Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 09/03/1964
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Biographical Note
Komer was a senior staff member of the National Security Council from 1961 through 1965. In this interview Komer discusses negotiating disengagement with Gamal Abdel Nasser and Faisal, King of Saudi Arabia; John F. Kennedy's [JFK] involvement in the Yemen crisis and the negotiations with Nasser and Faisal; U.S. New Guinea policy and the Dutch-Indonesian conflict; JFK and counterinsurgency; Komer and police programs as part of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts; JFK's policy towards and involvement with India and Pakistan; U.S. military assistance to India, 1962; and U.S. missions to Pakistan and India, among other issues.

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Third Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT KOMER

September 3, 1964

For the John F. Kennedy Library

by
Elizabeth Farmer
MORE ON YEMEN, NASSER, AND FAISAL

My thought was that I would be much more impressionistic about this Yemen affair which I went into at some length last time simply because it was an excellent minor league exercise in personal Presidential diplomacy. As I go over this chronology, I see that JFK was in this Yemen business up to his ears all the time. I ended about March 1963 with the U.A.R. bombing and the beginning of the Bunker mission. The Bunker mission, I forget whose idea it was initially but Kennedy thought it was a great idea. We were not managing to get the U.A.R. and Saudis together on some kind of a disengagement agreement, although this had been agreed upon in principle. So the idea was to send somebody out to see if he couldn't talk Faisal in particular into disengagement. Kennedy introduced Bunker by sending a message to Faisal and a message to Nasser.

Kennedy watched the Bunker mission extremely closely. We had to report to him on just about a daily basis. We got rather quickly into one of the most interesting aspects of this whole Yemen affair. Faisal wanted some kind of concrete evidence of our ability, as well as will, to turn off the U.A.R. air forays across the border. So we developed the idea of sending a very small air squadron to Saudi Arabia on a temporary basis as a visible evidence of our intent and a deterrent to Nasser if the Saudis would in turn tie onto the disengagement agreement. It was a purely political effort.

We did not send the squadron with combat capability, although it was combat aircraft. We knew that if we got into any kind of trouble, we would need a hell of a lot of more. Of course, the Saudis didn't know the difference, nor would Nasser for that matter. Kennedy really kept a hawk eye on this little squadron exercise. (We actually had to keep it there for about a year). He was goosey as could be on sending the squadron, on terms of engagement, on all the little details, because he had very clearly in mind that if a U.S. plane ever got into an engagement over Saudi Arabia or Nasser challenged us on this, we could escalate into a nice little Middle East conflict involving the United States directly. So he was, while fascinated with this use of military force for political purposes, extremely careful and constantly second-guessing us on how this thing should be handled.

As might be expected, the military were horrified at the idea of sending out this little squadron with twelve planes and one radar. They said, "If you're going to provide air aid to Saudi Arabia, you need six or seven squadrons, five radars, and three thousand men," etc. So the President and [Robert S.] McNamara had to explain exactly what we were up to.

As a result of this offer to Faisal, we got the disengagement agreement arranged. Kennedy sent his letters of appreciation to both Nasser and Faisal but insisted that the squadron not go out until after both sides (the Saudis in particular) were signed on to the agreement. There was a period of about three weeks when Faisal and our ambassador out there were saying, "Please send the squadron. We've got agreement in principle." But the Kennedy pitch was very loud and clear to me, "I don't want the squadron out there until after we are 99 per cent certain it won't have to be used."

Much of the last minute delay was because of the U.N. getting into the act. Bunker set up the disengagement agreement, but it was to be executed by the U.N. So we had to have the Secretary General on board and then go through the Security Council, which involved considerable delay. I might say a delay which many observers think was one of the reasons for the failure of the disengagement exercise to go through as an early success. At the time when Bunker got the agreement complete as to principles, the Yemen civil war had died down. But by the time the extremely painful and long drawn out, U.N. process had been gone through and we got the disengagement agreement to the Security Council on the 8th of June, the war had flared up again and, as a result, it became that much more difficult for Nasser to withdraw the troops. I am one of thosewho believe if we had got the disengagement agreement signed, sealed, and delivered back in April without all of this U.N. delay, we might have had the Yemen affair closed out in the middle of 1963. But as it was, the thing never really came to the point where Nasser felt he could pull out many troops because of the continuation of dissidence, etc., etc.

