that I discuss with you every time this happens. You contend that disarmament is a keystone of your foreign policy, is that correct?" I would say, "Yes." The Tunku would then say "Will you explain to me how you can ever have international disarmament if China isn't a member of the United Nations."

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In his rather simplistic, but affective way, he would put his finger on an important aspect of the matter.

He had committed himself publicly on the issue in another demonstration of "off-the-cuffmanship." On a trip to Europe--at an airport, a European newspaper man had asked the Tunku what he thought about the problem. He'd replied that he thought that it was silly to call Formosa the capital of China. Obviously, it wasn't. The solution to the problem was to have a Republic of Formosa in the U.N. The Tunku wasn't proposing a "two-China" idea; it was to create a Republic of Formosa protected by the United States.

He said to me on one occasion: "I believe in this. The state of Formosa could be protected by the United States or by you, if you want to extend your protection to it. I think it is unrealistic to regard the great country of China as having its capital on a little island called Formosa."

I have not been in a position to keep closely in touch with the trend in Malaysia thinking since then concerning China's membership. The British decision with respect to their commitments east of Suez must have had a very strong effect upon the thinking of the Malaysians because they relied very heavily on British help as the Indonesian crisis showed. When the British decision to withdraw its presence was made, they were shaken; they immediately turned to the Australians and New Zealanders with some results, as we've seen recently. I think, and this is surmise but knowing them, I believe the British decision probably, also, created a feeling in their minds that, while not in any way being pro-communist or abandoning their anti-communism, they might tone it down a bit.

O'BRIEN: Was it in any way a kind of concession to not only the Chinese in Malaya but as well in Singapore?

BALDWIN: I doubt it. The Malaysian government was not of a mind to make concessions to Singapore. The bulk of the Singapore Chinese tended to be liberal and even socialist, whereas communism was still a clandestine movement, as you know, in Malaysia.

O'BRIEN: Right.

BALDWIN: And the average Malaysian Chinese, who has a pretty good income, certainly much better than his Mainland brothers, would like to be left alone, if possible, and continue to make money in Malaysia.

O'BRIEN: Was there any relationship between the timing of Malaysian independence and support for South Vietnam, in any way?

BALDWIN: No. They timed it originally to occur on Merdeka Day, which is the ceremonialized birthday of their independence. Then they postponed it a month because of pressures from Indonesia.

O'BRIEN: Was there growing support for South Vietnam during the period that you were Ambassador?

BALDWIN: I don't think so. Let me put it this way. Practically every Southeast Asian state that I know has hoped, and may still hope, that we would win in Vietnam. Now, when I say win, I don't mean a military victory, but that we would succeed in holding back any expansionist pressures from North Vietnam or from China. They tended to feel that they were doomed, eventually, if that didn't happen. They remembered history. They remembered the feuding between the Thais and the Laos and the Cambodians and the former Vietnamese. They felt that a unified Vietnam with a very powerful, battle-hardened army, a nation of thirty-two million people, would be very bad news for them, regardless of China. So they were sympathetic to our efforts in South Vietnam. The Malayans conducted a training operation, for the South Vietnamese, as you know, for some time. When I arrived in Malaya as ambassador, they were training people sent down by the South Vietnamese army in anti-insurgency, jungle warfare.

O'BRIEN: Was there much U.S. involvement in the study of the counter-insurgency?

BALDWIN: You mean any utilization of experience gained in Malaya?

O'BRIEN: Yes, were there American officers that were involved…

BALDWIN: No. Very frankly, I think we were slow in profiting from the twelve years of experience the British had gained in Malaysia. I say that I am aware of the

differences between Vietnam and Malaysia, there are many and they are very important. However, I have believed for a long time--I say this with some misgivings, because I was not in the Pentagon, and was not privy to the planning--that what happened early in our involvement in Vietnam seemed to reflect either ignorance of or disregard of some of the lessons that the British had learned in Malaya. One of them was a fundamental of anti-guerrilla warfare: that you had to win the hearts and minds of the people--to quote Gerald Templer's famous expression. Therefore, it was political war as well as a military war. I think we learned that later than we might have learned it if we had watched more carefully, the record of Emergency, in Malaya.

O'BRIEN: Thompson [Robert K.G. Thompson] has become more of a prophet in recent years than he was….

BALDWIN: Robert Thompson, yes.

O'BRIEN: How did Malaya react to the Geneva Conference on Laos? Did you get any kind of feedback at all?

BALDWIN: They understood it, I think but they were not very optimistic about it. They had doubts as to whether the troika arrangement would work. They read into it, I think, the right implications. They understood what seemed to be the Russian purpose, but they seemed to be skeptical about the long-range durability of the agreement.

