

Robert A. Hurwitch Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 02/17/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Robert A. Hurwitch
Interviewer: F.J.H. DeRosa
Date of Interview: February 17, 1967
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 21 pages

Biographical Note

Robert A. Hurwitch was the Special Assistant for Cuban Affairs, Department of State (1962 - 1963). This interview focuses on Bay of Pigs prisoners, exchanges with Fidel Castro for the prisoners, and effects of the missile crisis on prisoner release, among other things.

Access

Open

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed September 4, 1969, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Robert A. Hurwitch, recorded interview by F.J.H DeRosa, February 17, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Robert A. Hurwitch

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Robert A. Hurwitch, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed Robert A. Hurwitch

Date April 9, 1969

Accepted Walter E. Angel
Acting Archivist of the United States

Date 9-4-69

Robert A. Hurwitch – JFK #3
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
201	Bay of Pigs, Bay of Pigs prisoners, and the Tractors for Freedom Committee
205	A committee and a plan: establishing a task force to work on the release of Bay of Pigs prisoners
210	Goods for prisoners: an exchange with Fidel Castro
214	Missile crisis effect on prisoner release
215	Promises to the Cuban Family Committee
216	Effect of James B. Donovan’s acceptance of senatorial nomination on prisoner project
216	Exchange tools with Cuba: drugs, food, and ransom money
218	Hurwitch’s reflection on the project to release prisoners from the Bay of Pigs

Third Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT A. HURWITCH

February 17, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By F.J.H. DeRosa

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DEROSA: What was your first involvement with the Cuban prisoners' problem?

HURWITCH: Frank, I'd like to go back just a little bit before that and repeat what I said in another interview for the Kennedy Oral History Project, and that was that, although I was at the time of the Bay of Pigs operation the officer in charge of Cuban affairs in the Department of State, I was not informed of the operation or any of its background. However, as is sometimes the case, when things go wrong, the officers in charge are left to do what they can to put the pieces back together. Shortly after, as you recall, almost immediately after the failure of the Bay of Pigs undertaking, a Tractors for Freedom Committee was formed in response to a [Fidel] Castro speech suggesting that some sort of reparations for the damage done to Cuba by our Bay of Pigs brigade be taken. At the time, as I recall, the White House called over to the Department of State and asked the officers, or asked the State Department, what its views were with regard to the formation of a Tractors for Freedom Committee and the general idea of providing some goods to Castro for exchanging the prisoners. At that time the Office Director

for Caribbean and Mexican Affairs was Edwin Vallon, who polled his officers in his office. This would be the officer in charge of Dominican affairs, Haiti affairs, other Caribbean affairs and Mexican affairs, and myself, as well as his Deputy.

At that time all officers polled felt very strongly that we should not do anything that would indicate that we had any moral obligation or in any way evidenced any weaknesses towards the Castro government on this issue. I was the lone negative voice and believed that we did have a moral obligation and voted in favor of this. The view went forward from our office that we were, that is, the Office Director, who had the responsibility for the decision, opposed to any actions which, as I say, could be constructed as weakness.

Nonetheless the White House did go forward with the idea, and I had nothing to do with it, never met any of the participants in the Tractors for Freedom Committee. I do recall that Victor Reuther, who was a member of the Committee, had called over to the State Department asking that we provide a translator, interpreter, a civilian, non-official, to accompany the group to Cuba.

DEROSA: To your knowledge was there any other government agency involved with the Tractors Committee?

HURWITCH: To my knowledge not. I had really nothing to do with it other than this assistance in providing an interpreter to the group that went down.

DEROSA: To your knowledge was it formed at the behest of the U.S. government?

HURWITCH: I don't know whether it was formed at the behest of the U.S. government, but certainly that it did come into being and that there were questions that emanated from the White House as to the State Departments' views on it would lead me to believe that there was certainly interest on the part of the U.S. government. Whether it was formed at the behest of the U.S. government, I don't know.

DEROSA: Were you made aware of President Kennedy's attitude towards the general project or the aims of the project?

