

**George W. Ball, Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 2/16/1968**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** George W. Ball

**Interviewer:** Larry J. Hackman

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**Biographical Note**

Ball, Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs in 1961 and Undersecretary of State from 1961 to 1964, discusses U.S. military involvement in Laos and Vietnam in the early 1960s, the crisis in the Congo following secession of Katanga Province, and the development of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa, among other issues.

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George W. Ball – JFK#3

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Third of Four Oral History Interviews

with

George W. Ball

February 16, 1968  
New York City

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Ball, what can you recall about what your own viewpoint was in, let's say in early '61? This was one of the first problems that came up with the Administration: General Phoumi [Phoumi Nosavan] had moved and taken Vientiane and Kong Le had joined up with the Pathet Lao, I believe in the fall before, and Souvanna Phouma [Prince Souvanna Phouma] had fled to Cambodia. This was one of the first things that came up. Can you remember what your view was at that time?

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BALL: Well, during the early period of the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] Administration we spent an awful lot of time talking about the problems in Laos, which always had a highly opera *bouffe* quality. I had a sense that there was a good deal of unreality in the position that we were taking with regard to Laos, that we were treating it as a matter of far greater importance than the facts justified. But, nevertheless, the amount of time and effort that was devoted to this was very considerable. As far as the President was concerned, I think this situation had a kind of fascination for him. But in a sense it also may well have brought home to him the limitations under which he was operating because when the question came of the injection of American

force into a Laotian situation which was falling apart rather rapidly--and I would suppose

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that this was probably about March of 1961....

HACKMAN: Right.

BALL: He met with the Congressional leadership, and they made it very emphatic to him that, to put American military force into Laos just was not on. I must say my own reaction was a sense of some relief because I personally thought that to invest troops in an inferior position in a situation where there was no political base of any consequence whatever would have been a very great mistake. I think that I felt this much more strongly than Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk] did. At the time, however, my own relations to the problem were only peripheral because I was still Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs until December of 1961. While I went to the meetings and was familiar with the problem, I didn't assert my own views very strongly except to the Secretary and on one or two occasions to the

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President when I told him that I thought that we were giving incommensurate importance to an area which was really only tangential to the American interest. This found its reflection later on and in the situation with regard to Vietnam. But that's another story.

HACKMAN: Did this matter of Congressional reaction, did this appear to be the deciding factor?

BALL: I think it was the deciding factor as far as the President was concerned. And then immediately thereafter, in April, came the Bay of Pigs. I think that this had perhaps the greatest impact on the President of any event during 1961, except possibly his meeting with Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev] in June. I've always believed myself that the background to the Bay of Pigs, the fact that it occurred, the fact that the President felt that he had himself been led into error, and that he had either had to use

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force effectively in Cuba or accept the fact of a continued Castro [Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz] regime, that this greatly influenced his decision in the fall of '61 to accept the recommendations of the Taylor-Rostow [Maxwell D. Taylor; Walt Whitman Rostow] Report and increase the number of military advisors in Vietnam, with making what I then felt to be a very critical decision which, I must say, I was not in agreement with, but which, in retrospect, seems now to be almost the principal operative decision that was made as far as our present situation in Vietnam is concerned. I had occasion at the time of the Taylor-



Rostow Report to talk with, first, as I recall, McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric]--I think the Secretary was away at the time when the proposals were being discussed for the acceptance of the recommendations of the Report--and I told them both that I thought it would

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be a very great mistake to do so, that to put American troops into or to increase the number of military advisors would start us down a path which would lead, as I said at the time, to our having three hundred thousand men in the rice paddies and jungles of South Vietnam in five years time under conditions very adverse where we could possibly lose them and just never find them again because of the fact that they would be dealing against guerilla forces under conditions where the intelligence advantage was largely on the side of the opposition. The reaction of both McNamara and Gilpatric was one of certain shock and a feeling that I was completely off base. But McNamara was forthright, as he always was, and his reply was, "Well, I don't agree with you at all. This isn't going to happen. But I do think that if the President makes

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this decision, he ought to take it with the inner conviction that if he has to put three hundred thousand men or five hundred thousand men or whatever he takes into the field, he'll do it. And if he isn't prepared to make that decision now, he probably shouldn't. But," he said, "I think it's absolutely indispensable that we go down this road." I told him that in my judgment no President of the United States could make a decision in those terms at that time. He always had to retain the right to withdraw, to change his view as events developed, but that I thought he ought to recognize that by starting down this road, the President would be progressively losing his freedom of action and his freedom of maneuver. I told McNamara that I was going to discuss this with Rusk, which I did. I told Rusk

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my own deep disquiet about an affirmative decision to go ahead with the recommendations of the Report. And he made it clear that in his judgment the President had to do so. I then told him of my conversation with McNamara and the fact that I had felt the President couldn't make the decision in the terms of a moral commitment of the extent that McNamara had described. And Rusk agreed with that. I then remarked that I wanted at some point to discuss this with the President. And some time later--and I can't remember when exactly, but within a week or ten days--I was talking to the President about something else, a loan I think, some economic problems, as I recall. And I said to him that I did want to have the chance to express my views to him with regard to the Taylor-Rostow Report, that I had mentioned this to Rusk, that I

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was deeply disturbed by it, and I thought that if he made an affirmative decision, it would be a considerable mistake. I then told him that I thought that if he made this decision, he could very well find himself in a position where five years from now we would have three hundred thousand men in the field. And a commitment of that kind, under the conditions of the terrain, both political and physical, in Vietnam would, I thought, be a major mistake. I told him that I thought that there was a totally soggy political base and that in my judgment it was a very great mistake to put land forces on the mainland of Asia and I thought that there had been a kind of tacit acceptance of that position by the American people.

