

**William C. Foster Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 08/05/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** William C. Foster  
**Interviewer:** Charles T. Morrissey  
**Date of Interview:** August 5, 1964  
**Place of Interview:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 40 pages\*

**Biographical Note**

(1897 - 1984) Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (1961 - 1969), discusses nuclear disarmament during the Kennedy administration, relations with Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, and meetings and plans regarding the Test Ban Treaty, among other issues.

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**Suggested Citation**

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\*Two page 7s are noted in the original transcript.

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TO THE  
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(signed) William C. Foster  
William C. Foster

(date) 1/13/65

(accepted) Wynne L. Foster  
Archivist of the United States

(date) 1/21/65



21 February 1985

Mrs. William C. Foster  
3304 R Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mrs. Foster:

Thank you for your letter of February 14, stating your wish to lift restrictions on Mr. Foster's oral history interview for the library. We will handle the interview that way from now on.

Sincerely,

  
JOAN L. O'CONNOR  
Coordinator, Oral History  
Processing

JLO'C:eag

Mrs. WILLIAM CHAPMAN FOSTER  
3304 R STREET, NORTHWEST  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20007

February 14, 1985

Ms. Joan L. O'Connor  
Coordinator, Oral History Processing  
John F. Kennedy Library  
National Archives/Records Service  
Columbia Point  
Boston, Mass. 02125

65-34

Dear Ms. O'Connor:

Thank you for your letter of December 6th regarding the disposition of my husband's Oral History Interview with the Kennedy Library. I have been traveling in Florida and Haiti and am sorry it has taken so long to respond to your kind letter.

I note my husband had designated Adrian Fisher, and then Robert Kennedy, to authorize access to the transcript in the event of his death. As both of these men are no longer living, and as you note that he stipulated the term of restriction as twenty years--expiring January 1985--I feel the restrictions should be lifted and that you should treat the transcript as you would normally. I assume this means it will now be available to anyone requesting it.

Thank you for sending me a copy of the transcript and for your help.

Sincerely,

*Beulah R. Foster*

Mrs. William C. Foster

William C. Foster – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

With

William C. Foster

August 5, 1964  
Washington, D.C.

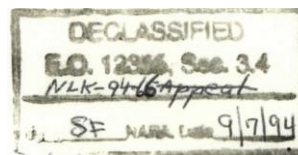
By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Do you recall the first time that you met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

FOSTER: The first time I had substantive contact with was when he phoned in the fall of 1960. He wanted me to join a group that he was going to consider for his military and disarmament problems. Coincidentally, I had also been called twenty-four hours before by Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] to join the same type of group, which I accepted. Since I am a Republican, I told Mr. Kennedy that I would always be available to help, but I didn't think it was quite proper to sit formally on both advisory groups. I didn't hear from him directly again until five or six weeks after his inauguration as President.

During the period after his election it would seem that





he had thought about me once or twice because I was successively rumored to be in line for about six of the Cabinet posts and other spots. When I finally saw him after his inauguration at a cocktail party he asked: "What are you doing?" I said I was busy setting up a new company. He said he would like to talk to me and to get in touch with Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] about coming in to see him. I went, and what the President wanted to talk to me about was whether I would take on the job of negotiating in Geneva on disarmament and a nuclear test ban. He disarmingly apologized for any embarrassment rumored appointments had caused me but said that there had been substance to some of the rumors.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall the approximate time of that first contact?

FOSTER: Yes, this must have been late February or early March of 1961.

MORRISSEY: I was referring to the phone call in the fall of 1960.

FOSTER: It was after the convention because he was by then the Democratic nominee.

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MORRISSEY: But before the election?

FOSTER: It was probably in early September because I got the call at Point O'Woods, our summer place. I did get a couple of calls, incidentally, from the proposed group after it was set up on special questions which I gladly answered. I believe Paul Nitze [Paul Henry Nitze] called me on these. I was happy to answer because disarmament was a non-partisan activity and I had a deep interest in it and had had for many years.