HURWITCH: Frank, while I had never spoken personally, or directly to the President about this project, I learned of his attitude and interest in it indirectly from a variety of points of view. First, the parents of the Bay of Pigs prisoners had formed a families committee in an attempt to raise funds to liberate them, a follow-on from the Tractors for Freedom Committee. While based in Miami, they had Washington representation, and its Washington representatives or the heads of the organization in Miami periodically came into my office to ask for U.S. assistance with respect to liberating their sons from Castro's prisons.

[Richard N.] Dick Goodwin at that time was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, and I turned to him to get some feel of what the top level of the U.S. government felt about attempting to help them. It was Dick who told me that the President felt a deep obligation and concern about the welfare of these prisoners and would look favorably upon any enterprise that was legal that might help free them. This was further reinforced by direct conversations with the then Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, who also expressed deep interest and a sense of moral obligation which I believe not only reflected his own personal views but also those of the President as well.

DEROSA: What was the general State Department position once the Attorney General acted favorably on this project?

HURWITCH: The general State Department position, as reflected by then Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, Edwin Martin, and, of course, the Secretary of State, Mr. [Dean] Rusk, were both favorable to do what could be done in order to recover and release the Bay of Pigs prisoners. I think they both believed in the wisdom and morality of such an operation—and, of course, I think they also knew that the President felt very deeply about it—and wished to do whatever they could in

order to discharge this obligation.

DEROSA: Did we have any special reason for thinking that Castro might be someone that we could deal with in this way?

HURWITZ: Well, at that time, and this was before the Cuban missile crisis, Castro was becoming less and less important on the world scene, particularly from the standpoint of publicity. And it had occurred to some of us that this might be a favorable opportunity to approach him again which would help place him back on the world scene and would appeal to his ego.

Additionally, it occurred to us that these prisoners were essentially a wasting asset to him, that it was to some extent a source of embarrassment, that he was keeping twelve hundred comparatively young men in prison, young men who were motivated. Although from his standpoint, perhaps not with the best of motivations, from the standpoint of Latin American opinion the efforts of these twelve hundred or so young patriots were viewed as understandable and patriotic acts. Therefore, he had twelve hundred or so young people on his hands, in prison, whom he had to feed, some of who were ill, not in the best of conditions, and it would seem to us that from his standpoint these were, as I say, becoming a wasting asset.

DEROSA: After the Tractors Committee was disbanded was there any background concerning the government's decision to try again?

HURWITZ: There are several things that I might say on that, Frank. One, as you recall, I think it was April of '62, the prisoners were condemned-- had a trial and were condemned--and there was a great furore in the exile community at that time and fear, particularly on the part of the parents of the prisoners, that a number of them would be sentenced to execution. This, as you know, was not the case, but there was considerable pressure exerted by the families particularly, and the Cuban exile community in general, that the United States use either its good offices or indirectly through some other country to

influence the sentences of the court at that time.

At Dick Goodwin's suggestion, I spoke with the head of the Families Committee and indicated that we might be able to get some food and medicine together if the Castro government were interested in an exchange. This was considerably before the decision to finally go ahead and see what could be done. This was one of the several attempts made to influence the decision of the court--whether it was the prospect of gaining something, both in material and political terms, from the United States, or whether it was the many other efforts, both private and official-but-unofficial, certainly not publicized efforts, in many cases to soften the attitude of the court.

As you know, none were condemned to death but they were sentenced to prison and, concomitantly, a price tag put on each one of them. The leaders of the brigade were the ones most severely sentenced, and the price tag placed on, if you like, their ransom or release was the highest, and it went along in a descending scale depending on pretty much the rank that the members of the brigade held.

Later, this would have been in about July or August of 1962, we began to sense that there might still be a possibility of sending foodstuffs and medicines, and obtain the release of the prisoners. I mentioned my views to Ed Martin, who suggested that I talk with Attorney General Kennedy; I saw Attorney General Kennedy in that period in his office and indicated my belief that there might be a possibility of successfully negotiating their release. I suggested that we might want to aim for Christmas of that year, believing that if we were successful, the release of the prisoners at Christmastime would tend to mute the type of opposition, domestic political opposition, that the Administration might run into since the reunion of families at Christmastime would seem to be the best possible time, from that standpoint, to accomplish it. The Attorney General said he would look into it and wanted to give it some thought.