The President's reply, as I recall was, "George, you're just crazier than hell! This decision doesn't mean that.

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We're not going to have three hundred thousand men in Asia." In retrospect, I have thought many times that events have tended to indicate that I was probably more right than I knew at the time because at the time Kennedy was killed we had 16,500 and more on the way. I think we were then caught in a developing situation where it was manifestly difficult to turn back.

HACKMAN: Did you continue to make this case?

BALL: Not to him. But when Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] came in, in September of '64, after... When Johnson first came in, he was so preoccupied in dealing with the constitutional crisis that he didn't have much time to spend on Vietnam and it sort of went its way. He then got involved in the political campaign. By September of '64 I felt so deeply about the nature of our involvement in Vietnam that I wrote a seventy-five page memorandum to

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President Johnson challenging every assumption of our Vietnamese policy and proposing that we cut our losses and get out as soon as possible, and proposing a way by which we might cut our losses and get out. I gave a copy of this memorandum to Rusk, to McNamara and to Bundy [McGeorge Bundy], and we set aside an afternoon to discuss it, although there was a good deal of disapproval on the side of my colleagues for even having put such heresies in print. In fact, McNamara was deeply concerned that I had written all this stuff and thought that it probably should never have been written. In any event, we discussed it. And they were always good about letting me air my complaints. I then asked Bundy to give a copy to the President, and when I found he hadn't, early in January I arranged to get a

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copy in the President's hands through Bill Moyers [William D. Moyers], telling Rusk what I was doing at the time. The President read it twice and was deeply concerned about it and then set aside some time for long discussions. And thereafter about every two weeks over the next year I sent the President a memorandum analyzing the situation in considerable detail

and urging him for heaven's sake, to cut our losses and take a short term loss, and get out of the situation which, it seemed to me, was a hopeless situation and which was going to involve us very deeply in a very bad position. But I still, in retrospect, think that the decision made in the fall of '61 were the critical decisions because they set the course. And thereafter it became increasingly difficult to turn it around.

HACKMAN: Are these some of the things that are going to be coming out in this book that

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you have coming up?

BALL: No, there's nothing in the book about what I told anybody. I think Reston [James B. Reston] mentioned in his book the discussion we had in the fall of '61, very briefly. But I'm not writing anything about it.

HACKMAN: Going back to Laos, were you basically in agreement with trying to get the Geneva Convention going?

BALL: Oh, yes. It seemed to me that we weren't losing anything by trying to find a political solution. I never had deep confidence that the thing was more than a kind of shadow game, but the whole Laotian business seemed to me a shadow game so it didn't disturb me very much.

HACKMAN: There seemed to be a lot of feeling in the Department and in other places that this isn't what we should have been doing. Where

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was this feeling in opposition to this coming from in the Department?  
Can you remember?

BALL: You mean that we shouldn't have been seeking a political decision?

HACKMAN: Right, we should have been stronger in supporting General Phoumi.

BALL: Well, I think there may have been a certain amount of it in the Far East Division. I don't think outside of what we call FE in the Department that there was much sentiment of that kind. McConaughy [Walter P. McConaughy] at that time was Assistant Secretary.

HACKMAN: Right. He replaced Parsons [J. Graham Parsons] in the spring.

BALL: He replaced Parsons in the spring, yes. And I think, I'm not sure what

his views were, but I think some of the people on his staff may have felt that way. It was not a groundswell opinion in the Department on it because by and large people

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were concerned with other things.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any of the meetings at the White House? There were a couple meetings in April, late April, of the National Security Council dealing with this.

BALL: Yes. I remember the meetings. But again the meetings very largely consisted of a review of what was going on and how we could get the princes together. And we played incessant little games as to who was going to go to what point to meet whom. As I say, I thought it had a great atmosphere of unreality about it.

HACKMAN: Can you remember the presentation of the Joint Chiefs as far as possible military operations at this point? I believe the SEATO Plan V [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization], it was called, was discussed.

BALL: Yes, yes. Well, I remember it in general terms.

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They had a plan. But I don't get the impression, as I recall, that the Joint Chiefs were deeply persuaded that this was a particularly good thing to do. They were asked what they could do and how they would do it, and they responded. But it was a pretty routine basis.

HACKMAN: The reason I asked, a number of people have written and said that the Joint Chiefs' presentation of what this would involve was very confused at that time. They couldn't make up their minds about how many troops it would actually take.

BALL: That may well be. I wasn't at all the National Security Council meetings during that season because Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] very often went, and when he went, I frequently didn't go because it would have meant taking three people. This was while I was still Under Secretary for Economic Affairs.

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HACKMAN: There was a lot of talk in this whole period, after we had decided to

seek some sort of neutral government in Laos, about the role of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and the military people out in the field. What kind of a reading were you getting on this at that point? Can you recall?

BALL: I remember a lot of discussion about it. Frankly, my memory isn't all that precise about it.

HACKMAN: I was just reading in Hilsman's [Roger Hilsman, Jr.] book, he makes a big point of the problems of trying to pull back some people in the field who were supposedly supporting General Phoumi and were sort of contradicting the Administration's policy at that point.

BALL: I only remember being aware that something of that kind was going on. It wasn't very interesting, to be frank with you.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollections at all about the way the Geneva Conference proceeded as far as Harriman's [William Averell Harriman] role at that point?

