Theodore C. Sorensen Oral History Interview – JFK #3 & #4, 4/15/1964
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Biographical Note
Sorensen was staff assistant, speech writer to Senator John F. Kennedy (1953-1961) and Special Counsel to the President (1961-1964). This interview focuses on non-crisis negotiations with the Soviet Union, nuclear test ban treaty, the Soviet purchase of American wheat, Southeast Asia, and diplomatic relationships with NATO allies, among other issues.

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Kaysen Interviews - March 26, April 6, April 15, May 3 and May 20, 1964

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Hackman Interviews - March 21, 1969 and July 23, 1970

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Theodore C. Sorensen
JFK #3 & JFK #4

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Third and Fourth Oral History Interviews

with

THEODORE C. SORENSEN

April 15, 1964
Boston, Massachusetts

By Carl Kaysen

For the John F. Kennedy Library

KAYSEN: Let's move from thinking about the missile crisis to thinking about negotiations with the Russians which did not start out of crisis situations. Would you agree that the most important of these were the test ban negotiation and wheat deal?

SORENSEN: Yes.

KAYSEN: Do you think there are any others of significance, general significance, which also deserve consideration in the same respect?

SORENSEN: Some consideration should be given to the general disarmament conversations at Geneva, although they produced, as far as I know, only the hot line agreement, and the discussions at the United Nations which produced agreement on the resolution banning weapons of mass destruction from outer space.

KAYSEN: Let's turn to the test ban negotiation. Can you sketch the events that led immediately up to the President's [John F. Kennedy] speech of 10 June at American University?

SORENSEN: The President considered in the early spring of 1963 the idea of delivering a speech on peace, a speech which emphasized our peaceful posture and desires, a

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speech which talked in terms of a peace race instead of an arms race much as the President's speech to the United Nations in 1961 had done. One of the main sources of inspiration for this idea was a letter, and possible a visit, which the President received from Norman Cousins, editor of the *Saturday Review*, the gist of Mr. Cousins' argument was that the Soviet plenum, or central committee, would be meeting later in the spring, and that Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev], under increasing pressure from the Chinese since his own failure to keep his missiles in Cuba, would be required to take one of two courses: either denouncing the United States as imperialist warmongers who had failed to respond to his peaceful initiatives; or, if possible, pointing with pride to the growing success of a policy of peaceful coexistence, listing concrete results achieved since the withdrawal of the missiles in Cuba. And, Cousins argued, whichever course Khrushchev took, it would be to the advantage of the United States to be on record with the world at large with a speech which demonstrated our peaceful intentions.

The President sent the letter to me, asked me to think about it, and it was probably a month later that he and I reviewed his speaking schedule for the summer, deciding on a division of topics for each forum. And I brought to his attention again the idea of a peace speech and suggested that the only likely forum on the speaking schedule for such a speech was the commencement address to American University on June 10. He felt that would be a good subject for that time and place. The Soviet meeting had, as I recall, been postponed to later in June anyway. McGeorge Bundy also liked the idea of that speech for that time and that place, and consequently the President asked me to prepare a draft.

KAYSEN: Had you and Bundy discussed this idea with other people in the government by this time?

SORENSEN: No.

KAYSEN: And to your knowledge, had the President?

SORENSEN: No.

KAYSEN: When you prepared the draft, did you discuss the draft widely, or how widely?

SORENSEN: It was discussed. A copy of the proposed draft was show to Bundy and the Secretary of the State [Dean Rusk]. Parts, or all of it, were shown to the Secretary of Defense [Robert S. McNamara].

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I'm certain that parts regarding nuclear testing were shown to the Joint Chiefs, or at least to their chairmen, and to the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. It's probable that others high in the Department of State had a chance to review the draft, including Ambassador Thompson [Llewellyn E. Thompson, Jr.], who specialized in our relations with the Soviet Union, Under Secretary Ball [George W. Ball]. But I would say it was not widely distributed throughout the government, but most presidential speeches were not.

KAYSEN: When was all this done, how long before the speech was given?

SORENSEN: This was all done a very few days before the speech was given. The speech draft was written by me overnight on Thursday night, revised on Friday, and given to you, Carl, in the absence of Mac Bundy, to obtain the necessary clearances. I then left Saturday to join the President who was on a speaking tour to the West Coast and to Hawaii, taking a copy of the draft with me for his review and revision. He was delivering an important civil rights address in Honolulu Sunday noon, so it was not until we started back from Honolulu Sunday afternoon, which was quite late Sunday night back in Washington, that he had time to review the speech. He made a series of changes, but basically liked it. Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] was on the plane, and he liked it very much, which encouraged the President not to change it further. The proposals in the speech regarding our decision not to test first in the atmosphere and our agreement with the British and the Soviets to try a new round of negotiations in Moscow were, of course, matters on which the President had been working and on which there had been some telephone conversations over the weekend as we were able to develop this second proposition further with the British and the Soviets.

KAYSEN: Now, when the negotiation started, what was the President's expectation in respect to is success? Did he feel that the speech, Khrushchev's speech in Berlin afterward, made it pretty clear that there would be a treaty, or was he still doubtful in the light of the past history of the negotiations?

SORENSEN: He was extremely hopeful, and Khrushchev's Berlin speech had made him more optimistic than he had been in a long time, as did Khrushchev's remarks during the

opening formal proceedings of the negotiations. On the other hand, he had been disappointed in this particular quest so often that he was not counting on it. And he was concerned about Khrushchev's desire for a nonaggression pact between the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and Warsaw powers, and whether Khrushchev would insist on conditioning a test ban treaty upon the conclusion of that kind of pact which might, in turn, prove unacceptable to our allies or the Senate.

KAYSEN: During the course of the negotiations, as you say the Washington end of

them, was it your impression that the President was determined to get a treaty as long as he thought that he could possibly defend it in the Senate? How would you put his position?

SORENSEN: Yes. He was. Once he became convinced that Khrushchev sincerely wanted a treaty, and once it became clear that he could avoid a firm commitment to concluding at the same time a nonaggression pact, he was determined to have a treaty, and arguments over language and wording, and all the other dangers and disadvantages which might be pointed out, could not deter him at that time.

KAYSEN: Would you comment on the significance, or importance, of presidential leadership in just that situation, in relation to what other forces in the government might have done with the problem once the negotiations had started?

SORENSEN: The true perspective of presidential leadership on this problem really has to go back to long before the negotiations started because the President was careful to obtain in advance the consent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, the Atomic Energy Commission, and all others in the executive branch who might normally be expected to oppose this kind of treaty. He obtained that through the exercise of leadership, by repeated argument and persuasion, by careful evaluation of what the treaty would do, and so on. He may well have obtained some of this consent not only because of his personal desire to have it, to which these individuals felt they should respond, but also because they thought they were discussing an academic question and would never be faced with an actual treaty. Once the treaty loomed as a reality, as the negotiations proceeded in Moscow, it was the continuation of that kind of leadership, particularly in overriding the nit-pickers who attempted to point out all the technical and legal

loopholes which they might imagine to exist in the wording. That leadership continued to be important.

KAYSEN: To what extent was the process of getting consent in advance conscious, to what extent was it a by-product of the fact that there had been a discussion of this problem going back to the very first days of the President's Administration?

SORENSEN: Oh, yes, when I say in advance, I mean well in advance, because this treaty had been discussed since the very first days of the Administration. It had been discussed at the time that the Soviets resumed testing and Kennedy and Macmillan [Maurice Harold Macmillan] made an offer asking Khrushchev to stop testing; it was discussed again at the time that the United States decided to resume testing in order that the President could state with the full authority and support of the

government that we were prepared to conclude a treaty which would effectively ban tests if the Soviets were willing; and no doubt was discussed after that as well.

KAYSEN: Perhaps it might be useful now to follow back from the negotiations to earlier history. The President did have a review of the nuclear test ban negotiation quite early in his administration conducted by Mr. McCloy [John Jay McCloy]. Do you remember any of the discussions or processes which led up to that review and to the decision to continue to seek a test ban treaty?

SORENSEN: The President had been concerned for some time about the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He sincerely believed in a test ban treaty. He had spoken often on the subject. He had consulted with his friend, David Ormsby-Gore [William David Ormsby-Gore], who was then a British representative at the Geneva meetings. He had questioned whether the United States position had been sufficiently thought through and concrete to take advantage of whatever earlier Soviet willingness there might have been to conclude a treaty. And consequently he was determined, upon taking office, to explore the subject, to put the resumption of talks off until his Administration had had an opportunity to review the subject in order that we might put on the table a specific and concrete approach, a draft treaty which we would be willing to sign in cooperation with the British. As he did so often in foreign policy areas, he asked a distinguished Republican whose loyalty and patriotism were unchallengeable, Mr. McCloy, to head up this effort.

KAYSEN: And the consequence of that was a renewed offer in Geneva. Now the summer's discussion in Geneva was of no great fruit. The next important event was the Soviet resumption of testing. What was the President's reaction to that fact in terms of his efforts to get a test ban treaty?

SORENSEN: You first must remember that there was a Soviet change of position during the spring and summer which resulted in the talks being fruitless. This was their insistence upon a troika, upon a rule of unanimity in any decisions made by the inspection team which consisted of Soviets, Americans, and neutrals. And Khrushchev made it clear to the President at Vienna, as Gromyko [Andrei Andreevich Gromyko] made it clear to Rusk at Vienna, that their experience with the United Nations in the Congo had convinced them that there were no truly neutral nations and that international bodies could damage the national interests of the Soviet Union unless a veto could be exercised. And consequently they introduced this principled into their disarmament and test ban negotiations as well.