Subsequent to this meeting with the Attorney General, a meeting was established in the White House in the Situation Room, at which were present the Attorney General, the Secretary of State, McGeorge Bundy, Mike Mikovsky, General

[Marshall P.] Carter, General [Edward G.] Lansdale, and perhaps one or two other people, and myself. I had been asked prior to this meeting to prepare a document indicating what our best estimate would be as to how the delivery of substantial sums of foodstuffs and medicine might affect the Cuban economy. This document was prepared and distributed to the group at that time.

The general thrust of the document was that while these items might provide some temporary relief in areas of shortages in these materials, it would not have any fundamental effect, and certainly not long-range effect, upon the course of the Cuban economy. I made this point orally at the meeting and reiterated my belief that the timing as far as the situation in Cuba was concerned was as good as we could hope for in the foreseeable future.

It was at that point that the Attorney General, after listening to some other views, made a forthright and, perhaps it would not be unfair to say, quite passionate statement indicating his strong belief that the United States had a moral obligation to try to effect the release of these prisoners. His views were clearly and strongly held. I recall no strong opposition to those views, and it was decided, the consensus there was, that this would be worth undertaking. The Attorney General then undertook to obtain the views of the President on the matter. Shortly thereafter it was decided that we could go ahead, and a task force was set up in the Department of Justice under the leadership of the then Deputy Attorney General for Taxation, [Louis F.] Lou Oberdorfer.

DEROSA: Why were you in favor of a project which would result in the release of the brigade?

HURWITCH: Well, although I had not been involved, I shared, the sense that we did have a moral obligation. My other view was that the prospect of twelve hundred men languishing and then, perhaps, eventually dying in jail would, from the standpoint of future American history, make the Bay of Pigs operation, disastrous as it was, a real tragedy for the human beings involved and for the nation. But if we could effect their release, the judgment of the

future generations reading American history at that point might be, "This was an operational failure, but nobody really got hurt that bad, so it's not that important." And it seemed to me that from the standpoint of future generations who would judge the United States and its activities such as the Bay of Pigs operation, there was a clear and important difference between an operational failure which resulted in nobody really being seriously hurt and certainly no deaths, except for the few, comparatively few, who were killed, and a real tragedy where twelve hundred men died as a result of this operational failure.

DEROSA: What made you first come up with the idea that food or drugs be used here? [Interruption]

HURWITCH: Well, I knew if I talked long enough, I'd remember. Frank, as you recall, one of the important economic measures that we took to make life difficult for the Castro regime was the invocation of the Trading with the Enemy Act. This is an act which can, in its harshest terms, shut off all trade between the United States and the country against which it is applied, in this case, Cuba. In its application against Cuba, the decision was reached in the government not to bring to bear the full force of the Act, but rather on humanitarian grounds to exempt the trade or shipment of foodstuffs and medicines to Cuba. This was designed to soften any political criticism that the United States' great power was not satisfied with an attempt to bring down the Castro regime itself, but also was exercising its power against the people of Cuba, whom we had consistently assured we held as friends and that they had our sympathy. Therefore, the foodstuffs and medicines were not included in the application and scope of the Trading with the Enemy Act. Therefore, when the possibility came up of perhaps not sending funds but goods that the Castro regime might wish to have, the only items that we really could consider legally were foodstuffs and medicines, since, as I say, they were exempt from the application of the Act.

DEROSA: You mentioned previously that the United States government, as well as private sources, had

tried to influence the Cuban government during the trial of the prisoners--that is, influence the Cuban government not to come in with a verdict which would mean execution for these people. Did the government, as has been reported, actually contact President [Joao] Goulart of Brazil and ask him to pass on to Premier Castro the message to the effect that President Kennedy would be forced to take drastic action if the prisoners were executed?