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BALL: Well, I think Averell did an extremely good job. A good job in that sense meant displaying endless patience and putting up with just a great succession of nonsense. But one of the great qualities he has is a quality of being patient beyond the capabilities of ordinary men.

HACKMAN: Some people seemed to be very disturbed that he was giving away too much.

BALL: Well, he had I mean, obviously, there was no solution possible except on the basis of a coalition government. There was no territorial partition. That was the only other alternative. This is the same problem that exists in Vietnam. It's all very well to talk about getting to a conference table, but what kind of a solution you can reach is something else again.

HACKMAN: Staying with Laos but moving on to the spring of '62 at the time the

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Pathet Lao had taken Nam Tha and were moving toward to Mekong. Can you remember any of the meetings at that point?

BALL: I remember there was a lot of concern about the fact. As a matter of fact, I remember it very well because at the time that Nam Tha was taken I had to appear on *Meet the Press* right after spending all night

on an airplane, attending a Sunday morning emergency meeting at the White House, and flying directly from there to "Meet the Press." And I was dead tired. And Larry Spivak [Lawrence E. Spivak] failed to give me a drink which was a violation of a firm agreement I had with him.

HACKMAN: Can you remember if it was discussed at that point, the possibility of bombing North Vietnam?

BALL: Well, the fellow who was always urging the bombing of North Vietnam was Walt Rostow;

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it was a King Charles' head with him. But I don't think it was seriously considered. Certainly, I can't imagine that anyone gave it serious thought.

HACKMAN: Do you remember being in basic agreement with the moves that were taken to move about a thousand troops, I believe, to the Thai border and the Seventh Fleet into the Gulf of Siam?

BALL: Well, as far as protecting Thailand was concerned, that was all right. I mean I was in agreement with the desirability of providing the Thais with some protection.

HACKMAN: Maybe we could talk a bit about the Congo then.

BALL: Yes.

HACKMAN: Hilsman again in his book says in the very early period that you gave Harlan Cleveland [James Harlan Cleveland] and Stevenson some help in rounding up votes for another resolution at that point. I believe it was in

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February of '61. Can you remember anything about that, a U.N. resolution?

BALL: I don't remember anything much about that. It's possible that I may have seen some ambassadors. I think the first time I really took an active interest in the Congo was in trying to articulate a rationale for our involvement there. I had been asked to make a speech in Los Angeles, as I recall. And I decided that the last minute to throw away the speech I had been working on and make a speech on the Congo because I was deeply impressed with the fact that we were getting ourselves very much involved in a situation where nobody had bothered to find out why we were there. And I was always disturbed by this kind of creeping involvement which seemed

to be characteristic of the government during that period. So I wrote a speech which I

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delivered in Los Angeles, and it became a kind of definitive statement of our position on the Congo. It was the best justification I could develop for our being there. I was never wholly satisfied that the position that I articulated was necessarily the correct one because I had very large doubts myself as to whether the Congo would be organized as an independent state and effectively run from Leopoldville. The Belgians had never really run it. They had a kind of decentralized arrangement in which they had held outposts with local administrators. And I doubted the competence of the Congolese by themselves to be able to administer a state on that basis. What could be said on the other side, of course, was that if they permitted the secession of Katanga, there would be a source of tension and almost certainly conflict for a

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long time to come, and since the Congo lay in the very heart of Africa, this would be a possible occasion for inviting big power intervention, as the Soviet Union had started to do in a rather limited way. I'm not sure we were right about the Congo policy. After all, Katanga was viable. And the older I get the more I'm inclined to think that if you have a viable situation, you better let it develop without loading too much onto it, and not try to burden the viable areas with the support of a lot of non-viable areas with the consequence that nothing is viable. And I think what was at issue there, much more so than the rather noble sentiments with which we wrapped up our involvement and the U.N. involvement. It became a fairly booo thing to have the United Nations forces chasing the Katangese,

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killing a lot of people, using rockets from planes and so on. And it was extremely uncomfortable for a while there. However, having felt that the policy had been made before I got deeply involved in it and had to be defended, I did my best to try to articulate what seemed to me to be a rational explanation.

HACKMAN: Everyone who's written and talked about this talks about this so-called "new Africa" group that came in, including Stevenson and Harlan Cleveland and....

BALL: Oh, Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams], and then the real intellectual leader of the group was Wayne Fredericks [J. Wayne Fredericks], who was passionately dedicated to his own vision of Africa. I don't say that in a denigratory way. I have great admiration for him. I think he's wrong, but I think he a deeply dedicated man and he's a very able man.

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HACKMAN: How effective were these people at presenting their point of view in the early period?

BALL: Oh, I think they carried the day. And they certainly carried the day with the White House. I think the President became committed to this point of view fairly early on. And the fact that Hammerskjöld [Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld] happened to be there. If he hadn't been Secretary General at this time, I think we might very well have had a different policy.

HACKMAN: Hilsman implies in his book that your sympathies basically lay with this group of people, and he says because of your close identification with Western Europe and your sympathy with the plight of the Belgians, that you were, as he phrases it, I believe, "handicapped." How would you react to that statement?

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BALL: I don't know. Everybody's a prisoner of his own background to some extent. I never regarded myself as being handicapped. I regarded myself as having some insights that went beyond just a preoccupation with Africa as such. But again I've had for a long time some preconceptions about the structure of power which, in turn, tend to influence my judgment as to what areas are worth great effort and great involvement and what areas are not. I never felt that Africa was an area where the United States should get deeply involved other than trying to provide economic help and on the educational side because it seemed to me that there was nothing very stable to build on except in a very few areas, the geographical lines that had been drawn in Africa were totally coincidental resulting simply from where one colonial army had collided with another, and that they were

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indefensible, indefensible in not merely the military sense but in the sense that there was no logic to them, that you had large tribal agglomerations which slopped over national lines and gave a certain reality to a quite different kind of border, and that it was pretty foolish for the great powers to intervene in trying to hold together things which were inherently irrational.