This meant the President continued to deal with Yemen right up to the month of his death. To show you how close tabs he kept on this, I notice on 26 June he wrote Faisal saying that the squadron had been dispatched, on 10 July he sent Badeau to see Nasser and tell him that he had put his personal prestige on the line in this agreement and that Nasser really had to make a gesture in order to show that he, Kennedy, had been able to produce something tangible. On 19 July Kennedy saw Egyptian Ambassador Mostafa Kamel here and told him that we had to have such a gesture of good faith. Then in August we had a slight hiatus. But in September again Faisal was getting worried about the continuing U.A.R. bombing, so Kennedy had to send an oral message to him. On 10 September he had a long session with Badeau and sent him back with instructions to have a talk with Nasser trying to get this thing straightened out.

On 10 October 1963 Kennedy put out a new NSAM saying that despite the discouraging progress so far, we really had to keep at this thing; that, in effect, we were keeping the Yemen affair below the level of escalation and should keep the squadron there as evidence of good faith. At this time the Pentagon was constantly asking us to take the squadron out. Apparently General [Curtis E.] LeMay was very unhappy about his twelve aircraft being kept down in Yemen. We originally thought this would be a three-months operation at most. By this time it was five months.

On the 17th of October we had one of these problems of the renewal of UNYOM [U.N. Yemen Observation Mission]. The Yugoslavs were getting nervous. The Yugoslavs provided the guards for the Canadian official observers in the U.N. observation mission. So Kennedy personally put the arm on Tito to keep his people there. Tito agreed. Then on 19 October Kennedy sent another oral message to Faisal reaffirming our willingness to support the Saudis if the Egyptians attacked them, but emphasizing that we could not use our squadron in their defense if they provoked a situation which led to an Egyptian attack. This was our constant pitch all along.

On 19 October Kennedy also wrote Nasser sort of taking him to task on the U.A.R.'s failure to carry out disengagement. Kennedy always had the idea that by explaining to another chief of state your own personal political problems, you established a degree of common understanding. I remember in that letter of 19 October he pointed out that he had been personally criticized in Congress for our policy on Yemen; in effect, that he was carrying a load of criticism because of his willingness to try to play ball with Nasser on the Yemen affair.

Well, things turned out all right. It was another tempest in a teapot because of the 31st Faisal finally came through with an extension of UNYOM, and then we had another hiatus period that, being the end of October 1963, was the end of the President's involvement in the Yemen crisis.

As a final reprise, it seems fair to say that we were through the worst of it, although not until 14 September 1964 (after a talk between Faisal and Nasser personally at the second Arab summit in Alexandria) when they themselves agreed to continue disengagement and work out a new scheme, have we had a real feeling that the Yemen affair had definitively been turned downward. This may yet be premature judgment, but I do think that it justified the Kennedy feeling that by and large he just had to keep at it with both sides to keep Yemen from blowing up. And I think we are now more confident that our policy was the correct one and the British policy of trying to keep the pot boiling the wrong one. It looks as though there will be a rapprochement between Nasser and Faisal about Yemen, whereas the British are still left down there with moves and countermoves, etc., etc.

THE WEST IRIAN AFFAIR

Another policy problem in which I was involved was our New Guinea policy. By now it seems to me that everybody but Arthur Krock is reconciled to the fact that the New Guinea exercise was a successful one. Once again it was an exercise in preventive diplomacy where the United States, in effect, was the middle man in a negotiated compromise solution of a teapot crisis which threatened to blow up between the Netherlands and Indonesia. You remember that New Guinea was a vestigial remnant of the Dutch-Indonesian settlement in 1950, the Round Table conference which led to or confirmed the independence of Indonesia. But they had agreed at that time to set the West New Guinea question aside. Then in the late fifties, Sukarno began a propaganda campaign about New Guinea, and by the time Kennedy came into office we were moving along toward a quite nice little dispute over an indeterminate number of head-hunters living in one of the few really isolated and comparatively unexplored areas of the world. Here was one of those painful things on Kennedy's plate. He got involved in it fairly quickly because we had suggested in our planning list proposal to Kennedy in early 1961 that it would be desirable as one of

our major foreign policy planning initiatives for the New Frontier to step in and help the Dutch out of this pickle before the thing blew up. He bought this. He bought it on the basis of the rationale that New Guinea was something that wasn't worth fighting over, but the Dutch felt for reasons of prestige, honor--call it what you will--that they themselves could not disengage. There had to be some amicus curiae who could arrange a solution. Kennedy always had very clearly in mind--in fact, I think he said to various European statesmen--that as far as we were concerned, the Dutch could blame us for loss of New Guinea if we could just get the damn problem off the plate. Of course, you get one problem off the plate and you have another (after New Guinea came the Malaysia crunch), but that's the nature of life these days.