HURWITCH: Frank, I no longer remember specifically, but I do recall efforts being made by our government with friendly Latin American governments. I would not at all be surprised that the record would show that this included President Goulart of Brazil, and, if I'm not mistaken, the Mexican government, as well, was helpful in sending messages to Castro, entirely, if my memory serves me correctly, appeals on humanitarian grounds. But I do not recall messages that went out which in any way contained a veiled threat of U.S. retaliatory action if the courts were to sentence one or more of these people to death. As a matter of fact, I would certainly not have cleared any such telegram because my own reading of the Castro regime was that nothing would ensure the execution of one or more of these young men than threats, veiled or otherwise.

DEROSA: Was there any belief, either on your part of within the Department of State at this time, that it would be easier to deal with Castro because he was considered more of a Cuban than a Marxist? Or certainly a Communist?

HURWITCH: You mean easier to deal with on this particular . . .

DEROSA: Yes.

HURWITCH: . . . on the Cuban prisoners. I think, really, when it came to the issue of releasing or not releasing Cuban prisoners, the question of whether he was a Marxist or not played a very minor role,

if any role whatsoever. I think he was looking at this problem from his own standpoint--that is, his stature in the world, his relationships with the United States. And he, I believe, from the time of the Bay, right after the Bay of Pigs and with the Tractors for Freedom Committee and subsequently, felt strongly that a wrong had been done his country and that this should be made good. And I think this was his motivating factor, and if he could extract from the United States what he considered the value of making good, he felt, he probably felt, that this would somehow humiliate the United States and enhance his own personal stature.

My own belief is that we are a big country; I don't think it is humiliating; I think his judgment was wrong on this; and if he wanted to exploit it for his own reasons, that was his business, but a country of our stature and traditions could certainly stand whatever type of political advantage he hoped to extract from this exchange. I believe these were the motivating factors much more than the question of whether he was a Communist or a Marxist.

DEROSA: Were you present at any discussions during which the effect this project might have on domestic United States politics were considered?

HURWITCH: No, Frank, the only time that I at all became involved in that was what I mentioned about suggesting the date of Christmas. But other than that, while being a voting and knowledgeable citizen, I think, of our own politics, my main considerations and the role that I played in this effort was really an assessment of the situation in Cuba and a judgment as to whether or not the contemplated exchange had a real chance of success.

DEROSA: What point in time was it decided that this project would be ostensibly a private endeavor?

HURWITCH: At one time there was some consideration of looking into the ways in which it might be possible for the U.S. government to become financially involved in it. However, this was subsequently discarded. An interesting sidelight on this was at about

that time, or perhaps previously, in a meeting I attended with the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, it was he who suggested that a fruitful avenue of inquiry might be the tax aspects of donations to a committee, citing his experience as former president of The Rockefeller Foundation and some knowledge of tax matters.

DEROSA: What was the significance of the twenty-three American prisoners being held by Castro in this whole project?

HURWITCH: It was in some sense a second stage of the whole process, Frank. I had known for some time before we were contemplating the possible operations to try to release the Bay of Pigs prisoners that among the Americans held in Cuban jails were three of particular interest and significance to the United States. Related to that was the public and congressional attitude that could exist if this great effort was mounted for Cubans while Americans continued to languish in jail. We had the general proposition of Americans versus Cubans and, specifically, three Americans who were of considerable official interest to us. Therefore, it was of importance that, quite apart from having contracted with the Castro government, we would live up to our part as long as he lived up to his. It had a practical reason--in addition to just generally as a nation we should maintain our word once having given it, there was a practical reason for making sure that those good promises were in actuality delivered since Castro had held out hope to [James B.] Donovan that if our part of the bargain were maintained, he would entertain the possibility of releasing the prisoners.

DEROSA: What would be your reaction to the charge made in July of '63 by Castro that actually he was, in fact, shortchanged and did not receive the amount of goods that he had been promised?