When the Soviets resumed testing in the late summer of 1961, the President was concerned about its general meaning in the Cold War and its particular effect on our margin of nuclear superiority. Inasmuch as he had been under some pressure from military and others to resume testing first himself and had rejected the arguments which backed them up, he suffered some personal chagrin as a result of the Soviets doing it first.

KAYSEN: Shortly after the Soviet resumption of testing, the President decided to resume underground tests by the United States, but deferred decision on the resumption of atmospheric tests. What led him to this course of conduct?

SORENSEN: Immediately upon learning of the Soviet decision to resume testing, the President gathered his responsible officers of the government into this office to discuss a course of action. Many were suggested. The resumption of underground testing – which had been pressed on him most of the year by those who favored a resumption of testing (and felt they could convince the President to take this step if they confined their request to underground testing) – was the most obvious one. Its proponents had claimed practically all the benefits they sought could be achieved through underground testing.

KAYSEN: Who were the proponents of this course of action?

SORENSEN: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, some of the heads of the Atomic Energy Commission laboratories. I do not believe anyone else at that time. The Department of State had taken a more or less wait and see attitude, deferring the decision whether to resume underground testing until after the close of the year. I cannot recall now the position of the Department of Defense. Other alternatives suggested were: the immediate resumption of atmospheric testing, the immediate announcement that atmospheric tests would be resumed, and doing nothing at all until we evaluated the Soviet tests and how much progress they made and how much threat to our security they presented. And one suggestion was to wipe out the Soviet test site, presumably through a nuclear air strike.

KAYSEN: What factors led to the conclusion that the appropriate course of action was to resume underground testing as soon as feasible, but to defer decision on the resumption of atmospheric testing and defer announcement?

SORENSEN: They were both substantive and political reasons. Substantively, the President had been told earlier in the year that underground testing would be sufficient for the advancement of our nuclear arsenal. Consequently, the resumption of that kind of testing would help guarantee against any immediate closing of the gap between American and Soviet nuclear technology. Politically, the President felt that he had to respond to the Soviet move in some way. He had to do so for reason of the American Congress and the American public; he had to do so for reasons of the world public, so to speak, which he felt, whatever its fears of fallout may have been, feared an overwhelming Soviet war machine and a weak and timid America even more. He therefore decided that we should make some response, that we should make it immediately so that there would not be a separate condemnation of the United States by the neutrals, most of

whom were meeting in Belgrade at the time. But he refused to go immediately into ordering a resumption of atmospheric tests because he knew that presented more serious problems, not only in terms of fallout but in terms of the temperature of the Cold War and the possibilities of ever getting agreement again in the future. He preferred to defer that decision until an analysis was made of Soviet test which would provide a judgment as to whether

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our security required the kind of technological advance which only atmospheric testing would make possible.

KAYSEN: Was it that analysis of Soviet tests, and the size and number of Soviet tests, that were the decisive factors in the President's decision to resume testing in the atmosphere?

SORENSEN: That's hard to say. Again political factors entered in, worldwide as well as domestic political factors. I think, probably, whatever that analysis had shown, the President was leaning toward a resumption of atmospheric tests on the ground that his posture as the political leader of the free world and the United States did not permit him to do anything else, unless the analysis could convince him that the Soviet tests were wholly unimportant, or unless a dramatic breakthrough was made in negotiations which would make possible a new effective treaty.

KAYSEN: On that last point, did the President at this time – that is, before his announcement of the forthcoming resumption of atmospheric tests – consider explicitly the question of whether he would be willing to, and could afford to, let the Soviets have the last round of tests?

SORENSEN: He came to the conclusion that he could afford to if they would sign a treaty banning all nuclear testing including underground because the latter required some inspection of Soviet territory, and the overall gains to be made from concluding that treaty, he felt, were more important to our security than the gains to be made from our having the last round.

KAYSEN: The decision to resume tests in the atmosphere was announced in March of 1962, and there was a test series in the summer. Can you say that during this period did anything happen to change significantly the President's attitude toward the desirability of getting a test ban treaty?

SORENSEN: I'm not sure I….Such as what?

KAYSEN: Well, the results of our own tests, the domestic and world public reaction to our testing?

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SORENSEN: I don't really believe they affected him either way. He was increasingly skeptical of the military and scientific claims which were made about our tests – about their necessity, what they would accomplish and so on. The world reaction to our tests was not as adverse as it might have been, and he felt that that was a manageable problem. Nevertheless, he continued in his desire to have a nuclear test ban treaty for the original reasons he had: namely, the opposition to nuclear proliferation.

KAYSEN: How did the fact that our own test series was not eminently successful in terms of the ability to do what we had planned to do, and other elements of that sort, affect his confidence in military and technical judgments of what was necessary?

SORENSEN: I have no firsthand, detailed knowledge of that other than the general observation I've already made.

KAYSEN: During this period, let's say between the fall of '61 and the fall of '62, a great many changes in our negotiating position on the comprehensive treaty in Geneva took place. I think the most important, really were: first, abandoning the notion of any international inspection arrangement and substituting the notion of what you might call adversary inspection in which we inspected the Soviets, and they inspected us; and second, a large change in the idea of the number of control posts and the number of inspections required. The first of these changes, of course, was essentially political; the second involved new technical understanding. To what extent did the President participate in the evolution of our position in these two important ways, to your knowledge?

SORENSEN: My impression, although I was only on the fringes of it, is that he participated a great deal. He was still determined to get the test ban treaty. His private correspondence with Chairman Khrushchev often discussed the prospects for a treaty and the conditions which each side was specifying. He was interested in the new scientific experiments which made possible a change in our proposal without any weakening of our posture. As I say, my impression is that he played a major role in all of this.

KAYSEN: The negotiations that were going on in Geneva were conducted, for the most part, in a rather public forum even though there were some private meetings of the U.S. and Soviet delegates in the disarmament conference. Late in '62, there was another round of relatively restricted negotiations with the Soviets, British and ourselves participating. What background, from the President's point of view, is there to this new session of private negotiation?

SORENSEN: That will have to be, really, filled in by others. I know that, at that time, the President's optimism rose. He felt that a combination of the so-called

black-box technique of automatic recorders, accompanied by what he understood to be change in the Soviet position on the number of inspections required on Soviet territory, made very possible the conclusion of a treaty early in the that winter of 1962-63. But then the Soviet tide seemed to ebb once again, and by spring he had no more reason to be optimistic than he had during the previous year.

KAYSEN: To some extent, the optimism in the fall of '62 was related to the aftermath of the missile crisis. The correspondence with Khrushchev at that time suggests, or states directly, that a resumption of these negotiations at that moment would prove fruitful, or might prove fruitful.

SORENSEN: I have a general impression to that effect, but I cannot specifically remember.

KAYSEN: Let's move forward once again to the period of the late summer, 1962, after the treaty was initialed and the President had to face the political problem of getting consensus and Senate ratification of it. Had the President planned long in advance to make a speech in the event that there was a treaty, or was that a decision that was made immediately and at the time?

SORENSEN: I believe the decision was made more or less at the time. It may have been a few days in advance as the negotiations proceeded and appeared to be successful. It was the kind of occasion when the President would take the national airwaves; it was a major national issue; it required support of the public because it required support of the Senate; it was one where he could present a specific result and program

and argument. There were a good many arguments which needed to be made, and on which the President should take the initiative before the opponents of the treaty began to take the opposite argument. So I think all roads pointed to a presidential speech to the nation.

KAYSEN: What are the high points, in your judgment, of this drafting and preparation history for that speech? You were the drafter of it, were you not?

SORENSEN: I was, but, unless you can add more precise questions, I cannot now distinguish how the drafting of that speech differed from the drafting of many others.

KAYSEN: The two main points of the speech argument were: this preserves our national security; it advances peace. Was there really anything more to be said? Was this really, simply stated, the essence of the political appeal that the President felt was necessary?

SORENSEN: Yes, I think that sums it up well.

KAYSEN: And was this the kind of speech that, so to speak, wrote itself, and there wasn't a great deal of discussion within the government before the President made the speech?

SORENSEN: I resent the implication that any speech wrote itself. There was a good deal of discussion. There were materials from the Department of State, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and the Joints Chiefs of Staff, Bundy's office, all of which concentrated primarily on the security aspect, which was the most difficult part of the speech to write: how we could be sure that our arsenal was adequate, that the Soviets were not ahead, that they would not cheat, that we could detect violations, and so on. It was less difficult to write the more political arguments regarding this being a step toward peace.

KAYSEN: To what extent were the difficulties of dealing with the first part of these arguments magnified by statements that had been made the year before and before that to justify the resumption of testing, first underground and then atmospheric testing?

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SORENSEN: The statements which had been made the year before – in the President's speech to the country on resumption of a nuclear testing – were very carefully made so that they would not be cited against us in the even a nuclear test ban treaty was signed. There was a somewhat confusing exchange of views at a presidential press conference relating to secret preparations for testing, including the President's statement that the limited test ban treaty would not be adequate because it would call for no inspection that would prevent the Soviets from testing suddenly once again, which we could not permit. However there were two answers to that in the fall of 1963: One was that the United States had tested since the Soviet Union had resumed testing and therefore was not as concerned as we had been about the Soviet's testing, then agreeing to another unpoliced moratorium, or ban, and then suddenly testing again, thereby putting together two test series and endangering our security. The second answer was that the President made it particularly clear, in his speech and in his message to the Congress and in his actions, that the United States would continue underground testing, and that this would keep our atomic laboratories in a higher degree of readiness for a resumption of atmospheric testing, should the occasion arise.

KAYSEN: In preparing to go to the Senate after the treaty was signed to get it ratified, was the President concerned from the first to get an overwhelming vote?