O'BRIEN: How about the test ban treaty in reference to nuclear weapons? Was there any awareness at all?

BALDWIN: That, of course, happened after I had left. Like all small nations, Malaysia was very much in favor of anything that would contribute to control and reduction of armaments.

O'BRIEN: Did they show an awareness of the Cuban missile crisis?

BALDWIN: Oh, yes. They understood that very well. You see, they felt that they had a potential Cuba in Singapore. The analogy was very clear to them. The little offshore island, of Singapore, then with a good deal of communism, made them understand the Cuban situation very clearly. And they were, of course, fully aware of the gravity of the missile crisis. I briefed the Prime Minister as soon as I could get some instructions which were delayed in getting to me, as was the case with a number of embassies, because of communications problems. When I briefed them, I found them very perceptive and understanding--very pleased with the action taken. I suppose it is natural, when a nation has gone through the crucible of twelve years of guerrilla warfare, that its

government should feel strongly that it is necessary to use strong measures in dealing with dangerous issues.

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O'BRIEN: Did they show an awareness of U.S.-Thai-Laotian relations, particularly in regard to the problem with Laos? I'm thinking here the Rusk-Khoman [Thanat Khoman] agreement as well as putting into effect the SEATO plan five.

BALDWIN: Yes, they understood. They were very impressed with the first troop movement, the movement of 5,000 troops--at the speed with which it was done. That was very impressive all over Southeast Asia so far as I could see. Although they had in the past some disagreements with the Thais, the Malaysians have very close bonds with the Thais. As you know, Thailand has had a residuum of guerillas who fled there and are now beginning to start forays again. So Thailand is very important to Malaysia.

O'BRIEN: There were some tensions in regard to those border raids?

BALDWIN: Yes. The guerrillas were quiescent for a long time. The situation was quiet. The Malaysians hoped the Thais would spend more time and effort to weed out the guerrillas, but they also understood, however, that the big problem of Thailand is the northeast frontier. But the Malaysians, possibly prophetically, foresaw a time when trouble would start again, and it seems to be beginning.

O'BRIEN: What prompted Malaysia to establish the so-called "Save Democracy Fund" in regard to aiding the Indians in their border problems with the Chinese?

BALDWIN: I don't know. I've never known whether that was partly anti-Chinese and partly because of the Indian population…. You know, there is an Indian population in Malaysia, and it doesn't get very much recognition.

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O'BRIEN: It's still sizeable as far as I know.

BALDWIN: It's still sizeable.

O'BRIEN: Ten percent or something.

BALDWIN: Yes. I think also that they were moved by the fact that they saw some relevance between their action and the previous action the country had taken on Tibet, as co-author of the U.N. resolution of censure in the Tibetan case.

O'BRIEN: Did this in any way endanger the alliance between UMNO and the MCA

[Malayan Chinese Association] elements?

BALDWIN: I don't know anything about that. I would doubt it. There is a prominent Singapore politician, whom I will not name, who once said to me, "The MCA is not a political party; it's a rich Chinese businessmen's club." That was perhaps an exaggeration, but what is true is that one of the problems of the MCA has always been to build up grassroots support. It's far from radical, leftist Chinese organization. It was a very conservative organization when I knew it.

O'BRIEN: How about PAP [People's Action Party] in Singapore?

BALDWIN: That's different. It is socialist. It's orientated left of center.

O'BRIEN: Well, did this…

BALDWIN: That was the cause of the trouble between Malaysia and Singapore.

O'BRIEN: Right. Did you sense any tensions developing?

BALDWIN: Good Lord, yes. Some of the key Chinese members of the Malaysian Cabinet have been very much opposed to key PAP people. Much of that was ideological as well as personal. The Chinese who were prominent in Malaysia were conservative. The Chinese officials in Singapore were socialists.

O'BRIEN: Were you contacted at all in '63 about the possible visit of President Kennedy to Southeast Asia and Malaysia?

BALDWIN: Contacted how? By the Malaysian government?

O'BRIEN: Well, no, by the people in the State Department who perhaps were soliciting your advice in regard to….

BALDWIN: No, as I remember--and I'm vague about this--as I remember, intimations had been made to me, more or less unofficially by Malaysian officials that it would be desirable if President Kennedy could pay a visit to the area. But it was not done officially and I handled the matter in that way with the Malaysians. The Malaysians can be pretty subtle about this kind of thing. They have a very sensitive feeling for the nuances of courtesy, for courteous relations. This was our business--our President. They felt that President Kennedy would do what he wanted to; all they could do was to say, as they did, "We'd like to have him come here, and he'll get a warm welcome if he does."

O'BRIEN: Well, I have a number of things I'd still like to go into, but I know it's growing late….

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