I think that the first personal initiative of Kennedy's was a letter of December 1961 to Sukarno in which he offered to find a solution by direct negotiation. Then a little later, after the Bermuda conference, he asked Macmillan to press the Dutch and Australians for flexibility on this issue. This was followed by the Attorney General's February of '62 visit. Bobby delivered a letter from the President to Sukarno which urged the Indonesians to come to the table without preconditions. At the time Kennedy was also fobbing off the Dutch, who were quite insistent on U.S. support of their position. The thing speeded up considerably after that because we were successful in getting both sides to come to the conference table.

You will remember the device we used to get them there was to have a mediator under a U.N. umbrella. It was the first time we used Ellsworth Bunker, who turned out to be great on this sort of thing. Well, Bunker had a set of private talks out at Middleburg with the Indo negotiator and with the Dutch ambassador, who was extremely good on this whole issue. As a result, very painfully, we began to work out the outlines of an agreement. Kennedy again followed the Middleburg talks very closely. He gave his personal blessing to the plan which Bunker finally worked out, which, in essence, called for turning New Guinea over to the Indonesians under what really amounted to a trusteeship arrangement, with the understanding that at the end of a period of

years the Indonesians would have a plebiscite on whether the New Guineans wanted to come in.

The talks were on again, off again, and meanwhile the Indonesians were threatening war almost daily. It was, again, a minor league exercise in brinkmanship, with Sukarno stepping up the pressure by dropping some paratroops and making some amphibious raids--with the Dutch coming in each time and saying, "We'll fix those guys, even if we have to go to war with them." I recall Kennedy at the time having a very firm feeling that in the last analysis the Dutch would not go to war, mainly because what were they going to war over. New Guinea was a long, long way from Holland. If the Dutch had lost the war to hold on Indonesia in the first place in the late forties, certainly they weren't going to gain. What was the percentage in it? So, he was dead right in the last analysis. (But you never can tell. Look at the British on Malaysia--of course the British have a few more assets in the Far East than the Dutch did at the time). By the end of July 1962, it looked as though an agreement had been reached, and the problem became essentially one of getting both sides signed on, etc., via a great many Presidential messages to Sukarno, [Joseph M.A.H.] Luns, the Dutch Foreign Minister, and [Jan E.] de Quay, the Dutch Prime Minister at the time.

FARMER: Could you talk a little bit more about the nature of the President's interest?

KOMER: Elizabeth, essentially, I think his interest was on two levels: One, it fascinated him as a problem solver. Here was one of these issues, a peanut issue of and by itself but one which, if not resolved, could get the West into a major conflict with Indonesia. Of course, the Soviets and the Chinese were backing the Indos. The specter which haunted us (which the President personally saw) was that out of a minor league crisis like this could grow a major confrontation with us having to back the Dutch simply because the Sovs and Chinese were backing the Indonesians. Then it gets to be a confrontation out of all proportion to the merits of the issue involved, which essentially was half of one of the last unexplored islands on earth with no known exploitable assets--and one which the Dutch wanted to get rid

of but didn't know how to. It was really as simple as that.

I go into this largely because, once again, it was a Kennedy initiative handled largely as an exercise in personal diplomacy. I think his role, particularly with Sukarno (another one of these charismatic leaders who responded only to the form of massage which Kennedy was a past master at) was the essential element in bringing the Indonesians around. I see that the accords on New Guinea were finally settled on the 15th of August 1962. That was the end of that exercise. The President closed it off by congratulating Sukarno on the conclusion of the historic negotiation, writing the Dutch etc., etc.

COUNTERINSURGENCY

I would like to say a few things--these are fairly disjointed items now because what I want to do is to give a series of impressions, about Kennedy and the counterinsurgency business. I think this was one of the major initiatives of the New Frontier. I have no doubt that others like General [Maxwell D.] Taylor will comment in detail on it. I was involved in only two aspects of it, things that I have a personal slant on which might be useful. It's not quite clear where Kennedy got this concern about counterinsurgency (which was essentially dealing with civil war and civil disturbance started by the Communists as a means of take-over and the old wars of national liberation business that Khrushchev began talking about--I guess that speech of January 1961). Kennedy had an instinctive feel that we better develop a new set of defenses against what was appearing as a major new form of attack, essentially sub-limited war, if you will. The Attorney General says that Khrushchev's speech was a major factor influencing the President.

At any rate, I noticed that very qucikly after taking over Kennedy started to agitate this subject. Once again it was very largely a matter of his personal initiative, of pressing and continuing to press on these things. Of course, in Bob McNamara he had a very effective response mechanism. Once McNamara got the word and began pushing on it, things began to move.