SORENSEN: Yes and no. He desired an overwhelming vote, but his chief concern was

to get the necessary two-thirds, for which he was more pessimistic than many of us thought he should be. He was afraid that the natural opposition of the Republicans and the opposition of the Southern Democrats, led by Senators Russell [Richard B. Russell, Jr.] and Stennis [John C. Stennis]--whom he knew had great influence – could easily put together one-third of the Senate plus one and prevent consent to ratification altogether. So, while he desired the kind of overwhelming vote you suggest, his immediate concern was getting the two-thirds vote.

KAYSEN: So that the fact that there was really a very substantial majority in excess of two-thirds came as something of a surprise?

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SORENSEN: No, by that time it was not a surprise because many weeks of work went into achieving that margin, and it gradually built up during the fall. The President met with those representatives of private organizations that were interested in helping him secure Senate approval, counseling them on their strategy and technique, and otherwise led a very major lobbying effort to achieve that margin.

KAYSEN: Would it be fair to say that this was the first and, as it proved, the only instance in which the President had to get formal consensus, through the Senate, for a significant departure in foreign policy from the broad lines of foreign policy that had been the country's foreign policy for some period?

SORENSEN: It depends on how much importance you ascribe to others. I think the President made some departures in strengthening the tools of freeing policy which required congressional approval: the creation of the disarmament agency, the creation of the Peace Corps, the long-term foreign aid act, the Trade Expansion Act….

KAYSEN: I'm not intending to suggest differently but simply to make the point that if you look at…. Trying to take some kind of broad view – I wouldn't try to rate this, and I'm not suggesting that you should – but there is a sense in which events like the NATO treaty mark a new consensus which has not previously been registered. Would you judge that the President viewed this ratification as marking a new consensus which had not previously been registered, or is that putting it too strongly?

SORENSEN: No, I think that puts it very accurately, and it was reflected in his own speeches and statements in the fall.

KAYSEN: And would the preparation and the work that you talk about be, you know, relevant to this sense of the occasion, that it deserved this kind of work and preparation?

SORENSEN: Yes.

KAYSEN: And I wonder if you would comment, perhaps, here a little on the question of technique – how the President saw his task of going about this on an important occasion of this sort?

SORENSEN: Well, again, could you refine the question?

KAYSEN: To what extent did he himself talk to members of the Senate whom he thought were doubtful, to what extent did he talk to members of the Senate whom he thought were hostile to get some sense of the depth and breadth of their opposition, to what extent did he participate in campaigns in the country, to what extent was this a set of activities that you could parallel on other important legislative occasions, to what extend did it go beyond them, or was it unique to the circumstances of a major foreign policy effort?

SORENSEN: It paralleled few other efforts which he took place during the three years of the Kennedy presidency, and no other strictly foreign policy effort, although he had certainly engaged in a major effort on the trade bill which had large foreign policy implications. He personally talked with a great many senators; he worked through the Senate leadership, the Vice President [Lyndon B. Johnson], the legislative liaison officers in the White House under Mr. O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and in the State Department under Mr. Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton]. He kept in daily touch with the tactics being used both by the proponents and opponents of the treaty and was concerned about the efforts of the Military Preparedness Subcommittee – or perhaps it was the full Military Affairs Committee – to hold simultaneous hearings on the subject with the Foreign Relations Committee, to hear all of the adverse witnesses first, and to try to put the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the spot. He personally negotiated with General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] and Senator Stennis the order of these witnesses. He met, as I said, with the representatives of the coalition of organizations (which he had helped bring together, I believe) in support of the test ban treaty, counseled them as to how to spend their time and money, which senators they should see, what kind of effort should be made in Washington and back home, and so on. His own speeches and statements at the time were filled with references to this effort.

KAYSEN: In talking to the Chiefs, in particular, to what extent did the President use the argument that this was peculiarly his kind of decision, and it was the their duty, while stating their honest beliefs as professionals, to stay within the confines of the judgment that he, as President, had already made?

SORENSEN: I don't know. I was not present during any of these conversations.

KAYSEN: After the treaty was ratified, did you ever hear any reflections the President made, observations, not written down, on what he thought he had accomplished by this whole effort? Did he ever give some retrospective evaluation of those months?

SORENSEN: No, because it was unlike the President to be retrospective, particularly about his accomplishments of that sort. I think there was implicit in many of his conversations a sense of accomplishment and almost a sense of discovery that he had a major new issue, so to speak, working for him – the issue of peace.

KAYSEN: And on this point, the President was clear in his mind, especially after the treaty was negotiated, that this was a political gain; more people were in favor of peace than were afraid of dealing with the Russians?

SORENSEN: That's correct.

KAYSEN: Was it in those terms that he thought one had to look at the issue? How would you put the issue?

SORENSEN: I don't think he would have put it quite that way. I think he, on the contrary, took pains – partly for political reasons, perhaps, but also because it was his substantive belief – to warn the Administration and the general public against any smug feeling that the millennium had arrived and that everything would be rosy in our relations with the Russians from here on out. He felt that our military strength, our willingness to use that strength, and our vigilance of being alert to the possible of that strength had played a part in achieving the test ban treaty. While he hoped for further

agreement, he remained to the end extremely cautious in his expressions of optimism and extremely anxious not to lower our guard, even though tensions were, hopefully, lessened.

KAYSEN: The next subject we want to go into is the wheat deal – the negotiations, first with the Soviets, and then with the Congress, about selling wheat to the Soviet Union. Was the President much concerned about East-West trade as an issue before this problem of Soviet purchase of wheat came up?

SORENSEN: No, not as a major issue. He had met from time to time with those who were concerned about the shipment of strategic materials to iron curtain countries. He had, in his interview with Adzhubei [Aleksei I. Adzhubei], talked about the possibility of expanding trade once relations between the two countries were more normal. But it was not a major issue.

KAYSEN: Had he ever expressed a view on the Macmillan theory that "a fat Russian is a good Russian" and that really increasing trade is a policy goal in itself

which would bring other favorable results in its consequence – prior, anyway, to the wheat issue coming up?

SORENSEN: I don't recall him expressing a view, but if I had to guess, I would say it was the kind of oversimplified and overoptimistic judgment which his mind would not encompass.

KAYSEN: You would think it's just what he expected from Macmillan. [Laughter] When the possibility that the Soviets would want to buy a large quantity of wheat from the United States was signaled – and, of course, it was signaled by negotiations with the Canadians – was the President immediately brought into the question?

SORENSEN: Almost immediately, yes. When the Canadian negotiation was going on, a group of traders from Minneapolis, grain traders, went up to try to see the Russians and find out if they were interested in American wheat. Whether they went on their own initiative or in response to Soviet invitation, it has never been made clear. The head man of these dealers was a close personal friend of the Secretary of Agriculture [Orville L. Freeman]. He reported to the Secretary on the morning of the meeting of the

President's Cabinet. It was one of the few occasions when a new and important subject was brought up in Cabinet meeting, with some justification and some worthwhile results. The Secretary of Agriculture brought it up – the President was immediately interested; the Secretary of Commerce [Luther H. Hodges] was interested; the Secretary of State was interested; the Secretary of Labor [W. Willard Wirtz] was concerned about the problem of maritime and long shore unions participating in such sales; the Secretary of Defense had an indirect concern about overall foreign policy implications. So it was a useful subject to discuss at Cabinet meetings although on the basis of that very preliminary discussion not much could be concluded. The President, thereupon, called a smaller in his office in which he explored with the officials I mentioned, and with O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and myself, I believe, Mr. Bundy, probably, the problems involved, the possibilities

The following day, I believe, he left on his extensive tour of the West, a non-political campaign tour devoted to conservation. A series of questions was prepared by me and farmed out, with the help of Mr. Bundy, to the various departments and agencies; and on the basis of the answers which came to those questions and further meetings at the cabinet and staff level, a recommendation was made to the President that we should go ahead and permit such sales to be made, if they could be made. The President felt he did not want to go out on a limb if the Soviets were not really interested. This was a typical posture of his, very similar to the one he exercised in Berlin negotiations and test ban negotiations. There is no point in our presenting a new proposal to the Soviet Union which would bring criticism from the allies or from the Congress if the Soviets were not interested in it anyway.

Consequently, Ambassador Thompson was asked to explore the degree of Soviet interest with Ambassador Dobrynin [Anatoly F. Dobrynin], which he did. He came back with an indication of sufficient interest and commitment to prompt the President to announce at his following press conference that the United States government would permit such negotiations and transactions to take place if the Soviets and the private grain dealers were able to get together.

I might add that in the initial Dobrynin response, which he was conveying from Moscow, the statement appeared that American ships would be used. This was noticed by Thompson, just as it astonished all of us when we read it, but Dobrynin assured him that was the way the message had been delivered, and it was regarded by the rest of us as a gift horse we should not look in the mouth, even though we knew it would cost the Soviets considerably more.

It had the advance of appearing to be a concession which had been wrung from the Soviet Union, although that was hardly the case, and it had the effect of quieting the American unions who might otherwise cause trouble. Therefore that condition was placed in the draft of the Presidential statement announcing our position, and that statement, which was also cleared by Dobrynin – and Dobrynin implied that it had been cleared through Chairman Khrushchev himself – that statement was the basis of the President's opening press conference statement, and the answers to these questions which had previously been prepared by the various departments and agencies formed the basis of his report of the Congress on the matter.

KAYSEN: Both the reason for the Russians' inclusion of this gift and later Russian argument about it as a condition we had imposed remain obscure?

SORENSEN: That's correct. Our best guess is that in a bureaucratic mix up not untypical of our own experiences, the political desk had decided this would be a good idea inasmuch as the Russian ships were tied up with the Canadian trade and American port security procedures and labor union difficulties were very grave deterrents for the use of Russian ships; and it was not until later that the commercial desk, which knew all along of the higher American rate, threw up its hands in horror when it learned of this. The Russians, of course, then insisted that American ships were fine, but they had to be at world shipping rates.