HACKMAN: Remember by late '61 the noise level on the Hill had become pretty high. Struelens [Michael Struelens] was operating that information office.

BALL: Struelens was operating it, and he was operating with a fellow named Martin [David Martin] who was an administrative assistant of Senator Dodd [Thomas J. Dodd].

HACKMAN: Dodd, right.



BALL: And they were working. There was also a good

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deal of stimulation through various Protestant missionaries. After all, Tshombe [Moise Kapenda Tshombe] was a Catholic and Adoula [Cyrille Adoula] and his friends were Methodist or something of the sort. Well, I had to go talk to these people, and I must say I never thought that Struelens was the most attractive character in the world. He was rather clever. And there was a fellow named Clement, I believe, on the Belgian side who was a professor. There was something a little insidious about the method of operation, and I didn't find that very attractive. But, you know, when you're defending a policy, you do what you have to do. It was too late then for the Americans to reverse their policy, particularly because of the U.N. involvement and the way in which we had supported Hammerskjöld in getting into this mess. We spent an awful lot of money in the Congo. We devoted an

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enormous lot of time and effort and involved the activities of a lot of people, and a lot of people got killed. I can't say that as of 1968 we wouldn't be just as well off if we'd followed quite a different policy.

HACKMAN: Did you spend much time working with any of these people on the Hill who were excited about the Congo?

BALL: Well, I used to go up and talk to Dodd, and all these people and try to calm them down. I spent a certain amount--the President was very concerned about its effect on people like, Dick Russell [Richard B. Russell], for example. I remember once talking with the President. We sent George McGhee [George C. McGhee] down to see Dick Russell. I remember making a joke with the President. For once his sense of humor failed him. He said to me, "What do you think McGhee should tell

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Senator Russell?" Who was very pro-Tshombe at the time. And I said, "Well, Mr. President, just have him say to Russell that obviously we can't give any support to Tshombe because he's just a goddamned secessionist!"

HACKMAN: [Laughter] You put that in the first interview with Mr. Kraft [Joseph Kraft], I believe. I can't conceive of him not reacting.

BALL: Well, he didn't react. [Laughter]

HACKMAN: Great. What, do you recall about Secretary Rusk's viewpoint on this whole problem? Some people, I believe in the Department, were trying to get him to make stronger statements in backing the U.N. position.

BALL: Well, I think he was fundamentally sympathetic with the United Nations position. And you have to remember about Secretary Rusk that he spent a good deal of his life in the world of the United Nations. He knew its limitations, but at the same time he had great desire to build the United Nations and to give it every

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possible support. But, again, there were a certain number of people who were so deeply involved in this, that this was the beginning and end of American foreign policy, and I think Rusk saw it in better perspective than that.

HACKMAN: What about the President's people on Bundy's staff? Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] and Kaysen [Carl Kaysen] at various times were both involved in it.

BALL: I don't remember Kaysen's involvement in the Congo particularly.

HACKMAN: He came pretty late, I believe.

BALL: Yes, Dungan was. And I think Dungan, as I recall, was very much sympathetic to the policy of maximum support for the U.N. I think the President himself had believed that was the right policy. But he had a very healthy appreciation of the kind of atmosphere of unreality in which most United Nations problems are surrounded.

HACKMAN: Did you ever bring this up with him, your

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idea that possibly we were just going in completely the wrong direction here?

BALL: I don't think I did at that time. Let me say that, with the exception of Vietnam--or of any policies which I had, you know, by kind of general agreement taken, sort of taken the laboring oar on--I was always reluctant to challenge the President except by first trying to convince the Secretary because I didn't want to be in a position of two lines of communication going to the President. This didn't mean that I didn't talk to the President, but when I did, I was there not only for myself, but I was representing the Secretary as well. We didn't dare--I mean, we certainly never wanted to get crosswise. We were perfectly aware of the Cordell Hull-Sumner Welles fiasco,

and I think both of us

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tacitly had made up our minds we wouldn't be in that position. So that I never went to the President with a view contrary to the Secretary's without first at least telling the Secretary this is what I had intended to do. He was always extremely tolerant about it. But I didn't do it very often, except in the case of Vietnam where, again, I told him in advance. I always told him. And he encouraged me to express my own views because he felt that this was a matter that was of grave importance. I had no inhibitions whatever about expressing my views to the Secretary. And he was never a passionate Congolese in the business, not to the extent of the African Bureau. I think he always had a feeling that the African Bureau consisted to a considerable extent of missionaries and that, therefore, their over-ardent spirits had to be tempered a

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bit.

HACKMAN: If you can recall, in December of '61, I believe, you issued at one point a statement I believe while Secretary Rusk was out of the country. Some of the new Africa group felt at the time it was a much stronger statement, or interpreted it to be a much stronger statement than the Secretary had been willing to make. Can you remember this being of any special significance? What feeling there was at the time?

BALL: What was the statement about, the Congo?

HACKMAN: Yes. It was about, that our policy was to support the U.N. military operations to the point at which they achieved their minimum objectives. And your phraseology on what the minimum objectives were was apparently broader than what Secretary Rusk's were; at least that's the way some people interpreted it.