HURWITCH: Frank, my belief is that he, in essence, asked for in the neighborhood of some sixty million dollars worth of goods. that he received goods

fairly valued at market prices of that amount. Now, in some instances, as you recall Let me start back. As you recall, Castro and his staff had devised a very long list of items. The very great majority of those items specifically were met, fulfilled, and delivered. Toward the end, some difficulty arose in getting down to every single specific item and some substitutions were made, but there was no attempt to shortchange in value. What did occur was some substitutions were made because rather than say, "No, we don't have anything of these items. We're not going to send them to you," we wanted to live up to our hundred per cent side of the bargain just as he had in delivering both the Bay of Pigs prisoners and the American citizen held in jail at that time.

DEROSA: Had you any information concerning the fact that there was a faction in Cuba that was against the exchange?

HURWITCH: No, I don't have any first hand knowledge. I have some recollection of perhaps Jim Donovan and his assessment of the situation when he was down there having reported back that he either had encountered opposing views or, when some obstacles were placed in his way, suspected that there must have been such a faction. But we never had any other--this is not to doubt what Jim encountered--but we never had any other information along those lines. In the final analysis this was a kind of matter that Fidel Castro was personally interested in, that he personally handled and made the decisions on, and if there were strong opposition, I think the outcome might have been different, but he is the number one down there, and it was his judgement and decision that prevailed.

DEROSA: Previous interviews have indicated that, prior to Mr. Donovan's first trip, there was a divergence of opinion as to the timing of the trip, with U.S. government people involved in the project being in favor of his making the trip immediately and Mr. Donovan wanting to make it after he had a larger amount of goods to offer. Were you familiar with this at all?

HURWITCH: Yes. I first met Donovan in August of 1962 when he was sent to my office by Attorney General Robert Kennedy for a background briefing and an assessment of the situation. At that time, when we talked, and after I had given him the background that I had on the matter, I felt that it was urgent for him to go down there and get some firsthand feel of the situation and to assess Castro himself because we were working at a considerable distance and based on information which we believed was true, or judgments which we held rather strongly, but there was no substitute for a face to face conversation with Castro.

DEROSA: Once Donovan returned from his trip, is it your recollection that it was pretty clear that a deal could be made?

HURWITCH: Yes, it was my recollection that a deal could be made. And I think Donovan came back optimistic and felt that the trip had been very worthwhile, and his assessment of Castro was that this was a man who was interested in the deal and who could be talked to.

DEROSA: Before Mr. Donovan went to Cuba did you have any briefing sessions with him during which you might have given him some idea as to how you thought the negotiations or the meetings with Premier Castro should be conducted?

HURWITCH: Yes, I did, Frank. When he first came over, we went over the general background of the development of our relations with Castro and then the assessment of Castro's international position, or how I would imagine he felt at that time. And Donovan, which I've already mentioned, Donovan, very thorough, and I think very correctly, asked for and was given every available speech of Castro's that we had so that he, too, could get a picture of the man through his speeches, and particularly anything that related to possible negotiations for the prisoners, which Donovan, as a good lawyer pre-

paring himself for negotiations, wanted to be able to cite back to Castro as he visualized the conversation developing between himself and Premier Castro. That was, at the outset, the most important briefing and conversation that we had to get the negotiations started.

At each point, when Donovan came back to the United States, either in Miami or in Washington, we had further opportunities to check views as to what Donovan discovered about Castro's character and how, with the background that I had, this might or might not fit in. We saw remarkably eye to eye on the assessment of Castro.

After the Cuban missile crisis, we were both convinced as we discussed what effect the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis would have on the course of the negotiations I was quite positive that Castro must feel that he was shoved aside rather brusquely by [Nikita S.] Khrushchev, shoved aside from the international scene, and must really feel that he looked pretty ridiculous and out of the league of possible conflict between the Soviet Union and ourselves, felt very strongly that he would like very much, once again, even more so than before the missile crisis, to take some steps which would: a) show him to be independent and a power to be reckoned with, hoping also thereby to regain some of the international spotlight upon himself.