KAYSEN: In the subsequent course…. Excuse me, let me go back. The discussion, both then in the Cabinet in the first round and later, how important were the particular concerns of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Treasury [C. Douglas Dillon] in relation to more general foreign policy concerns in shaping the decision?

SORENSEN: Minor. The general foreign policy concerns shaped the decision.

KAYSEN: It was not a case of desire to sell wheat or desire to get gold leading us to do something which, in the absence of these pressures, we might not have done.

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SORENSEN: That's correct. Those were arguments which helped advance the cause, but I would not say they were key.

KAYSEN: Now in the later stages of the negotiation, is it fair to say that the focus of attention shifted from foreign policy to problems of labor relations and the like, and internal negotiations within the United States rather than foreign policy negotiations with the Soviets?

SORENSEN: Partly there was a shift, and partly there was an addition of the others. The labor problems continued and are still continuing, The internal governmental problem was most seriously one of congressional opposition and attempt to impose a variety of congressional restrictions. But there was some confusion within the executive branch as well which required White House intervention from time to time.

KAYSEN: What was the nature of this confusion, or its source?

SORENSEN: The cause was, basically, that several departments were involved: the Department of Commerce, which issued the export licenses and approved the shipping rate; the Depart of Agriculture, which had the surplus grain and represented the grain dealers; the Department of State which had the overriding responsibility in the conduct of foreign affairs. And from time to time – this was dealt mostly at the Under Secretary level – Under Secretary Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr.], Under Secretary Ball and Under Secretary Murphy [Charles S. Murphy], all three of them in different ways strong-willed men, each felt there ought to be more leadership on this issue, and…

KAYSEN: …was prepared to supply it.

SORENSEN: That's right. Each of them was prepared to supply it.

KAYSEN: Were their views generally in concert, or were there serious policy conflicts among them?

SORENSEN: There were not serious policy conflicts as far as desirability of effectuating this sale, and making the largest, most efficient, most expeditious sale possible. The problems were problems of tactics with respect to the disagreement with the Soviets over shipping rates, with respect to

a variety of means of financing these sales through Export-Import Bank or through agricultural credits or otherwise. There was some disagreement between Commerce and Labor when Commerce tried to get into the labor relations field, and so on.

KAYSEN: Now this was an affair in which no positive legislative action was needed.

SORENSEN: That's correct.

KAYSEN: But there were some concerns about running afoul of a legislative reaction which would obstruct carrying through the transaction?

SORENSEN: That is correct. The President…

KAYSEN: Statutory constraints on what could legally be done in the way of credit, for example.

SORENSEN: That's right. The President called legislative leaders from both parties to the White House to disclose and discuss his announcement before he made it. In that meeting he had general support in the Senate, inasmuch as the Republican senators present were all favorably inclined, including assistant majority leader Kuchel [Thomas H. Kuchel] and the ranking members of the Agriculture and Foreign Relations Committee who were in town – Aiken [George D. Aiken] and Young [Milton R. Young] of North Dakota. Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen] and Hickenlooper [Bourke B. Hickenlooper] were both out of town.

Halleck [Charles A. Halleck] and the ranking Republican in the House Agriculture Committee, Hoeven [Charles B. Hoeven], strongly opposed the bill, and Mrs. Bolton [Frances P. Bolton] made a contribution which was negative in more ways than one. [Laughter] The discussion had been reasonably competent up to that point. Some constructive question had been raised by Aiken and Young as to the type of wheat which would be involved, but they expressed no opposition. Mansfield [Michael J. Mansfield], Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] expressed their strong support. Halleck had read a statement of strong opposition, and Mrs. Bolton, who had been sitting there with a fixed look on her face, interrupted to say, "Mr. President, aren't we at war?" This puzzled, if not startled, the President, and he asked her for the meaning or motivation of the question. But we gathered that she felt the Russians were our enemy in the Cold War, and we should not be sending them anything.

KAYSEN: Did the President have any concerns about popular support on this issue, or did he consider it one in which his problems were entirely within the Congress?

SORENSEN: He had some concern on popular support, and we made a series of phone calls to various groups and leaders of organizations asking them to issue statements of support which they did. And we prepared materials for use by members of the House and Senate, and speeches on and off the floors of the Congress. And the President decided, because a variety of legislative enactments were at issue, to send a comprehensive report on the matter to the Congress and to explain the reasons for his action.

KAYSEN: Did the President draw any lesson of more general possibilities of trade with the Soviet Union out of this? This was an item of which the Soviets had talked a great deal. How, in the light of the still unconcluded episode, really, did that possibility look?

SORENSEN: I don't think it changed it much one way or the other. It caused all of us to take a closer look at commercial relations with the Soviet Union than we had in three years. We heard statements to the effect that there was very little which we would find that we wished to buy from the Soviet Union, and had no reason to doubt that. We also were reminded of all of the past and outstanding commercial problems – unpaid loans, and lack of commercial attaches, and all the rest – which would be barriers to expanded Soviet trade. So the President was very careful not to indicate that this automatically meant a vast increase in trade, but I think he looked upon it as a useful first step.

KAYSEN: On another angle. Did you ever hear the President reflect, or did you yourself reflect, on the difficulties of dealing rationally with certain kinds of subjects? The point I have in mind, which struck me from that discussion, is the issue of selling subsidized commodities to the Soviets. Of course, it's the American farmers who get the subsidy; once we sell abroad, we sell at world market prices. Yet my own memory is that it was almost impossible somehow to meet this problem. It seemed too complicated to explain, and the words "subsidized commodity" sounded sinister and threatening. What

was your own reaction, and what did you hear the President say on this particular point?

SORENSEN: Well, my own reaction was the same: that subsidy had an ominous sound to it. Of course upon closer examination we found there was no subsidy being paid by the American taxpayers to the Soviet Union. But it was a point which needed careful explanation which we tried to do in the President's press conference statement and message to the Congress – but we were restricted by the lack of logic in our entire farm price support system which is insoluble.

KAYSEN: Was the President ever faced with the possibility of having to overcome a strike, general picket line by the longshoremen's union, in loading wheat

for Russia? Did he consider what he would try to do in that situation?

SORENSEN: No.

KAYSEN: Because it wasn't imminent enough?

SORENSEN: No, it was often imminent, but his efforts were aimed at preventing it rather than finding a substitute.

KAYSEN: But what was the main method of prevention? How, in fact, did you avoid this situation?

SORENSEN: Well, the President, the Secretary of Labor and the Under Secretary of Commerce all were in direct contact with Mr. Meany [George Meany] and the heads of individual unions from time to time. The guarantee of American ships had started that relationship off on a level of expectations which were not to be achieved. Consequently, some negotiations were required, and some explanations were needed. But they seemed satisfied – at least from time to time – with the understanding that at least 50 per cent would go on American ships.

KAYSEN: So that the direct question of what will you do if the longshoremen won't load the whet never was face as such?

SORENSEN: To the best of my recollection and knowledge.

KAYSEN: Ted, would you say out of these various experiences – the Cuban Missile Crisis, the test ban treaty, the wheat negotiations – that the President came to any conclusions about the problems of negotiating with the Russians toward the end of his Administration that were different, went beyond the thoughts he had about it when he began his term of office?

SORENSEN: Comparison would be difficult inasmuch as the President did not dwell on this or any other aspect of office in any detail before his election, following his rule of concentrating on first things first. But I would say that the following were among the principles which characterized his attitude toward negotiating with the Soviets after he had been in office for a period of time. The first was not to make any offer, or to continue to make any proposal, which irritated the Congress or the allies once it became apparent that the Soviet Union would not accept it anyway. There was no point in lowering the number of nuclear tests on-site inspections of suspicious seismic disturbances from ten to seven, for example, and incurring the wrath of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee for doing so, if it was clear that the Soviet Union would never go higher than three.

A second principle was related to that, perhaps it might be the converse of, which was to try to put forward only those proposals which we were prepared to stand behind. The President took negotiating sessions seriously, not simply as fun and games, and therefore no test ban or other disarmament proposal was put forward that the President did not feel that he and the entire government, including the military – and the Congress, with some persuasion – would be willing to stand behind.

The third was a conviction that a great deal of patience and endurance would be required. The President kept in mind a letter with respect to the Cuban missile affair which he had received from Dean Acheson in which Acheson congratulated him on his brilliant handling of the matter in its initial stages, but warned him of the long and tortuous path which could well lie ahead, comparing the situation with that which prevailed in Korea after the initial American intervention which was widely hailed in this country, but which then led to that enthusiasm steadily eroding as no concrete resolution of the conflict appeared.

Fourth was the President's conviction that, in international affairs as in life and politics, time and events change many things which seem unchangeable, and that we could not foresee what the future would bring and did not need to make plans for

all time to come. Consequently, he said to Khrushchev and Adzhubei, with respect to Berlin – and no doubt had the same principle in mind on other negotiations – that in the case of Berlin and Germany, the status quo should simply be settled upon, inasmuch as it had some advantages for both sides, for a period of time. Once that period of five or ten years had elapsed, we might well find that conditions in Germany or in our own country or in the world had changed so that a solution was possible which did not seem possible now.

KAYSEN: To what extent would you say he didn't view ideology as really central to our relations with the Soviet Union, he didn't view this as a conflict of ideologies in which there was an issue in which either our ideology or their ideology had to prevail?

SORENSEN: I don't believe he regarded it as a conflict of ideologies at all. There was more of that kind of philosophy in some of his earlier speeches as a Senator, as I recall, but he realized, as President, that the modern world, with modern weapons, did not permit or require a victory of one system over another, and that the real cause of difficult was the Soviet Union's attempt to impose its system upon others by force. As he said to Adzhubei, as he said in his American University speech, as he said on many occasions, if that would cease, the threats to world peace would cease. We were not trying to wipe communism from the earth. I believe he said to Khrushchev at Vienna that if the people of British Guiana freely chose the communist system, the United States did not intend to deprive them of that choice.