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BALL: Well, in may have simply been a different style of expression. But there was no real difference between the Secretary and myself on that. Nor do I think I would have issued such a statement without clearing it in advance with the White House, which meant either talking with the President directly or at least Mac Bundy about it.

HACKMAN: Can you recall Adoula coming over in February of '62? I believe you....

BALL: Oh yes. I was Acting Secretary, I think, at the time.

HACKMAN: Right. Maybe you could go into that meeting as to what the President's reactions to him were.

BALL: Oh, I think the President on the whole was impressed with him. He seemed to be a modest, sensible, limited, but stable kind of fellow. I think the President liked him.

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I think on the whole he made a very good impression.

HACKMAN: Were you at all involved in the development of what became the U Thant plan in the fall of '62? August of '62, I believe we formally announced we would support it.

BALL: Well, I was involved, in part, because I was always the fellow that the President put on the telephone to cool off Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. I was in the rather unhappy position where Adlai would call me as an old friend whenever he was unhappy about a policy. And then I would have to defend what I thought was the President's or Rusk's views to Stevenson and try to cool him down. Then the President would call me and say, "Get hold of Adlai and get him off this," or "Get him to understand why we can't do this," and so on. And it always put me in a very awkward position because I'm sure Stevenson

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thought that I had kind of sold out. At the same time, I couldn't be working with Rusk and the President without defending what their position was and trying to carry out the decisions that the President made. I was quite free to express myself and argue, but once a decision was made, it was made.

HACKMAN: How successful do you think you usually were when you talked...?

BALL: Not always because every now and then he'd say, "Well, I've got to talk to the President about this." And he would insist on calling the President after I had been on the phone with him for forty-five minutes. The President in a curious way had a lot of sympathy for Adlai. I remember once we were in the White House, and the President was having a massage. And he was lying on the massage

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table, and I was talking to Stevenson on the phone. It was hanging on the wall. This was

during the Congo crisis. The President finally called over to me and said, "George, don't be all that hard on him. He lives in the U.N. and that's a special kind of world. I know what his problems are."

HACKMAN: Well, where did this U Thant plan come from? Was this primarily African Bureau's creation?

BALL: It would be my guess, yes. I just don't remember it that well.

HACKMAN: Can you remember the discussion surrounding George McGhee's mission to the Congo?

BALL: Yes, because I was the one who sent George McGhee. The idea of sending George came from me. I thought George was a sensible fellow for this kind of mission, and I was not satisfied with just having

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the African Bureau people handle it. I really wanted to get another reading, which was why I sent George over. And I wanted to satisfy myself that--oh, what's the name of the chap who was ambassador out there?

HACKMAN: Gullion, Ed Gullion [Edmund A. Gullion].

BALL: Ed Gullion was not riding his own hobby horse too much because it seemed to me that he had gotten himself into a rather hysterically hard attitude towards Tshombe, and it had become kind of a personal feud.

HACKMAN: At this point when McGhee came back and I believe at that time urged that we give Tshombe a little more time, I have heard that at that point Assistant Secretary Williams was ready to resign because he felt that Secretary Rusk was being too sympathetic to McGhee's point of view. Do you remember that coming up at all?

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BALL: I think he was very unhappy. I didn't know that he was prepared to resign. I'm not surprised about it though because I think the African Bureau thought it was a very bad thing. But this was largely my doing. I mean the invention of the McGhee mission and so on. I knew the President had some confidence in McGhee, then did, and I wanted to get another reading.

HACKMAN: Roger Hilsman in his book says that in December the President called you and asked you to develop some new thinking on the Congo. Can you remember this--why this came up and what feelings he expressed

at that time?

BALL: Not with any precision. I remember vaguely that this occurred, but I don't, without having any papers before me.

HACKMAN: Hilsman says that at this point the President felt that either we had to cut bait and get

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out, in effect, or we had to use some force, more force than we were using.

BALL: Yes. I think that's probably right. My instinct in the matter was to limit our involvement. I certainly wouldn't have recommended a greater use of force. But I don't remember in detail. And if I had access to papers I could revive my memory, but I can't remember.

HACKMAN: Do you remember considering the possibility at that time of trying to get Tshombe in some way to become the unifier of the whole thing? Was that a possibility?

BALL: Well, I always thought it was. But we had taken such a stiff-necked attitude towards Tshombe that it would have been very hard to have reversed ourselves. But it always seemed to me that in a way Tshombe showed more realistic appreciation

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of the problems than anybody else down there. So I never regarded myself as particularly anti-Tshombe. Now I'll tell you the fellow who was most sympathetic with Tshombe was Averell Harriman. And I once arranged for Averell to meet with Tshombe in Geneva, I believe--I can't tell you the time sequence on that and he came back with recommendations that we treat Tshombe not as a pariah. But when that was, I don't know. And he thought that business could be done with Tshombe, which was not the Gullion view, or the African Bureau view.

HACKMAN: Can you remember being involved in getting Paul-Henri Spaak at that point? He was in the United States at that point and made the statement that he was in agreement with the policy to back the U Thant plan.

BALL: Yes. I think the man who had more to do with that anyone else was Averell Harriman, again.

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HACKMAN: What can you recall about the President's own attitude about using more force? Some people have said that he was probably more willing than anyone else to consider the use of force.

BALL: My recollection is that he was quite willing to. I would agree with that. I think we were holding back somewhat more on this point than the President would be.

HACKMAN: Can you remember a discussion around the use of--sending in the United States jets?

BALL: Well, I think the President's view, again, was, "Let's not temporize with this thing. If we commit ourselves to a line of policy, let's go through with it." But I don't remember it in all that detail.