DEROSA: Do you base any of your feelings as to what Castro would have done at this point on the fact that he also had at one time been imprisoned and had been a revolutionary who had been tried and sentenced and then was later released?

HURWITCH: Yes, I think that this certainly was a basis of appeal to Castro in the talks with him which I believe Donovan used, and used quite effectively.

DEROSA: But, in effect, you did a character study on Premier Castro and felt that for various reasons he would go along with this project. Did you think that he might have some humanitarian reason also for going along with the release?

18
1

HURWITCH: Well, I think so, although I don't think that he was primarily motivated that way. I think really the man is--as most leaders are--an egotist, and the type of argumentation that could appeal to his ego would be, it seemed to me, of an international nature in the sense of his position vis-a-vis Latin America and the United States, but also, as you mentioned, appeal of the young, spirited people who may erroneously, in his judgment, have been motivated to liberate their country, but nonetheless a sympathetic, if not secret admiration and understanding for young people of his own nationality who would attempt to do something like that. I think also it's possible in his terms that he felt that the young people were overly influenced by their parents, whom he regarded as worms, in Cuban terms, and also misled and duped by the United States government.

DEROSA: Do you know just how important a part Celia Sanchez played in the whole project in convincing, talking to Premier Castro about the proposed release?

HURWITCH: I don't know, other than from what Jim Donovan reported, and as I recall his reports, he felt that she did play quite an influential role in Castro's decision, that she was present at some of the conversations, that she was obviously close to Castro. We had known, of course, that she was close to Castro before Jim Donovan had gone down, but his own personal experiences there verified it, and I have no reason at all to discount Jim's assessment that she did play an influential role.

SIDE II TAPE I

DEROSA: What was the overall effect of the missile crisis on the project at this time?

HURWITCH: Well, the immediate effect at the outset of the missile crisis, Frank, of course, was all attention was directed to the missile crisis, and activities were basically suspended with respect to negoti-

ating with [Fidel] Castro on the prisoner release. However, with the successful resolution of the missile crisis, attention was immediately returned by those of us who were working on Cuban matters to the release of the prisoners. The net effect, really, I think in a sense, was a favorable one in that Castro, once again motivated I believe by desire to once again reimpress his personality and person on the international scene, was even more inclined to do so at that point.

DEROSA: Did you hear anything to the effect that during this time that some discussion had been had about writing the prisoners off in the event of an invasion of Cuba by the United States?

HURWITCH: I recall that one of the considerations--I must say my recollection is that it was not a very important consideration--was the welfare of the Cuban prisoners. I think the reason it came up at all was that the juxtaposition of our efforts to release them and the Cuban missile crisis was so close that this was very much on our minds when the--that is, their release and freedom was very much on our minds at the time of the missile crisis. But I do not think that the decision as to which of three means we might take to counter the Soviet threat of placing missiles in Cuba--that is, quarantine, air strike, or invasion--was at all affected by considerations of the welfare of the Cuban prisoners. That decision was based on other matters.

DEROSA: To backtrack for one moment, do you recall ever promising twenty-six million dollars in food credits to the Cuban Family Committee?

HURWITCH: Yes. At that point in time which was just prior to the trials of the Cuban prisoners, which took place in April of '62--this would have probably been in March, '62--as I mentioned, the Cuban Families Committee, made up almost entirely of the parents of the Cuban prisoners, were desperate and fearful for the fate of their sons. It was at this point that [Richard N.] Dick Goodwin

suggested that we offer about twenty-six million dollars for the release of the prisoners.

DEROSA: What effect did the fact that Mr. [James B.] Donovan accepted the senatorial nomination have on the project?

HURWITCH: Well, since the project was successful, in one sense one could say that it had no effect. In another sense, however, I must say I personally was concerned about his dividing his attention and energies on a project which required the greatest amount of care and persistence and, in my judgment, undivided attention in order for it to succeed. But I gather the evidence now is that Mr. Donovan is sufficiently energetic and versatile that he can negotiate successfully for twelve hundred odd people and still run a campaign. The outcome of the senatorial campaign, however, leads one to believe that he might not be able to be simultaneously successful in two such great efforts.