KAYSEN: This, of course, was a speculative matter in part. To what extent did the President think about the political acceptability of the proposition that if

the people of British Guiana or some other country freely chose communism that we should accept it, and not try by forcible means to change their views?

SORENSEN: I don't know that he ever discussed the political acceptability of that particular question. In a sense, that would underlie many of his public and private utterances that the United States could not hope and should not

expect to influence all events in all countries in all parts of the world.

KAYSEN: Ted, I'd like to turn to the questioning from Europe to Southeast Asia. To what extent did the President view the situation in Southeast Asia as one also directly under the control of the Soviet Union and one which formed an important element in our bilateral relations with the Soviet Union?

SORENSEN: Let's discuss Laos and Vietnam separately. Laos, at least initially, he considered to be a situation in which the communist forces, the Pathet Lao, were to a very great extent under the control of and dependent upon the Soviet Union, and he emphasized it as a matter of considerable importance in our relations with the Soviet Union. And I recall in the fall of 1961, when Salinger [Pierre E. G. Salinger] was summoned to a meeting with Kharlamov [Mikhail A. Kharlamov], or one of his opposite numbers in the Soviet Union, serving somewhat as a transmission belt of messages, the President placed great emphasis upon the importance of the Soviet Union agreeing to a fair composition of the coalition government. Laos continued to be a topic of communications between Kennedy and Khrushchev, beginning with their Vienna meeting, continuing somewhat through their correspondence, although I believe he began to get the feeling toward the middle of 1963 that the Soviet influence in that area was not as great as it had been.

Vietnam, on the other hand, did not seem to occupy the same role. This may be due simply to the fact I did not hear or know of the President's feeling on the subject. My impression, from what I did know, was that he blamed the insurgents within South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese government at Hanoi, and the Red Chinese more than he held the Soviet Union directly responsible.

KAYSEN: Yet isn't it a little surprising that we made a much bigger commitment in Vietnam than we were ever willing to make in Laos, in view of this difference in attitude? The President, after all, did think it was possible to influence the Soviet Union's attitude by negotiation and discussion, and he never indicated any line of action, if I am correct, which counted very heavily on influence either the Chinese or the North Vietnamese. I think we had almost minimal communication with the Chinese, and none with the North Vietnamese.

SORENSEN: Well, doesn't that prove my point rather than yours? In Laos it was clear that a negotiated settlement was the best we could reach. It was not accessible to American forces. It was up against the border of the Red Chinese. A policy of trying to establish an American protégé there was contrary to the wishes of our allies. And therefore, inasmuch as a negotiated settlement was possible, since negotiations with the Soviet Union were possible, that was the most desirable alternative.

In Vietnam, on the other hand, exactly the opposite was true. It was militarily more accessible, and there was no obvious route to negotiations inasmuch as we were not and could not be in a position of dealing directly with the Red Chinese and the North Vietnamese. And therefore, the President felt that we would have to maintain our military presence there until conditions permitted a settlement which would not be a disaster for the United States.

KAYSEN: Well, this raises a couple of questions in my mind. After all, we had negotiated with the Chinese when it was necessary in Korea. If, in fact, there had been any prospects for a settlement, would the necessity for negotiating with the Chinese have been a bar to such a settlement? Let me ask a less rhetorical question. Were the possibilities or prospects for a settlement by negotiation ever considered, to your knowledge, examined – any soundings made?

SORENSEN: No, not to my knowledge.

KAYSEN: So the President assumed from the first that we had to deal with this problem by military means?

SORENSEN: That's right.

KAYSEN: And when…

SORENSEN: I don't want to indicate he considered it to be only a military problem. He felt that getting the enthusiastic support of the country, its population, and its army was at least one-half the problem and, therefore, would require economic and political and social reforms as well as military action on our part.

KAYSEN: Yes, but from the first, there was this judgment that we have to support military action with whatever else was required to do that. And throughout the whole of the President's Administration, we found ourselves increasing our commitment to Vietnam, although at no time did the prospects improve. Did this reflect a judgment that a favorable decision in Vietnam was really vital to U.S. interests?

SORENSEN: It reflected rather the converse of that – that an unfavorable decision, or a retreat, an abandonment of Vietnam, an abandonment of our commitment

would have had a very seriously adverse effect on the position of the United States in all of Southeast Asia. Therefore, we had to do whatever was necessary to prevent it, which meant increasing our military commitment.

KAYSEN: And was the main thrust of this view the proposition that we had made the commitment, for better or worse, and having made it, we had to live up to it? Or was it an independent judgment of the value of having a friendly, pro-Western government in South Vietnam?

SORENSEN: No, I think it was much more the former than the latter. The hopes for the latter may have – although not stated quite as grandly as you stated them – existed at first. The President had taken a great deal of interest as a Senator in the independence of Vietnam. He had met Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] and had some admiration and hopes for the job he was trying to do. The President felt that, after the Vietnamese had won their struggle for liberation from the French, it was tragic to see that independence under attack by communist forces. But I think basically he was motivated by a commitment the bulk of which had been made before he took office.

KAYSEN: To your knowledge did the President or his advisors other than you yourself, draw a parallel – did you ever draw a parallel between South Vietnam and South Korea, both from the point of view of the necessity of a commitment on the one hand, and the sort of problematic character of the outcome on the other?

SORENSEN: I see the comparison that you suggest, but I don't recall it being made by the President, or to the President.

KAYSEN: Because it was the case that during the course of these three years, there were a number of critical incidents in South Korea of a difficult sort, none of which made our relations with South Korea any easier.

SORENSEN: That's right.

KAYSEN: Did the President ever show any change in his views about the increasing dimension of the commitment to South Vietnam, which in fact increased sharply during this period?

SORENSEN: That's hard to say. I am trying to recall specific conversations, but cannot. I'm not sure his enthusiasm for the commitment was ever very great. It would not surprise me to learn that it diminished even further as time went on, but I don't know that. Nor do I know that it's particularly relevant because I think that President did feel strongly that for better or worse, enthusiastic or unenthusiastic, we had to stay there until we left on terms other than a retreat or abandonment of our commitment.

KAYSEN: Were you in any way aware of, or involved in, the sequence of events that occurred in Washington and Saigon when the Diem government was overthrown – the short period before when the overthrow was being plotted and predicted – and the events immediately surrounding it?

SORENSEN: I attended a few meetings, that was all.

KAYSEN: To what extent was it your…. In your judgment to what extent did the government decide that, in fact, it was good thing to have Diem overthrown explicitly?

SORENSEN: I don't know.

KAYSEN: So that you can't record any sharp view that this was desirable. I'm not suggesting that this was the same as the view that we should assist in it, but a view that we should stand back and let it happen, do nothing to prevent it.

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SORENSEN: I think that's a fair interpretation of the attitude which prevailed at the time.

KAYSEN: Do you recall any expression of the President's own attitude on this point?

SORENSEN: No.

KAYSEN: I think it might be of some interest to talk about the appointment of Mr. Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] as ambassador. Were you aware of the forces and considerations that led up to this decision?

SORENSEN: Not directly. I know that Lodge had been under consideration for a position for some time, and I also know that a search had been going on for a new ambassador to Vietnam for sometime, and a number of other individuals were considered. Finally, I was told it was the suggestion of Secretary of State Rusk, but I do not know. They put the longstanding consideration of the man and the vacancy together. I know it was not at the suggestion of the Vice President, the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy], the Appointments Secretary [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], or the Special Counsel.

KAYSEN: All of whom were opposed to this appointment?

SORENSEN: All of whom were opposed to it, or at least did not greet it with enthusiasm.

KAYSEN: Why?

SORENSEN: All of us felt on the basis of our observation of Mr. Lodge in his other areas of activity that he lacked the qualities of prudence which were necessary in this kind of area.

KAYSEN: In retrospect now, do you think you were correct, or would you change your judgment, let's say up till February of this year before the campaign season started?

SORENSEN: I'm not in a position to judge Mr. Lodge's performance. I gathered from a few expressions of irritation on the part of the President and others that they were less

than satisfied with him at times. On the other hand, the President's motivations for appointing Republicans to office may have been more than borne out in this case. The President did not regard Vietnam as a promising area, either internationally or in domestic politics. Consequently, there was that advantage of having a prominent Republican in such a sensitive post. Subsequent events have proved that the post is even more sensitive, and the Republican is even more prominent than the President had predicted at the time. So he could say that he was proven right.

KAYSEN: In considering the appointment of Lodge or other candidates, was there any substantial discussion of which you are aware of the need for having a politician in some broad sense rather than a professional foreign service officer in this post?

SORENSEN: There may well have been such discussion, but I don't know. The only discussion in which I participated was after the decisions had been made, and I was informed of it, and my reply was, "I hope it's North Vietnam." [Laughter]

KAYSEN: There doesn't seem to be much more to say about Ambassador Lodge at this point except that he may yet make it. [Laughter] Let's turn from Southeast Asia to areas nearer home. We haven't talked about relations with our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies, and perhaps I'd like to start by talking about our relations with England. To what extent would you say that the President increased the closeness, or decreased the closeness, or left it about the same of the special relationship of the U.S. to the U.K.?

SORENSEN: I don't know what we're comparing it with. I'm not that familiar with the Eisenhower [Dwight D, Eisenhower] relationship. My guess would be that

we increased it. The President was fond of Macmillan. They were in close consultation with each other, and he was particularly fond of the British ambassador to the United States after the middle of 1961, David Ormsby-Gore, and saw a great deal of him, consulted with him, worked with him, so that probably tended to increase the relationship particularly since the President had less regard for the ambassadors from France and Germany.