HACKMAN: Thinking back over this, both the Laotian situation and the Congo situation and others that you were involved in, several people I've seen have stated that you had a very low opinion of McGeorge Bundy's whole

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operation at the White House--the little State Department?

BALL: No, that isn't true. That isn't true. Personally, I always thought that Mac Bundy was, and still think, one of the ablest men I've ever known. I think he's a man of enormous ability. I think he is a man who has a capacity for clear exposition of an idea or situation.... And an effective way of....

HACKMAN: Yes, we're all right. It's going--it's recording on the other side.

BALL: Oh, is it? Now, I did have the feeling that this was implicit in the situation. I don't think it was any fault of Mac's, with one or two exceptions when we really had serious clashes. I had the feeling that implicit in the situation was a feeling of impatience on his part with the bureaucracy. I always had the feeling that

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if he'd ever actually served in the State Department for six months, he would have understood the Department much better than he in fact did and understood some of the problems that we faced in trying to get effective work out of the Department. There was, therefore, a tendency on the part of some of his young men to deal directly with people at the

Bureau level and sometimes bypass the seventh floor. Now I will say for Mac that whenever this came to his attention, he was very quick to rectify it. And he didn't want this to happen. But the very fact that he had a lot of people who were young and full of beans and impatient and did have the President's ear made a certain amount of this inevitable. To that extent, there were obviously tensions between some of Bundy's staff and

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some of us. But I was never opposed to the Bundy operation, other than the fact I thought that it tended to get too big. I thought that Mac Bundy himself was indispensable, and if there hadn't been a Mac Bundy, somebody would have had to have created him. I had problems with Mac later because on one or two occasions he wrote an ex parte memoranda which I didn't know about until I got into a discussion with the President and then found the President reading from a memorandum which I had never seen, and I thought this wasn't cricket and told Mac that. But I think our personal relations, while they were never terribly close, were always good in the sense that I think he respected the fact that we did have some ideas and a point of view, and while he didn't always agree with

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it, he was pretty meticulous in wanting the President to have the benefit of it. I thought, given all the circumstances, Mac was very fair minded. Now, we did find ourselves very often irked by the fact that, as somebody said, nothing "proppings" like propinquity, and the fact that Mac was with the president, right at his side, gave him a power which was denied to us simply because we did not have the same advantage, and therefore there was a tendency for his views very often to prevail over the views of others. But as far as Bundy himself was concerned, I thought he performed an enormous role for the President. While I think he gave the President some bad advice on occasion, I think on the whole his advice was extremely good.

HACKMAN: Did you ever have any problem at all in getting through to the President?

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BALL: Mac was very fair about it, with the one exception of not showing the President the memorandum which I wrote, I think it was the memorandum of October 5th which I wrote at the end of September. I didn't press him on it at the time. I just discovered that he had not done what I thought he would do, and which he would have done with every other memorandum. So that was the only time I simply went around him and transmitted it through Moyers.

HACKMAN: Did this problem with his people and their relationship with the State Department continue all the way through? In the early period there was a lot of talk about, particularly, Richard Goodwin [Richard N.



Goodwin] and Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.] in Latin America.

BALL: Well, Goodwin, was, in the early days, Goodwin was impossible because he was filled with a sense of power and Bowles was not very strong. I was at the disadvantage of not being

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actively responsible in this area. When I say in the early days, I mean in the very early days. We got into that once at the time of Trujillo's [Rafael (Leónidas) Trujillo (Molina)] death when there was a problem down there, where we suddenly discovered that Goodwin was all for calling out the fleet--Rusk was in Europe with the President, or somewhere with the President--and that Goodwin had been sending messages without going through the Department at all. At that time we had quite a row, which ended by my getting Bowles to get on the phone to Rusk and the President overseas and putting a stopper on Goodwin. Goodwin was the worst offender. He was very strong-willed and very, very bright. But it was the brightness of a man who was relatively inexperienced and who thought he knew a great deal more about Latin America

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than in fact he did. But with the rest I had no problems. Carl Kaysen was an old friend of mine from war time days, so we were on a close basis of friendship. I had a run-in at a later point with Francis Bator [Francis M. Bator], but on the whole I thought he was a very good influence and a very bright fellow. And while we had a momentary blow-up, I think it was healthy and he did better afterwards. I don't want this to be thought of as a situation where there was an active warfare between the Bundy staff and myself and the Secretary. The fact was we worked very closely together and, for the most part, very harmoniously, and it would have been very hard to have gotten along without him.

HACKMAN: There are just a couple of other areas I wanted to explore, and one was the administration's use, the President's use of executive

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privileges. I'm sure you remember your confrontation with Strom Thurmond [James Strom Thurmond] and the Armed Services Committee in '62.

BALL: Oh, yes. Yes.

HACKMAN: And I thought--well, what I wanted to ask is when you first became involved or what were your impressions as they developed through the Administration?