I note that on the first NSC [National Security Council] meeting on the 2nd of February 1961, JFK asked McNamara to examine means of placing more emphasis on counterguerrilla forces. This was followed up by one of our very early NSAMS--I guess NSAM No. 2--which restated the problem so we could get movement going. On the 5th of February, Kennedy sent Mac Bundy a little note, which we put out as NSAM No. 9, which suggested we try to get the Saturday Evening Post or some other outfit to put out [Edward G.] Lansdale's case study of counterguerrilla action in a South Vietnamese village. This shows you how widely this guy ranged in his responses. By the 23rd of February we got the planning list that I keep referring to approved. This list was a Rostow project, based, if I may be so bold, on an original suggestion of mine. Item number two on the planning list was the terms of guerrilla warfare. Rostow recommended, and the President approved, that [Richard M., Jr.] Dick Bissell and the [Central Intelligence] Agency would be the prime mover in getting this thing going. We set up then a little counterguerrilla task force chaired by Bissell, with Rostow and myself attending; Lansdale was involved, and Henry Ramsey from State. We started moving on the development of some kind of a concept and some kind of a government machinery. These were the two things we were investigating.

Two things happened then: One was the speed-up of the war in Vietnam; the other Kennedy's focus on counterguerrilla action. He began to move, prodding the Defense Department on doing more in Laos and Vietnam--I think it may have been Laos that flared up at this time and that became the focus of this activity. Then we had, of course, in April, the incident of the Bay of Pigs, and this led to a major investigation of our machinery for conducting clandestine operations. During this period the Bissell-Rostow task force was sort of inactive because a lot of other things had priority. But we got going again in July on the Bissell task force. As I recall now, another delay was because we had assigned a guy to draft a report, and it took him forever to get the thing out. Anyway, by July we got it and were moving ahead in redrafting it. We came out with a report for the President which called for a single high level

authority to concert the whole counterinsurgency effort of the government. Similar recommendations had been made by some other reports: the Cuba Study Group, for example, the JCS reports. We recommended a special group to handle this thing. I think our recommendation had more to do with final framing of the directive (I guess it was NSAM No. 124) which set up this Special Group Counterinsurgency, with Taylor in the chair but as the prime mover and chief needle the Attorney General. It became very largely an operational machine, which was our purpose in setting it up in the first place.

I dropped out then from that aspect of it. By this time, however, the President had gotten interested in another aspect of the counterinsurgency problem, which was support and equipping, to the extent that it was reasonable and judicious, of local police forces abroad. I remember that in October 1961 the President picked up the police academy idea. As a matter of fact, he had previously picked it up in August when he suggested a police academy to train Latin Americans. I think this came out of some riots in Brazil or something like that, and he immediately got on to the idea that we ought to train Latin American police forces in riot control. He picked up this idea again (from a memo of mine) in October and put out a NSAM asking Rusk to examine the prospect of a police academy. I notice that in November he again asked for continuing review of the overall problem of support of friendly police and armed forces.

He also got involved in civic action as a spinoff. His idea was that where we were already supporting foreign forces with no particular military purpose in mind, we should at least see that these units (which were equipped and trained and, in some cases, paid by us through the military aid program) were used on sensible projects which would contribute to the nation building. The obvious example was that we were supplying engineer units with bulldozers and stuff like that and were training them in bridge-building for wartime. The idea was why don't we get these guys out to build bridges in peacetime, out to use their bulldozers to build roads in the back country. Here was a double purpose or bonus use of forces that we were equipping and training. The whole civic

action program came out of that genesis.

Now, to go on to the aspect of the police program that involved me. I found out that an older program, called the Overseas Internal Security Program but which was mostly a program of support to police forces (a peanut program never involving more than twenty or thirty million dollars a year for thirty or forty countries, a very useful program in many ways, started about 1956 under the Eisenhower Administration) was in the process of being dismantled by the new people in the **AID** [Agency for International Development] agency who were going great guns for economic development but sloughing off a series of marginal technical assistance activities that they didn't regard as very important. Quite obviously, the new economic development boys were not terribly interested in giving guns to cops or training them in riot control, so they were downgrading this program and planning on getting rid of it.

However sensible this might be from the standpoint of economic development, it did not make much sense to be dismantling one of the most effective counterinsurgency programs that the U.S. government had ever developed, a very modest program but one which, in terms of payoff, could be demonstrated to give you a hell of a lot more for a dollar than all of the military assistance programs that we were providing. This had long been a hobby of mine back when I was the NSC man for Allen Dulles, because the CIA had an interest in seeing that these police programs were maintained for internal security purposes. So I had been involved when the NSC took up this inter-agency OISP program once a year during the Eisenhower period. I was quite familiar with it, and I guess I was the one who picked up the fact that little programs like this were being dismantled and phased out in a number of places. I raised it with Taylor and Mac Bundy and with the President.