KAYSEN: Was the President's fondness for Macmillan personal?

Did it reflect the sense that Britain was, in fact, our most reliable friend in international affairs, or how would you explain it?

SORENSEN: I think it was probably more personal because there was more than one occasion when he was dissatisfied with British response, or British attitude. But, once again, all relationship are matters of comparison, and comparatively I suppose he did find the British more reliable than any of our other major allies.

KAYSEN: How much of a role do you think was played by his feeling for Macmillan as a politician and his ability to see Macmillan's political problem in a certain sense as he saw his own – a situation which was much less possible in relation to allies in other countries?

SORENSEN: I think that was very important. But I think this had some importance in many countries. I think the President as a politician dealt with other heads of state as politicians, and he often thought of the political problems which were faced by Macmillan or Khrushchev or Fanfani [Amintore Fanfani] or Frondizi [Arturo Frondizi] or Goulart [Joao Goulart] or almost any other chief executive.

KAYSEN: Was the President every consciously trying to guard himself against his friendliness with Macmillan or with the British ambassador, or did he never conceive of this as a problem and did he feel that he could always distinguish between what it was sensible for him to do and what his intimate relations with these men led to?

SORENSEN: I was not aware of any such feeling on his part. He never discussed it. I would say on the basis of my knowledge of the President that his ability to look at things objectively and to do what was appropriate to the time and situation would have prevented such a problem from arising.

KAYSEN: Well, to what extent do you think it's possible that in relation to the Nassau decisions the President took decisions which reflected a greater

tenderness for British difficulties, and the problems of Macmillan and his government, than he might have taken in relation to some other ally similarly situated?

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SORENSEN: Yes, he showed some tenderness for their political problem, but I think that was due in some measure to his feeling that this government's conduct of the Skybolt cancellation had contributed to those problems.

KAYSEN: So that you think that if he had had a similar feeling in relation to the Germans or the Italians with respect to some parallel problem, if we could conceive of one he would have made the same effort in helping the leader of the German or Italian government find a solution for his problem?

SORENSEN: Well, that's different to speculate. The only other situation of its kind that I can think of probably proves that I'm wrong, namely, the situation of Diefenbaker [John G. Diefenbaker] in Canada where a procedure of our Administration which the President regarded as erroneous caused political difficulties for the government of an American ally. In that particular case, the President did not show a similar tenderness, possibly because there was no way in which he could be helpful to Diefenbaker as he was to Macmillan, but more probably because he liked Macmillan and did not like and did not respect Diefenbaker, and had no desire to see him continue in office.

KAYSEN: What was the procedure that you referred to?

SORENSEN: The note or press released from the Department of State, which the President had not cleared, during a Canadian parliament debate on the stationing of nuclear forces, in which the American government in effect stated that the Canadian government had falsely misrepresented its position.

KAYSEN: In our relations with our NATO allies, one great issue was the issue of nuclear weapons. To what extent are you familiar with expressions of views by the President on the problems of sharing control of nuclear weapons with the Europeans?

SORESEN: Not in any detail. I think the President's feelings on the issue stemmed from certain basic convictions which he made clear from time to time. One was his concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons or independent nuclear weapons systems in general. A second was his concern about the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the Germans – the effect that would have on the Soviet Union and the long range meaning it might

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have for the West. Third was his conviction that the United States was still and would continue to be for some time the chief nuclear deterrent for the West, and we should not be in a position, therefore, of having some other country trigger a nuclear war in which we would be forced to respond. Fourth were his doubts that the final decision making in a nuclear deterrent could be distributed or delegated.

All of these led to his initial posture of indicating interest in involving our allies, but waiting to see if they could come up with a plan. The Nassau meeting made it more necessary for the United States to come up with a plan and the idea of the multilateral force emerged. And I think the President was sincere, for earlier reasons I stated, in pushing it. But I never got the impression that it was one of high priorities, that he was terribly disappointed about its lack of acceptance on the part of other European countries.

KAYSEN: Did you ever hear the President comment, or otherwise become aware of his view on the proposition that the multilateral force must itself be an important instrument of European integration, which view was strongly held by many people in the State Department?

SORESEN: I don't think that the President would have disagreed with that, but I doubt, because of his feelings that I've indicated about the multilateral force, that he would have based his hopes upon it.

KAYSEN: To what extent would you say that the multilateral force was in some sense an improvisation that was forced by the Nassau discussion, and that this crystallized the decision which the President himself and perhaps others in the government, were not really ready to take?

SORENSEN: Well, that's my very strong impression. I do not know whether that's a fact.

KAYSEN: You never had heard a direct expression of the President's own view on whether he had had to do in Bermuda things he wasn't quite ready to do in Washington?

SORENSEN: That is correct.

KAYSEN: Were you familiar with the President's concerns and problems in dealing with the Congress on the various steps in the Nassau agreement and multilateral force proposal?

SORENSEN: No. I was aware of the fact that he felt there would be problems with the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy in particular, and Congress in general.

KAYSEN: Were these problems ever discussed at the leadership meetings at the time

the various announcements were made?

SORENSEN: No. Very little of substance was ever discussed at those meetings.

KAYSEN: And you were not involved in the discussions the President had with Congressman Holifield [Chester E. Holifield] and Senator Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] about these matters?

SORENSEN: That's right. Only believers were in the room.

KAYSEN: In the discussions of the MLF related issues, of course, the attitude of the French was always a great problem. Were you familiar with – did you discuss with the President or hear him discuss with others – the question of the wisdom of giving aid to De Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle] in nuclear matters as a means of purchasing his cooperation in this respect?

SORENSEN: I can recall only the most general allusions to it at the time of the MLF discussions. I can then recall more specific conversation about it in connection with getting the French to adhere to the nuclear test ban treaty.

KAYSEN: Well, we might as well take that second point because we didn't cover it before. What's your recollection about that?

SORESEN: My recollection was that the President was willing to go a long way to have French adherence to the treaty, but his experience with De Gaulle made him more cautious than ever and he wanted to make certain De Gaulle was sounded out so that – once gain this principle comes to play – if De Gaulle

was going to reject any kind of offer anyway, the President was not going to make it.

KAYSEN: Do you…

SORESEN: Earlier in the year, in connection with the MLF, discussions regarding De Gaulle related primarily to points I made before. He did not want De Gaulle having an independent nuclear force which could bring into play United States nuclear forces if there was anyway it could be avoided.

KAYSEN: But in the light of De Gaulle's determination to press ahead, and the fact that we couldn't, after all, prevent De Gaulle from getting some kind of force, there was at one time an urging by some in the Department of Defense that the wisest thing to do would be to give De Gaulle some help as a means of purchasing his cooperation. To your knowledge was the President ever seriously considering this plan? Did he have an unfavorable attitude toward it from the first?

SORENSEN: Are we talking about the MLF?

KAYSEN: No, the notion of giving De Gaulle help to purchase his cooperation in some form, either membership in the MLF or some other form.

SORENSEN: I think he seriously considered it with respect to membership in the MLF and then rejected it. I think he seriously considered it in connection with French adherence to the nuclear test ban treaty and would have favored it had there been any interest shown by De Gaulle. Is that your impression?

KAYSEN: The second, I'm perfectly clear on the second. My own impression on the first point is cloudy. Paul Nitze in particular, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA [International Security Affairs], urged quite strongly that…

SORENSEN: I know he urged it.

KAYSEN: …that the President make an agreement with De Gaulle. But it's your own impression that he never considered this as a wise thing to do?

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SORENSEN: Well, as I say, he considered it, but I don't believe he ever decided in the affirmative.

KAYSEN: Or came close in some sense.

SORENSEN: Let me just get on the record now while I'm thinking – while they are in my mind, two incidents regarding De Gaulle: The first came shortly after De Gaulle's rejection of British membership in the Common Market, the Franco-German treaty and the rejection of MLF and so on. It was an intelligence report from British sources that De Gaulle was contemplating some sort of master negotiation with the Soviet Union – that he had seen the Soviet ambassador and had confided to Couve [Maurice Couve de Murville], and at the most one or two others, that the time had arrived for him and Khrushchev to settle all these matters. The President was extremely concerned, was not certain what this would mean as far as our security, particularly in respect to the Germans whose fate would likely to be involved in any such settlement. He was not sure what it meant with regard to our posture of world leadership. He was not sure what it meant with regard to the Alliance and our ability to maintain it. And this gave added impetus to the studies of how to approach Western Europe which were going along at the time in connection largely, but no exclusively, with the MLF. Nothing, of course, ever came of this, and I would assume the report was largely false.

KAYSEN: Ted, wasn't that in January '63, January-February '63, not January-

February ’62?

SORENSEN: That’s what I said.

KAYSEN: But that was a year after the rejection of the British.

SORENSEN: No, it wasn’t.

KAYSEN: You’re right. The trade bill was ’62.

SORENSEN: Secondly, I recall that around May of ’62 all of these questions were still under considerable discussion at the White House and in the press, and therefore the President was prepared to answer questions on them at his press conference. And he did so in terms which were basically friendly to De Gaulle, understanding his position, not trying to force or

pressure, and as a result of the press conference, Ambassador Alphand [Herve Alphand] called to convey his delight of his government. He called Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy], I might add, who was his pipeline to the White House, rather than the President or any of his aides. At the same time, however, the President had decided to insert in an address he was making that evening – to the committee of private businessmen which was backing his trade bill – a three page insert on our relations with Western Europe and the meaning of the Alliance and partnership beyond the trade bill. This insert indicted very clearly that we could not accept the De Gaulle thesis of what our role should be. My recollection is that there was a subsequent message from Ambassador Alphand that the evening presentation was not as pleasing as the afternoon presentation. Or perhaps that was imply the President’s own suggestion that afternoon after he received the message through Jackie – he thought the ambassador might not be quite as happy that evening.