BALL: Well, the situation of the Strom Thurmond thing came about because

there was some very low level types in the Department who had been scratching up admirals' speeches and so on. And I must say their judgment was pretty appalling. Not that the speeches were worth a damn--the speeches were even more appalling. But they went to ridiculous lengths to impose their own rather silly prejudices on the speeches. And to defend this was a difficult job. I then got Abe Chayes [Abram J. Chayes] and so on and laid out what I thought was a way these things could be gone over. In the

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first place, I didn't dare let these people go up because they were just incapable of handling themselves and they would've been crucified by Thurmond. I got into the thing at the last minute and decided to go myself to the Committee. So I went up myself to the Committee and made a statement with regard to the fundamental problem, but on individual things, refused to comment on the ground that this required careful study and reconstruction of the situation at the time. And I had a confrontation with Thurmond which the *Washington Star*, or *Post* [*Washington Post*], or one of the papers, wrote up in a rather entertaining way. I think the President was slightly amused and slightly disturbed by the whole thing. But then I went up and spent hours before Thurmond. I made one very bad mistake. It was the only time I ever did it in six years--not

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the only time I ever made a mistake, but the only time I ever made this particular mistake, which was taking a very big book which had been gotten up under Chayes' direction, but apparently by one of his young men. And I was terribly busy; I didn't have time to go through the whole thing. I didn't take time to go through the whole thing. I got it at the very last minute. I was on my way on a trip somewhere, and I let the thing go up without having gone through it meticulously myself. And it contained things that then I had to defend as my own which, quite frankly, I thought were absurd. And that caused me great anguish.

HACKMAN: Can you remember this problem of executive privilege coming up before? Back in '61 Porter Hardy's [Porter Hardy, Jr.] subcommittee....

BALL: Yes. I went up and talked to Porter Hardy.

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The President was extremely reluctant to interpose executive privilege. Again, he saw this primarily from the point of view of his own background as a member of the Congress and a member of the Senate, and he was inclined to look at it more as a senator than as a President in the sense that the Congress was entitled to see anything and he didn't want to be in the position of denying it to them. So, during the early period we had no luck at all in getting the President to interpose executive privilege. I

believe he got more persuaded as time went on that it was necessary under certain circumstances.

HACKMAN: I heard that Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] had been particularly important in influencing him in the direction he took. Do you remember him being...?

BALL: I think it may well have been. He felt that it was.... Again, I think of it from

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Robert Kennedy's point of view. He'd been a counsel to a congressional committee.

HACKMAN: There was a meeting, I believe, that dealt with this at the White House on February 2nd '62. The people that were there were McNamara, Maxwell Taylor, Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach], Vance [Cyrus R. Vance], Fred Dutton, and Abe Chayes and yourself. Do you remember anything in particular?

BALL: Yes, vaguely. But I only remember the impression I have was of a very strong assertion by the President that he didn't want to use executive privilege unless he absolutely had to.

HACKMAN: I believe at that point he did write a letter--I believe the letter went to McNamara.

BALL: Yes.

HACKMAN: One of the things you've listed that you were involved in that reply to Robert Kennedy was the Foreign Affairs Academy.

BALL: Oh yes. Yes.

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HACKMAN: And I thought maybe you could....

BALL: Well, again, by that time we had an Assistant Secretary for Administration, Orrick [William H. Orrick Jr.].

HACKMAN: Right, Bill Orrick.

BALL: And they came up with this scheme which had been gotten up

originally by Walt Rostow, and which I thought was totally indefensible in the form in which it was prepared.

HACKMAN: This was the Perkins Committee Report?

BALL: No, this was the plan for the Academy. And the very last minute it had been set up on the Hill. I decided that I had to go up and defend the damned thing. So I went up with the Orrick because he knew the details, or I thought he did. But I did my best to.... First, I insisted on redrafting it almost completely

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because I felt there were some total contradictions in what we were proposing to the Congress, that on the one hand we were saying that there had to be an Academy in which there is complete freedom of expression by the faculty, that they should have the same right of free expression as the faculty of an independent university; yet this was to be something that was provided by the Congress and maintained by a foundation, a separate entity for the instruction for the State Department and other people in the government. Quite frankly, I didn't think you could do this. It seemed to me that you couldn't have a body of people who were taking a totally different line from the State Department as the people who were giving the indoctrination and education to foreign service officers and others who were brought back; that if it were a

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matter of wanting them to be subjected to a more independent intellectual climate, then the thing to do was to send them under contract to existing universities. But I didn't see any sense in our setting up an independent university, and I thought politically the thing would never wash because we couldn't have people down there who were taking independent lines against the Administration policy or attacking things that had been expressed on the Hill and so on without getting into deep trouble, and that, therefore, this was a fundamentally indefensible business. But it had been handled up to that point solely by people whose experience had been in the universities and who saw this as a possibility of setting up a kind of "new university". And I didn't think they had any sense of realism at all about

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what life was like as did we people from Washington. And I think it was just hopeless. But I went up and defended it as best I could. And then Orrick showed a total incapacity to defend anything. Max Freedman or somebody then wrote a piece in one of the newspapers which caused considerable anxiety because he made it clear that he thought Orrick had been the worst witness he'd ever heard before a Congressional committee. He thought I'd done pretty well--in fact, he was very complimentary to me--but that I was in an impossible position being there with Orrick. So this is the kind of thing that doesn't make for easy relations and

warm friendships.

HACKMAN: Well, staying with the idea of problems with Congress, did you ever discuss this with the President, his ideas on the State Department's general effectiveness...?

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BALL: Oh, he knew it. He talked about it all the time because he thought the State Department always laid an egg when it went up to Congress. And he was very interested, not always, but I mean frequently, in this. I think on the whole he generally approved of my own relations with the Congress. Although one time I think he told me, "Don't know so much when you go up before the Congress. They don't want to be in a position where they feel they're being instructed."

HACKMAN: Was there anything you could do or tried to do in your capacity as the Under Secretary to improve the situation on the part of other people there?