The result was that the President sent a letter to Fowler Hamilton on the 19th of February--this later became NSAM 132--which said "Hey, let's increase our attention to police programs as part of the counterinsurgency effort." Well, this wasn't quite enough. A Presidential prod kept things from going backward but didn't get things going forward very fast. So we decided on another Presidential prod, and we sold to the President very quickly the idea of

putting out a NSAM setting up an interdepartmental committee to study this police program problem and see if we shouldn't be going up rather than down. This came out on 20 April in NSAM 146. [U. Alexis] Alex Johnson was nominated to head the committee, and we had about three months of painful bureaucratic infighting, at the end of which time we put out a report to the President. I was one of the chief drafters of the report, as I recall, and then I drafted the answer for the President. That came out as NSAM 177 and approved all our recommendations. It gave the police business a degree of autonomy in AID. It gave it a new forward thrust. It incidentally recommended a police academy which is now set up and training two classes a year of foreign police officials.

Here was an example of a project, this police matter, where the President didn't personally monitor but where he gave initial impetus. He expected his staff to follow through, and every time we came back to him for a new prod, a new needle, or for approval of a final recommendation, he was with us 1000 per cent. I will say, as an old bureaucrat who saw the way the NSC and OCB [Operations Coordinating Board] machinery worked from '57-60 period, that without this personal Presidential prodding and interest, these exercises would never have gotten off the ground. Even here on minor problems like police programs, where I'd say the total amount of money spent worldwide was thirty million dollars per annum at top, he had sufficient interest to intervene four or five times and move things along.

FARMER: Very interesting. Now, this you mention particularly because it is a part of the counter-insurgency program in which you were involved, and it's an aspect of that. Now, do you have anything more to say about that in general or is that it?

KOMER: I just dealt with two aspects of the whole CI problem that I happen to be personally engaged in. I was also involved on a country-by-country basis in a whole series of activities which reflected the President's general desire to push this type of program in contrast to the more conventional military aid program. That didn't have quite the same potency that all these things did. Here is an example. When we had a country review where the

whole gamut of problems affecting a given country was brought to the President's attention, let's say in connection with a high level visit with the State Department, at that point the President always put his finger on the counterinsurgency thing and wanted to know were we providing enough help to the police in this country, did we have a CI program, were we training their military in counterguerrilla techinques. So he followed through on that sort of thing, and we followed through on his behalf. But I can't think of anything else of note for the oral history.

INDIA-PAKISTAN

Kennedy's policy toward India-Pakistan was once again a major exercise in personal diplomacy and one in which Kennedy was involved more than even normal for him--for two reasons. One, as I have said before, he understood the growing importance of the less developed world. To me, he was unique among Presidents to date in this respect. He saw the subcontinent as a very big piece on the international chessboard that was going to become bigger yet. Of course, the Chi Com [Chinese Communist] attack on India, coming in 1962 as it did, justified his view. One thing Kennedy had very firmly in mind was that India-Pakistan was big business. This was obvious from the very beginning in his sending [John Kenneth] Ken Galbraith, a personal friend and adviser, out there, though this was partly because Ken was interested in a completely new thing, to him at least. We have ever since World War II sent top-notch ambassadors to India, usually political ambassadors, at least all of the really good ones--Ellsworth Bunker and [Chester] Bowles, John Sherman Cooper, Galbraith.

The second reason for Kennedy's great interest in the affairs of the subcontinent was that Ken Galbraith was there and Ken was the President's man. Ken, in effect, dealt with the White House and not with the Department of State, which caused a large amount of annoyance to the Department, at least the Secretary, for which I don't blame him a doggone bit. Ken did his business with the President. I found myself, as a result, doing a lot of staff work that would normally have been done in the Department, sent up through the Secretary and out to the Ambassador. These two factors sort of interreacted: the President's own sense of the importance

of the subcontinent, and the fact that he had out there a man who wanted to deal with him. Let me see if I can recall some of the highlights of that relationship.