KAYSEN: How would you summarize the President’s attitude toward De Gaulle personally or his evaluation of De Gaulle personally?

SORENSEN: To quote a colleague of mine, the first word which comes to mind is “fascination.” The President admired the General’s personality, presence, his political skill, his command of language. He recognized in General de Gaulle a great figure in history who had worked wonders in restoring the spirit and unity of France and who had performed a probably indispensable role in reconciling France to an Algerian settlement.

But he also was irritated by De Gaulle’s intransigence, his opposition to any negotiations, his insistence on going it alone on nuclear arms and other policies. He was irritated that General de Gaulle, who recognized the Oder-Neisse line, who made it clear that he never thought Germany would be reunited, who was engaged in extensive sales to East Germans the Soviets and the Chinese, would not only consider himself to be the staunchest

anti-communist of them all but would be so considered by Chancellor Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer]. And, finally, he was irritated that De Gaulle was able to get away with all of this because he enjoyed the protection of the American nuclear umbrella, not the force de frappe.

KAYSEN: We move in talking about NATO relations from France to Germany. What can you say similarly about the President's attitude towards Chancellor Adenauer?

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SORENSEN: He always got along well with the Chancellor personally when the two of them were together. That was my impression based more on observation than the President's personal conversations. And that was true from their first meeting in this country to their final meeting when the President visited Germany. But the President remarked that he found talking with Adenauer, even more than he found talking to De Gaulle – and I don't recall that he ever made this remark about Macmillan – that he was talking to a man who had lived in another world, another era, and that it was difficult, therefore, for the two of them to understand each other in a very real sense. He had a genuine admiration for what Adenauer had accomplished. He liked Adenauer's sense of humor. But he also found that Adenauer was difficult to move, to deal with, and he felt the German government was capable of leaks to the press and other signs of unreliability.

KAYSEN: Did his feelings about Germany in general, Adenauer in particular – although he of course was no longer in command (oh, that's wrong. He was.) – change when the President went to Germany in the summer of '63?

SORENSEN: Adenauer by that time had already agreed to step down as of a date certain. He was a lame duck chancellor. There was no real reason for any animosity. The President admired him, liked him, and got along well with him during that trip, but still could not make much progress with him as far as persuading Adenauer to his point of view. Adenauer continued to be suspicious about negotiations on the test ban treaty and everything else. But, of course, the trip to Germany itself was a great success, and the President enjoyed the trip and liked the country very much.

KAYSEN: Are there other European leaders than Macmillan, De Gaulle and Adenauer on whom the President had particularly strong views or feelings, or found particularly interesting or difficult to deal with as far as our NATO allies went?

SORENSEN: Well, I think it's worth a footnote to say that he had great admiration for Hugh Gaitskell who was the leader of the British Labour Party and unfortunately died. I got the impression that he did not have a similar affection for Gaitskell's successor Harold Wilson. He had – again, this probably a footnote because it doesn't bear directly on any of the

governments in the Alliance – a great respect and affection for Jean Monet. He met all of the leaders of the Alliance. I think he liked Spaak [Paul-Henri Spaak] and felt that Spaak had performed with some courage during the Congo crisis, although he felt that in some other ways Spaak was inclined to be perhaps a meddler who wanted to involve himself in East-West relations, French-American relations, other issues more, perhaps, than he should have. I cannot recall any other observations of importance.

KAYSEN: To what extent did the President ever express a general attitude toward NATO, toward the kind of political problems U.S. relations with and U.S. responsibilities to NATO created?

SORENSEN: He made many public statements on that subject, and I think they fully reflect his view. I couldn't distinguish between his public and private views on this.

KAYSEN: However, when we talked earlier about Germany, about the test ban treaty, I think both of these raised questions as to extent to which, on matters the United States bore the prime responsibility, it still had to be guided by and subject to the wishes of a rather diverse group of other nations.

SORENSEN: No, that overstates the case, in my opinion.

KAYSEN: Well, that's what I want, your opinion.

SORENSEN: I don't think the President felt that we were guided by and subject to the wishes of the Alliance. I think he felt that we could neither sell them out nor appear to sell them out nor be subject to the accusation by the leaders of the Alliance that we had sold them out, and consequently took pains to consult and explain. But in matters of primary importance, particularly in the nuclear test ban treaty which involved only the British and ourselves, I don't believe he felt that approval of the Alliance was a condition that pressed on him.

KAYSEN: One of the questions which often created a good deal of discussion and some friction within the Alliance was the question of NATO' stated strategy. Its stated strategy when the President came into office was to respond almost immediately to any attack with nuclear weapons. The President here

as elsewhere was interested in trying to minimize the possibility that nuclear weapons might have to be used, and the Secretary of Defense, who led in this effort in terms of our own strategic planning, made several speeches to the NATO ministerial council in which he tried

to persuade them to a different strategy. He was, unfortunately, not very successful in this persuasive effort. Did you ever hear any of the President's comments on the discussions which McNamara's speeches aroused?

SORENSEN: I cannot now recall any specific comments or conversation. I'm certainly under the very strong impression that the President strongly backed the change in strategy.

KAYSEN: Do you remember any occasions of divergence in viewpoint between the Secretary of Defense and the President and the Saceur (the commander of the NATO forces who was first General Norstad [Lauris Norstad] and then General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer] during the President's Administration) on this and related issues?

SORENSEN: I gather that there was a disagreement. I gather that General Norstad had a different point of view with respect to the "forward strategy" – is that what it was called? – and the NATO role. The President never regarded it as a very serious disagreement. I got the impression that he thought that when it came down to specific contingency plans or specific actions beefing up NATO forces, Norstad was in agreement with the Administration. Bu I think he also felt that Norstad had been over there a useful period of time and that I might be better all around to enable him to retire when the time came so that a general who was more likely to reflect the Kennedy-McNamara point of view and less likely to forget his American origins would be helpful.

KAYSEN: The most important problem and activity in our relations with our allies in the President's Administration was in the field of trade. Now the first great decision that we made was to go for a very substantial increase in the President's powers to negotiate in this field and to do it in 1962, although some of the important circumstances on which the nature of trade negotiations depend – namely British entry into the Common Market – weren't yet clear. What led the President to the decision to ask for a trade bill and to ask for one with greatly expanded powers in 1962?

SORENSEN: There was considerable discussion in the fall of 1961 as to what our posture should be. The Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act did expire in 1962 and did have to be renewed or replaced, and the discussion boiled down to two alternatives. One was a simple one-year extension while the government prepared its position and observed developments abroad. And the second was to go strongly for a trade expansion bill. The President almost instinctively rejected the first alternative as being foolish and unnecessary. He felt there was going to be a major congressional fight on any trade bill and that we might as well make a fight for a big one and be on the offensive instead of on the defensive, instead of waiting and hesitating and postponing the time to go for the major bill.

KAYSEN: In fact when the bill was passed, the position of the Administration appeared to be stronger than it had been anticipated. Is that a correct description?

SORENSEN: The position of the Administration?

KAYSEN: The ability of the Administration to get a bill through Congress. [Laughter]

SORENSEN: No, I wouldn't say that. I would say it was very hard to work to get that bill through Congress. It required a good many private conversations, negotiations on the part of the President with various congressmen and senators concerned about various products.

KAYSEN: Yes, the cotton textile agreement is one price of the trade bill. Were there others?

SORENSEN: Yes, Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] knows the details more than I, but there were conversations with Wilbur Mills and Bob Kerr [Robert S. Kerr], Hubert Humphrey, Ed Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie], a good many – covering a multitude of sins.

KAYSEN: No, but the fact remains that the grant of authority that the President got was really quite a broad grant of authority.

SORENSEN: Oh yes, it was, and none of the private commitments which were made were of a very serious nature. None of them weakened his authority or increased protectionism.

KAYSEN: What did they do, Ted?

SORENSEN: I would say basically they were agreements to not make the situation any worse for that particular product than it already was.

KAYSEN: It was a question of holding the level of protection on some products constant essentially as the price of the bill?

SORENSEN: Yes.

KAYSEN: Now the trade negotiations were not really fairly started during the President's term, and they're only getting seriously started now. Can you

say what kind of expectation the President had in relation to these negotiations after the exclusion of the U.K. from the Common Market? Did this change his anticipations considerably or not?

SORENSEN: Yes, I think it did. The President was never intimately interested, in my opinion, in the economics of trade, certainly not as much as he was interested in politics of trade. He was very much aware of the domestic politics, and did his best to not only obtain Congressional support but public support for the Trade Expansion Bill. He was also interested in the international political aspects. Those international political aspects bogged down and became less immediate and less challenging and less exciting when the U.K. was excluded from the Common Market and the French were generally intransigent about accelerating the pace of Western unity. Consequently, while the President continued to stay abreast of trade developments, I think some of his interest and enthusiasm lessened.

KAYSEN: Then do you think that with the increased wisdom of hindsight, the President felt he had overcommitted himself, or bet too hard on the proposition that the British would get into the Common Market?

SORENSEN: Not at all. I think that was the only assumption on which we could proceed. It was important to Western unity that Britain be admitted to the Common Market, and Western unity is important to American foreign policy. Consequently, a major piece of legislation in the United States could

not seem to be in doubt as to Britain's inclusion. It instead had to assume that this was going to take place and to so couch the language of the legislation. Once Britain had been excluded, the President felt that he could not start over again with the Congress to obtain a new amendment to the bill expanding his authority. And the grant of authority, which remained in the bill – even with the British exclusion – was many times greater than that which had been ever previously granted by the Congress. So that it was still a worthwhile effort, and we still have several years to realize its potential.