DEROSA: At what point in time--or did you have anything to do with any discussions during which it was decided that drugs would be the primary medium of exchange?

HURWITCH: I don't know precisely at what point in time, Frank, but when it was decided that foodstuffs and drugs were really the only kinds of items that could be supplied legally and it was decided to look into the tax regulations and laws as to what benefits could a donor derive for donations for charitable purposes, it became clear that the span between cost of production and fair market value of the products would result in the heaviest portion of the donations coming from the drug manufacturers. Also, I believe that the list itself had a large number of drugs on it.

DEROSA: Were you involved at all, or do you know anything about the two point nine million dollars ransom money and the raising of this money?

HURWITCH: Yes, I know about it and was to some extent involved, Frank. This two point nine million dollars was the price tag placed collectively on the sixty people who had been released earlier. We had questioned a number of times whether in the calculations somebody was also worrying about this two point nine million dollars, which were not in the calculations for the roughly sixty million dollars for the prisoners still held in Cuba. Each time, I know, that I questioned this, I was assured that this was going to be taken care of. However, as you, I think, know from other experiences, the flights were interrupted when Castro focused on the fact that still two point nine million dollars was owed him. Donovan called from Havana saying he had just come from a stern interview with Castro who had raised this question. I think that conversation can be described by Donovan. He was there.

I do know that I was told that on the basis of one telephone call, the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy] had obtained a pledge of one million dollars, that General [Lucius D.] Clay, who, as you know, was one of the, oh, I think he was the honorary president of the Cuban Families Committee, was on his way to spend Christmas with his sons in Washington--he was coming from New York--and was met at the airport here in Washington and asked if he could not come urgently to the Department of Justice. He agreed to do so and I must say, he's a very patriotic and conscientious man, spent many of the hours that he would otherwise have spent with his family in pre-Christmas festivities with us in the Department of Justice attempting to raise the one point nine million dollars. I was assigned to work with him in the Department of Justice in this enterprise. My understanding is that he himself, on his own name, pledged the remaining one point nine million dollars and then spent a good part of the remaining days, of the remaining hours just before Christmas telephoning a number of his friends and contacts in the business world, as were other people as well, and succeeded in raising the remaining one point nine million.

DEROSA: Where did the Attorney General raise the one MILLION DOLLARS?

HURWITCH: It's my understanding--and learned subsequently, I did not know at that particular moment--that the money came from [Richard J.] Cardinal Cushing in Boston.

DEROSA: Have you ever heard any person ascribe a different source for that one million dollars other than Cardinal Cushing?

HURWITCH: No, I never have. Never have.

DEROSA: Could you give me your overall views on this project, what you think historians should gather from some of these tapes? Certainly, your idea of it, the attitude of the people concerned. Obviously this was more than a usual government project.

HURWITCH: Well, I think there are several things from my own personal point of view. One, as I mentioned earlier, it was heartening to me to see the Attorney General's attitude which, as I say, I have reason to believe reflected the President's attitude as well. The humanity involved, the sense of conscience and the sense of moral obligation. I think oftentimes when one reads history, one gets the impression of When talking about high officials and particularly the president or the presidency, one loses track of the fact that these are human beings and men of conscience or lack of conscience, as the particular case may be. Since my view and feelings about the obligation we had toward these young men coincided with the views of the men who made decisions, I was, of course, particularly gratified.

Also, the question of how the Bay of Pigs incident would loom or not loom in the history of our country twenty, thirty, fifty years from now in looking back over the Kennedy Administration and its accomplishments. As I mentioned earlier, I thought it terribly important and a distinction that would be made by historians in trying to put this incident which loomed so large in our minds, those of us who were working on Cuba, and certainly the American public feeling of that day, and today, as a matter

of fact, when one mentions the Bay of Pigs. But these views and feelings soften with history. Things get put into perspective and the important crucial thing, it seems to me, that had a bearing on the significance of this operation and its failure, its utter failure, was how many people really got hurt. And to the extent one could minimize that aspect of it, my judgment was and remains that the incident, disastrous as it was, at least did not involve a great number of human lives. I think this was an important way of looking at the problem.