Almost the first real problem came with the Ayub [Khan] visit. Ayub, being a very smart fellow, thought that he better make his number with the new President as fast as he could. I think this was one of the first major state visits. On 11 July Ayub came to Washington. He charmed everybody. You remember the visit to Mount Vernon, etc. Just as a sidelight, I think that Ayub went away from his meetings with the impression that he had taken Kennedy into camp. This may have had something to do with Ayub's subsequent partial disillusionment with Kennedy when we went all-out to help the Indians at the time of the 1962 Chi Com attack. The Indians, of course, had to come along right after, so Nehru showed up in November. He was taken to Hyannis, not because we had to give him something comparable to Ayub, but because the President was up there. It was a good meeting. Nehru didn't strike it off on a cordial basis immediately the way Ayub did. Nehru is a different type, but it was a constructive tour d'horizon, and we didn't have any major problems with India, except the Goa business where we had a little bit of a flap. Since I was not involved in that, I won't go into it any further. But there was real annoyance in the U.S. government, and particularly from Adlai Stevenson, on the question of Goa. The President, and I am not too firm on this, took a rather philosophical attitude. Goa was one of these colonial residual appendages which sooner or later was going to disappear. The Indians had waited fourteen years before they disposed of it, and then they picked a convenient opportunity. True, from any standpoint of international law, on doing things gracefully, it was a power play--let's face it. The Paks reacted highly adversely and kept saying you Americans are against this kind of enforced take-over of small states, etc., etc. The Portuguese were very unhappy, but as in the case of Dutch New Guinea, we thought we would do them a favor.

1961 was relatively uneventful with respect to Pak-Indian problems. By the time '62 rolled around, Kashmir was heating up again, and we had the beginning of a Presidential exercise designed to bring the two countries together to talk about Kashmir. Kennedy wrote both Ayub and Nehru about the 9th of January. He wrote Ayub proposing [Eugene R.] Gene Black as a mediator. Ayub accepted because the Pak position was to accept any way of making progress. Nehru thought that the timing wasn't right. Nehru said no. This began a repeated effort by the Pakistanis to warn us about the chances of the Indians causing them trouble and to get reassurances from us. Kennedy came through with a letter to Ayub--I guess it was the end of January--saying we would back them if the Indians attacked them, etc. We got into a Security Council session on Kashmir in June. The President always followed these Security Council things closely, frequently giving instructions to us on the telephone. We also had the beginning, even back in the late spring and early summer, of Indian-Chinese patrol actions up in Ladakh. This problem began to bubble merrily along.

The next major example of Kennedy interference in affairs of the subcontinent, if you want to call it that, was when we began getting reports in Spring 1962 that the Indians were interested in buying Soviet MIGs. This led to quite a little exercise in personal diplomacy. Ken Galbraith was the first to suggest that it would be very bad business if the Soviets got into military supply of the Indians while we were the suppliers of Pakistan. The President felt we should do what we could to preempt a MIG deal. We thought it would be too painful if we did it directly. This would just cause a great deal of trouble with the Paks, so the framework decided on was to try to get the British to sell some Lightnings to the Indians at a good price, if the Indians would give up on the MIGs. We broached this with the British, and they were exceedingly reluctant. It immediately became, for about six weeks in the summer of 1962, a matter of extensive personal messages going back and forth on a private circuit between Kennedy and Macmillan. The whole exercise was conducted in the stratosphere. The British, it turned out, were exceedingly reluctant. They wanted to make it a cash deal. The President made a decision that if

the British would sell them Lightnings, we would behind the scenes pick up a large portion of the bill, because if it were a straight sale on commercial terms, the Indians weren't going to touch it. They could get much better terms from the Soviets for convertible rupees, so we had to make it attractive to the Indians. We also got involved with a jet engine the Indians were trying to develop for their own supersonic fighter; we agreed to pay part of the costs of that. We finally got a package together, but the package wasn't really acceptable to the Indians, and the British were nervous about the whole deal, so it didn't go through. Once again it was a personal Kennedy exercise, and if you go back to see what was involved, without knowing there were about a dozen or perhaps two dozen personal messages exchanged between Kennedy and Macmillan on the matter of a couple of dozen aircraft, you won't find out what the real score was.

Ayub came again in September. As I recall, he was passing through from a visit to Canada or a Commonwealth meeting. But the meeting wasn't particularly notable, except for Ayub's warning Kennedy that the Indians were overdoing this business of the trouble with China. Then, of course, came the Chi Com attack on India in October 1962. It was followed immediately by a personal appeal from Nehru to us in which Nehru, in effect, dropped all pretense of nonalignment, etc., etc., and just appealed for all the help we could give. It was almost a panicky appeal. We came through, of course, in great style. Kennedy personally approved--he did more than approve, he personally stimulated, in response to Ken Galbraith's request, getting a supply line of C-130's going out to India with all the emergency equipment that we could reasonably provide. He got us started in the military aid business, he was very quick in response to all of Galbraith's initiatives. I must say Ken handled those things beautifully. This, in effect, started a whole new chapter in relations with the subcontinent because it basically affected our relations with both India and Pakistan. While not compromising India's position of nonalignment, we have now moved into being their prime suppliers, both in the military and the economic field. In turn, Pakistan is no longer our chosen instrument on the subcontinent with a veto on our Indian policy. I think that

the President saw both of these things as desirable and felt that not only were we making a sound move in supporting the Indians in the short term, as we would really to any major country under Chinese Communist attack, but he saw in this a desirable rebalancing of relationships that he had not thought were particularly well-handed in the fifties.