KAYSEN: Once or twice after the bill was passed, it was the President's task to respond to requests for special protection under the previous law by industries which felt their economic situations gravely threatened by imports. Once in particular, when he increased tariffs on carpets and glass, he got a very severe international reaction, especially from the Belgians. Do you remember any discussions of this incident, or weren't you involved at all?

SORENSEN: I was only involved in the fringes. I know the President put off that determination as long as he could, and finally felt that under the law, if the principle of selectivity was to have any meaning at all, he had no other choice but to grant the protection recommended by the Tariff Commission. He was aware of

the fact that there would be compensating tariff adjustments sought by the other countries and felt he had no other choice, partly out of domestic politics.

KAYSEN: Did you ever hear him discuss the difficulty of making a decision that is trying to balance off the domestic political consideration with the foreign policy negotiating consideration in this particular instance?

SORENSEN: No.

KAYSEN: The other major economic issue within the Alliance – although not strictly within the Alliance – was money, the international monetary arrangements, starting really with the gold crisis at the time of the campaign. What was your impression about the President's concern with the gold problem?

SORENSEN: I always thought he was over concerned about the gold problem and the balance of payments problem in general and I, from time to time, would (in half-jesting fashion) tell him so. And he would always respond very seriously that if there were ever a serious crisis – which he hoped there wouldn't be – he would be proven right for having been so concerned. Certainly, he spent a considerable amount of time and effort in those three years worrying about balance of payments and gold, as much as he did to any international crisis.

KAYSEN: How do you account for this? Why did he spend so much effort on it?

SORENSEN: I can account for it only because he must have been very impressed in the beginning, on the basis of conversations with friends in the financial community – including his father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], Henry Alexander, Earl Smith [E.T. Smith], Douglas Dillon – that this was a problem which could some day erupt and undermine both his domestic and his foreign policy, which gave the French and other countries a stick with which to beat us if they wished, which threatened the continuation of our military and other commitments around the world, and which could necessitate domestic economic adjustments that would impair the recovery and growth schedules he was planning. And those are all important reasons, but he gave to them an urgency of crisis proportions which I often wondered whether they deserved.

KAYSEN: Then it was your observation that the President was not wholly persuaded by those of his advisors – especially from the Council of Economic Advisors and me – who sought to convince him that the superior bargaining power in a situation of potential crisis was ours rather than that of the Europeans and others who held large claims on it.

SORENSEN: I would say he did not accept that idea.

KAYSEN: So in your judgment that the President's first discussions of this problem which probably came during the campaign were the…

SORENSEN: No, I think he had comparatively little discussion of it during the campaign. We prepared and issued a paper on the gold and balance of payments problem…

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KAYSEN: George Ball, as I remember it, was on the task force draft…

SORENSEN: During the campaign?

KAYSEN: Yes.

SORENSEN: I thought Ken Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] was the principal figure, but I don't know. At any rate I don't believe the President had any deep interests or convictions on the subject during the campaign, so that I think these conversations took place during the transition and during the early weeks of the Administration.

KAYSEN: In the long, you might almost say continuous, discussions on international financial issues that went on during the Administration, there was often a great deal of disagreement between the Treasury, on the one hand, and the State Department and the Council of Economic Advisors, on the other. The President, when it came to the issue of what should be done, almost always sided with the Treasury. How would you explain that?

SORENSEN: First of all, let me say there was also sometimes disagreement between the President and everyone else, inasmuch (and this I also spoke to him often somewhat jestingly about) as he was the only one who did not look upon capital controls with some abhorrence [laughter] and could not see why we would be restricting everything else and still permitting capital to flow as freely abroad as we did. In the last meeting I attended on this subject, the idea of having some sort of informal clearance committee, while perhaps not going far enough for him, showed that this idea was beginning to gain some strength in the rest of the administration.

I might also say that the President at one point was concerned about the split between the State Department and the Treasury Department on this issue because he was afraid it would become a matter of personalities – and to some extent it had. George Ball, as Under Secretary of State, was certainly an expert on these matters, and he felt that they involved foreign policy at the highest levels, and therefore he and his Department should have a voice in determining them and in conducting any negotiations. The Secretary of Treasury, on the other hand, and his Under Secretary in these matters, Mr. Roosa [Robert V. Roosa], played these cards

very close to their chests, considered it a specialized matter on which only they could speak with competence or with others. And this did produce some friction.

At one meeting at which the problem was discussed, and the future possibilities of Western cooperation on this issue were discussed, the President concluded the meeting by cautioning all those present to maintain their silence about the matter. On the whole, security was completely kept on the balance of payments issue, partly because of the people who participated in the meetings and partly because it was a subject of not much interest to the general press. And as a result, the general press was not aware of the time and interest which the President invested in this subject. After he had cautioned those present to be quiet, Secretary Dillon said, "I'm afraid that's too late, Mr. President. It's already out. Jean Monet has been talking about it." – (something of that sort). And the President said, "Well how did it get out?" And Dillon said, "The State Department told them." George Ball instantly retorted with some vehemence that this was a lie, and there was a brief verbal clash which, however, was quickly and quietly ended with the President saying he didn't want anyone to talk about it.

In his office afterwards, the President said that he was surprised and concerned by the outbreak. I think he said he hoped it did not mean there was bad blood between Ball and Dillon and added, "If there is, it is the only instance of it that I know in this Administration." That might have been a slightly optimistic conclusion, but I think it was generally correct.

At any rate, to answer your question, I think the President sided with Dillon in these cases rather reluctantly. But I think he felt that inasmuch as the problem was largely one which Dillon and the Dillon forces would have to carry out, it was one on which he could not directly overrule Dillon. He might try to move him and persuade him, and he did on occasion, but he did not want to overrule Dillon, did not want Dillon to protest publicly or to the Congress or to the financial community. He certainly did not want him to resign over the issue because any response of that sort might only have disturbed the financial community and bankers – both at home and abroad – and worsened the dollar situation. This is somewhat comparable to the statement the President made on one occasion to the Joint Chiefs of Staff about a possible military action in which he made it clear he wanted their concurrences in whatever decision was taken, inasmuch as they would have the responsibility of carrying it out.

KAYSEN: So that this was really a very general point from the President's point of view of how he had to manage the executive branch and administrative apparatus. In connection with international monetary matters, did the proposition that the President had an opportunity to bring about great changes in the international monetary system – to be a reformer, in other words – which was urged on him from time to time by the State Department and the Council of Economic Advisors, have any great appeal to him, or was this something in which he wasn't much interested, the prospect of reforming the international payments system as a goal in itself?

SORENSEN: I think he had some interest in it. I think that was clear because he would talk about it from time to time even outside these many meetings. But on the other hand, I doubt that it was very high on his list of priorities, partly because there were so many others already on the list of international priorities, partly because his experience in trying to reform other central bankers would not get very far.

KAYSEN: One of the specific foreign policy problems in which the President had to put a lot of effort in relation to Congress was the U.N. bond issue. This was a matter in which the President was convinced it was of first importance, and he at least initially did not meet a similar conviction in the Congress. How did he handle that problem of trying to make the Congress see what he saw in relation to the importance of keeping the U.N. afloat?

SORENSEN: The President felt that the case for the U.N. bond issue was relatively clear but had been badly damaged by the presentation of the State Department. It was not the State Department's finest hour, really, from the very beginning. The United States support for the bond issue proposition had practically been forced upon the President by the negotiations conducted by our delegation to the U.N. The announcement that it was going to be part of our legislative program came from the Assistant Secretary of State for U.N. affairs at the time when the contents of the legislative program were being discussed by the President at Palm Beach. The reasons for the U.N. bond issue were stated in somewhat different terms by the State Department and Ambassador Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] in their presentation than they had been by the President in his. All of this contributed to the prospects

that the bill might be defeated which by that time would have been a very serious setback.

The President's personal intervention was touched off by a speech which Senator Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] from Washington made which appeared to have a rather anti-U.N. ring to it and which was seized upon by opponents of the bond issue. The President was leaving on a trip, and he asked me to be in touch with Jackson's office as to why he had done this and whether he would help us on the bond issue. Jackson's reply basically was that he felt these things needed to be said but that now that both sides would trust him, and he could be of help to us in the bond issue fight. The President asked him to follow up on that. This led in turn to my participating in some negotiations with Mansfield, Aiken, Dirksen and Sparkman [John J. Sparkman]. Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] was then involved in his campaign for reelection and was not discussing anything as controversial as the United Nations. As a result, we worked out the amended version which the Senate passed and which was acceptable to the President. It then passed the House.

KAYSEN: What was the explanation, other than the obvious one, if any, of the failure of coordination here previously?

SORENSEN: Just the obvious one.

KAYSEN: Had the State Department warned the President in advance of their public statements and when the negotiations in New York started that this issue would inevitably arise as a legislative issue, or was it a surprise?

SORENSEN: That I don't know. I wasn't involved in that stage.

KAYSEN: To what extent was this the kind of issue in which the President might have tried to deal with it by public argument rather than private negotiation?

SORENSEN: It might very well have been made a major matter of public argument. There was a mention of it in the President's State of the Union message and in a separate message to the Congress. And I have no doubt that had it proved necessary, the President would have waged a public campaign for support of the bill. There was no reason to do it as long as it was making satisfactory progress in the Congress – and it was

difficult to do it because it was not really a major bill, merely a temporary stopgap in U.N. financing. While it was essential to get it – and undoubtedly the President would have been able to explain it in terms of support for or abandonment of the United Nations – the fact that the presentation of argument had been somewhat confused dimmed those possibilities. In general the President's feeling was that this was a Democratic congress with which he had to get along and that there was no advantage to be served by opening a cold war with the Congress by appealing over their heads to their constituents, and that there were very few issues on which very many votes could be changed by Presidential public appeal.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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