As far as the operation itself was concerned: As you know, Frank, I'm a Foreign Service Officer and have been in the career for fifteen years. It is a disciplined service and one in which one is trained to think along certain lines and to act with a bureaucracy in Washington or in an embassy overseas. The startling aspect, it seemed to me, of this operation was that it was in many senses so unorthodox; that the red tape of bureaucracy was bypassed or slashed.

In my own particular case, for example, to the extent that the Department of State was involved in this operation, I was the Secretary of State. The confidence that was placed upon me by the Secretary and by the Assistant Secretary allowed me, who was closest to the problem from the State Department's point of view, to operate freely, using my own best judgment without having to check back at every step. This placed upon me a dual responsibility: one, of making sure I exercised the best judgment possible; and, two, to keep my superiors informed of the main developments and also to be sufficiently alert to some implications of this operation from the foreign policy standpoint and when catching those and not able to make my own decision because of lack of knowledge of all the elements, taking only those few points that required higher level decision from a broader perspective than that which I had and making sure that that was done. But those responsibilities, it seems to me, any officer at my level would welcome in exchange for the 90 per cent of the time freedom in making decisions and acting on one's own behalf as far as one department of government was concerned.

A further lesson that I personally derived from this was that in my own experience, I have had very little to do with lawyers and the legal profession. This was my first and very full immersion in contact and working with lawyers. I, frankly, cannot say enough about how deeply and favorably impressed I was by the men in the Justice Department, both officially connected with the Justice Department or men who were brought in from outside, from the larger law firms in both Washington and New York; how quickly they grasped the problem; how they fit into a team; how energetically they pursued that portion of the problem that they were assigned with a minimum of friction, a minimum of prima donna attitude, but with an understanding that this is something that the United States government wished to do, and we not only needed luck, but we certainly needed all the cooperation and energies of the people who, in essence, in many cases, volunteered their services for this project.

The leadership--in some senses from the Attorney General, but certainly on a day to day basis by [Louis F.] Lou Oberdorfer, who, with his calm reflective manner and yet energy and follow-through, kept on top of the situation and guided it from one turning point to another turning point as the whole project developed--was really one of the inspiring and gratifying things to have witnessed and certainly to have participated in. It's indicative, I think, that sometimes when the United States wants to do something of great importance, particularly when it becomes known that the President wished a particular course of action, that, while I am a believer in the established pattern of doing business, we also must recognize that in many cases the established pattern may not always be the most feasible or the most effective and efficient, and that we ought to maintain an attitude of flexibility in looking at a problem and determining, really, is the established hierarchy and bureaucracy the best way to accomplish it or is there some other system?

I would not be inclined to go so far as to say that, because the established bureaucracy is careful and weighs things carefully and oftentimes results in inaction, inertia, or very few decisions, therefore, it should all be scrapped.

I think this would be imprudent and rash and would get our government in a great deal of trouble because we do have people who are part of the established bureaucracy who have contributions to make and whose judgments must bear on some of the problems, certainly of a foreign policy nature, that we're confronted with. But it would be a terrible confession to say that the United States was confronted with a problem and could not resolve it because the setup and the organization of the government would not permit it to do it.

It requires, I believe, the traditional pragmatism of the American people and its officials and the imagination of its leadership to say, "Well, if we can't do it through the established bureaucracy for good and sufficient reasons, well, that's a problem. But now let's resolve it and figure out a way of doing it." One such way occurred in the release of these prisoners. And a happy combination, I think, of private citizens and government officials harnessed together in a team which resulted in a favorable outcome of this project.

I don't think there are any magic formulae in any of these things. Tomorrow we might be confronted with another problem, and it may turn out that another kind of putting together of a group of people may or may not work. But I think we must be careful not to say that we have found any new magic formula because of the success of this particular operation. What we have learned is that it is possible to get a group of people together, give them a special problem to work on, and have it result in a success.