I can't recall any specific Kennedy statement, but think that he was, from the tenor of various remarks he made at the time, not enamoured of Pakistan. He didn't think the John Foster Dulles business of building up SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization], etc., in the NATO model was the brightest thing. It cost us an awful lot and provided us actually with relatively little.

Once the Chinese voluntarily stopped their forward movement and announced their unilateral cease-fire and moved back, we moved immediately into the Kashmir exercise. As soon as the Chi Coms attacked India, Ayub saw a God-given opportunity to settle Kashmir while the Indians were in trouble with the Chinese. The British were very much taken with this idea as well. So we sent Duncan Sandys and [W. Averell] Harriman out to India in early December and got both Nehru and Ayub to agree to a new effort on Kashmir. Galbraith was all for making the old college try, as I recall it. The talks began in December and went on--I guess they had about six rounds before the effort petered out. Kennedy was never very optimistic about these talks, as I recall. Harriman was pushing hard, and I was pushing hard, and Galbraith was pushing hard, but as I recall, the President was being just a little aloof about this whole exercise. I regret to say he turned out to be right.

We moved again into a little exercise which the President was very good at. This also was a Galbraith initiative. Galbraith pointed out that the Indians could not defend themselves against Chinese Communist air attacks. Even though the Chi Coms had a piffling Air Force, the Indians Air Force was even worse. Everybody had in mind that one Japanese air raid on Calcutta in 1944, from Burma or from an aircraft carrier--I forget which. One or two Japanese planes appeared over Calcutta and dropped a few bombs--there was

actually panic. The Indians remembered this very well, and they were frightened to death that if hostilities flared up again, there would be a couple of psychological air raids which would lead to millions being trampled, etc., etc. So the suggestion was we provide an air umbrella for the Indians: in other words, have a set of joint air exercises in the course of which some U.S. squadrons would go on, (the British got latched onto this in some way; I forget how) out to India and have some joint exercises with the Indian Air Force. There wouldn't be any question of any U.S. commitment to help the Indians. We wouldn't say that if there ever is a Chi Com air attack, these planes will come back and what we are doing is exercising to get ready. But there was no doubt whatsoever as to the deterrent impact of the thing, as to how it would be read in Peiping. This was one time when I remember the President's having very little concern about whether we would get drawn in. His feeling was that in a case like a Chi Com attack on India, whether or not we had any alliance obligations to the Indians, the American electorate and Congress would be completely behind the President in intervening. Note the difference here between the likely Kennedy response in a major situation where a show of force is desirable for a deterrent effect and the Kennedy response in a minor situation like Yemen.

By the time March-April 1963 rolled around, the Kashmir mediation effort was breathing its last. I would say we came as close to narrowing the gap to get into the zone of agreement as any previous effort that the U.S. had been involved in. Kennedy was very good on using our aid as leverage here. Our case was, "Look, we are providing massive support to both you Indians and you Pakistanis. Kashmir is costing you both money. In effect, you are wasting a good percentage of our aid because it is flowing into competitive military buildups and economic buildups." For example, East Bengal, East Pakistan, and West Bengal had been complementary in their economies before partition. Jute from East Bengal was exchanged for rice from West Bengal, or vice versa. But the natural economic complementarity had been destroyed as a result of the partition and animosity between the two countries. Kennedy liked to make points like that as a means of trying to induce the two countries to get together.