BALL: Oh yes. I mean, for one, there was the problem of Congressional mail which the Department was totally incapable of handling with any perception whatever. They'd write a letter to a Congressman just as though he were--they'd reply to him the same

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way they would to the deputy sheriff of a small county or to an ordinary citizen who wrote it. They never had the sense that the letter had to be tailored to the interests and attitudes of the fellow who wrote it. So that as efforts at advocacy they just couldn't have been worse. And I spent an awful lot of time, even personally rewriting a lot of this stuff, trying to get it keen, that is, to try to make them responsive and make them persuasive and take account of the sensitivities and the attitudes and the prejudices of the fellow that had written them. Well, that was one thing. The other thing was that a lot of the people who had been called up there just were lousy witnesses. And I did my best to make sure that they were properly gone over before they went up, or that we tried to field people who were competent. But it was a difficult business.

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HACKMAN: Was this something that Secretary Rusk got involved in to any degree or was concerned with to any great degree?

BALL: To some extent, but I think it actually was largely my problem.

HACKMAN: Was Fred Dutton any help when he came over at the time you became

Under Secretary?

BALL: Fred was very useful. Fred was bright. He had some sense of what Congress was about.

HACKMAN: You mentioned in your interview with Mr. Kraft that part of the President's problem in understanding the State Department was a result, you thought, of a couple of early experiences he had with people over there. Do you remember what those were?

BALL: I don't remember particularly. Do you mean after he became President? He came into office with a prejudice against the Department which he developed

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while he was a young senator. There was some very catastrophic experiences in the early days until we began to get hold of the thing. But I don't remember them in detail.

HACKMAN: During the transition period he had someone, and I'm not sure who, working on the idea of how to get rid of people at State who he felt were incompetent. Did he ever discuss this problem with you?

BALL: I think, yes. I think as a matter of fact....

HACKMAN: Possibly it was John Sharon [John H. Sharon].

BALL: It was John Sharon. Yes, I think it was.

HACKMAN: I just wonder if he brought this up with you at all.

BALL: Well, you know, Sharon was working for me at the time. And Sharon getting into that whole thing was kind of a joke, as a matter of fact. I don't know whether I had told that story to Kraft or not.

HACKMAN: I don't think so.

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BALL: But, at the time of the, right after the campaign.... I mean right after the Convention, Stevenson was quite disappointed and I said to him, "Now, look, you're going up to see the President at Hyannis Port, and one thing you can suggest to him is that you can be helpful to him during the summer while the campaign's going on in doing some task force studies on a variety of things. And I'll take charge of the programs for you and run them for you so that you won't have to get yourself

personally involved very much.” So this is what happened. The President liked the idea. So I got some people together on a variety of subjects. And I wrote most of it, well, I guess probably a whole damned book of stuff. And when the President was elected, I said to Stevenson, “Call the President and tell him that you want to send this

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book down now,” and that I’m going to ask Sharon on my staff to take the thing down to Miami because I didn’t want to be in a position of going down there because anybody that went down was in the full glare of the spotlights. So I gave Sharon this book which he’d never seen before and he’d had no participation in any of these things. And when he got down there, the President was left under the impression that Sharon and I had done this together and, therefore, he entrusted Sharon with a lot of things which were really quite outside Sharon’s own field of experience. I think he never really fully understood this, although I think he understood a little more as time went on that I had been the one who had done this and that John’s role had been somewhat subordinate. The fact was

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that on that whole book of task force reports which were given to the President, Sharon never saw them until he got on the plane to fly to Miami. It was a matter of great embarrassment to me. [Laughter] I didn’t want to call the President and say, “Look, John Sharon left you with the impression that he wrote that, but he’d actually never seen it before.” [Laughter] Then John, having felt that he had a mandate from the President, felt he had to go into these things.

HACKMAN: How frequently did the President or his people at the White House consult with you personally on the appointments of ambassadors or appointment changes in State as the Administration developed?

BALL: Oh, they would talk to us about it, talk to me, personally. If I knew so and so, what did I think of him, and all this kind of stuff. The President liked to make

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the decision himself, and sometimes he’d make it with hardly telling the Secretary of State what he was going to do, which was awkward. I must say it wasn’t.... You see, we were in a position where both Williams and Bowles had been appointed before the Secretary of State was appointed. So he had no voice at all in that. The President was disenchanted with the foreign service, felt most of them were pretty uninspired, and was trying to bring in people from outside. The Secretary was inclined to defend the service because he was more sensitive to their morale problems than I was. I would have been much rougher on them. I wouldn’t have served up some of the people he did and try to defend them. But we talked about an awful lot of people, the President would call me to discuss this or that fellow.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any that you were particularly upset about?

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BALL: No, I really can't. It was a long time ago.

HACKMAN: Some people at the White House end have tried to put blame on the other side and have said that State was just slow in making up their mind on who they wanted. Was this a problem?

BALL: Oh, I think they're right. I don't deny that. I think we were slow, and I think that we insisted on serving up quite a lot of people that were just plain incompetent and where it was clear that the President would be annoyed. But this was not a thing I could do anything about because the Secretary felt that-- he liked these people, some of them, and felt that he'd worked with them before and that the foreign service had to be given recognition, or the morale of the foreign service was falling apart and so forth. So he was much more protective of the institution than I ever would have been. And I would make these points, but I didn't succeed

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in all cases.

HACKMAN: One thing that you commented on in the first interview was, or just touched on was the balance of payments and your dealings with Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] in this area. Did you feel that over the whole three year period you made any progress in this area?

BALL: Oh, I think I made a lot of progress. I think this pressure brought the Treasury to move a great deal faster toward a more liberal and flexible policy than would have been the case otherwise. I'm afraid I've got to go. I only have five more minutes. Maybe we ought to chop it off right here because this is a big field.

[END OF INTERVIEW #3]

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