Meanwhile, we were talking about military assistance to India in order to continue--in the post--emergency phase--to strengthen them against what we thought at the time was a fairly substantial chance of a renewed Chinese attack. A strong school of thought in the Pentagon, CIA, and State Department was very cool on getting in a longer term military aid relationship with India. Galbraith was strong for it because he was looking strategically at the matter. Kennedy and his staff too were the strongest advocates of going forward on a military aid relationship with India even though we couldn't get Kashmir settled. The Paks were arguing, "Don't give them a nickel beyond the emergency. In fact you shouldn't give aid to them anyway until they settle Kashmir. Use this as a leverage for forcing a Kashmir settlement." Kennedy did not want to go that far, and I remember in late April he said, "I don't want to jeopardize our relationship with India by holding out too long on MAP [military assistance program]. We shouldn't limit ourselves to the U.K. pace either." The British were far more taken with this Pak argument, Duncan Sandys and the British chiefs of staff, in particular, were all for going very slow on aid to India until Kashmir was settled. Frankly, it wasn't just because they were more pro-Pak than we were on the Kashmir issue. The British did not want to get too locked into too much of a military aid bill for India or anybody else, and they were using this as an excuse to limit their own commitment, for they knew if we went into a major new program in India, they too would have to provide some aid. They were much more reluctant to invest the money. You can't blame them there.

There was a meeting with the President on the 17th of May to discuss this question of what kind of an air defense exercise and what kind of a commitment we should give to the Indians. The President again pushed for a good MAP program for India. He was not interested in being so niggardly on this particular program that we would lose the strategic effect of cementing the new relationship with India which had grown out of the Chi Com attack. It was at this time that I raised the question of an Indian Ocean task force, a pesky little matter which I will get into later. The President was very taken with that.

Then we had a new exercise coming up, Bokaro. This got all involved with the FY-64 aid bill, Galbraith was plugging full tilt for Bokaro. The AID people were saying the Congress will not give us Bokaro. The President was very uncomfortable. Previously, he had come out strong for Bokaro. He thought India needed Bokaro. He thought Bokaro was a good investment for the United States from a foreign policy standpoint. He thought it was a good economic investment. He was perfectly in accord with Galbraith on this, but it was perfectly obvious that we were not going to get through to Congress. So Kennedy made a decision that we should try some way to put this off or take our loss and try to get out from under. Here was again the caution of a politician: don't fight too hard on an issue when you know you are going to lose. Fortunately, we handled our affairs with the Indians so that Nehru wrote Kennedy a letter taking him off the hook. Nehru said, "I greatly appreciate the fact that you have all along been for Bokaro, that you have tried terribly hard to get the project for us, but I understand from the way things are going in your Congress that it's not going to be possible for you to do this for us. To avoid mutual embarrassment, I think that the right thing to do, in view of all the many things that the United States has done for India, is to withdraw our request for a great big loan from you." This let the President off the hook, as it were.

As a sideline on this, Kennedy kept dispatching missions out to India and Pakistan during this entire period. There was Harriman back in December 1962; Rostow and I went out in March of 1963; George Ball went out; Rusk went out during the late spring; and then George Ball went out in September; and Max Taylor went out in November of 1963. All of these exercises were primarily to push for a Kashmir settlement and then try to explain to Ayub what the score was--a very difficult problem. The President did in October approve the Taylor visit which, I guess, was one of his last initiatives.

The final comment I would like to make is that the President sending Chet Bowles to India when Ken Galbraith had to come back was a real stroke of statecraft. I think it was a very good move. There were two candidates whom we were plugging, both former ambassadors--Ellsworth Bunker and Chet Bowles. In the case of Chet, there were other factors involved in the President's decision to send him, but it was a master stroke in diplomacy because here was just the right kind of guy to convey to the Indians the general line that Kennedy was so much in favor of. I think that it was as much because of JFK's strong forward thrust on Indian policy as anything else that Bowles took the job, because he knew that he would have a President behind him who was already committed to a major Indian enterprise. Once Bowles got out there, he began to agitate very heavily for a long-term military commitment to India. One of the final things that Kennedy did on Indian matters was to say--I have a note here--on 14 November that he liked Bowles' suggestion for a five-year military aid program to India in return (as Bowles put it) for informal Indian agreement to a set of ceilings which would keep their own military buildup from interfering with their own economic development or from getting too far ahead of the Paks. Well, so much for Kennedy and India on which Ken Galbraith is a much better witness than I.

FARMER: I don't think he's done anything yet on it, for this project.

KOMER: Ken saw it mostly from out there, and I saw it mostly from back here. It was a great team operation, and nothing gave me more of a feeling of a really major movement forward in U.S. foreign policy than in being involved as Kennedy and Galbraith, and then Bowles moved forward on our Indian enterprise. The thing that has pleased me most since the transition is that LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] seems to be determined to move forward along the same route--not with the same degree of steam as Kennedy because he hadn't had the same initial impetus of the Chi Com attack, and by this time, things were getting to be more back to normal. But we are still pursuing the same policy, and in the perspective of history it may turn out to be one of the major initiatives of the Kennedy Administration.