I told the President when I first called on him at the White House, quite frankly, that it would be very difficult indeed for me to take on a full-time government position immediately. I would, however, do what I could to support the activity unofficially. Jack McCloy [John Jay McCloy] had already been named as the Special Assistant on Disarmament but could not remain indefinitely. The President suggested that I get in touch with McCloy, since I might be helpful to him in his efforts to set up legislation to establish this Agency. I think that about then the President got Arthur Dean [Arthur Hobson Dean] to take the negotiating job.

I wasn't in a position to do this myself since I had just

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set up a new company, a lot of people depended on me, and I couldn't leave it.

I talked to President Kennedy for twenty minutes or a half hour, during which, incidentally, we recalled that we had raced against each other on Great South Bay when he was a young "Star Boat" sailor. I was international measurer of the "Star" class at the time.

He appeared to be quite proud of his ability as a “Star” sailor. I’m not sure he was that good, but it was a very tough class.

The President said he wished I would talk to Mac Bundy in more detail. I did so, and I told Bundy why I couldn’t take the negotiating job at Geneva, but that I was deeply interested in the general subject and if indeed there was to be established an agency of the sort the President had outlined in general terms, I would be interested in working in that agency. Mac said that that might be some time off. I said that would be helpful to me because if I had six months to get my company established I would be in a better position to take on a full-time job. Mac suggested that I get in touch with McCloy, which I did.

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McCloy is an old friend. I had had various associations with him over many years. Among other things, he and I were both disarmament advisers to John Foster Dulles and then to Christian Herter [Christian A. Herter]. Both of them had several such advisers: Robert Lovett [Robert A. Lovett], Jim Killian [James R. Killian, Jr.], Al Gruenther [Alfred M. Gruenther], as well as McCloy and myself. McCloy said that he appreciated my interest and would be in touch with me. I said that I would be glad to give background help.

I was busy on company affairs for the next sixty to ninety days. I met with McCloy and his colleagues once or twice on general issues. I think perhaps in May, Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner], the President’s Science Adviser, called and asked me to get together some of the people that I had worked with—scientists, experts—who were with me on the Gaither Committee or in the Surprise Attack Conference to take a look at what McCloy might recommend to the President based on the suggestions from panels that he had set up. This was the origin of the so-called Foster Panel, probably in May 1961. Its function was to review the other panel reports and come up with specific recommendations for new arms control and disarmament possibilities. I held

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meetings of this group, sometimes as many as four or five in a week, and then during a month or so of review we would formulate other proposals and finally presented our general conclusion to the President and others.

Starting about the middle of June, I spent most of my time here quietly in a side office. I was also trying to run several other businesses during a day or so a week, or something like this, and also helping in shaping the legislation and getting it through.

In early September, as head of the panel, I had discussions with Messrs. Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and Roswell Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] and agreed on a number of things that were later approved by President Kennedy, some of which we are presenting, incidentally, now on nuclear delivery vehicles.

Shortly after this McCloy’s office was called on by the President to get material together for his important speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 1961. I sat in on the Zorin-McCloy [Valerian Zorin] meetings which were held here in Washington and grew out of Adlai Stevenson’s [Adlai E. Stevenson] negotiations with

Foreign Minister Gromyko [Andrei Andreevich Gromyko] in the spring of 1961 at the United

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Nations. The President had instructed Governor Stevenson to try to work out arrangements to go back at the disarmament and nuclear testing problem, the disarmament talks having broken down in the summer of 1960 at the time of the Soviet walk-out. Adlai Stevenson and Minister Gromyko had a number of meetings in which they agreed it would be useful to convene but details should be worked out bilaterally. Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin was appointed by the Soviets to work out the arrangements with McCloy, the President's Adviser on Disarmament. It was agreed to start meeting in June in Washington and then continue in Moscow. Their meetings concluded in New York in early September just before the U.N. reconvened. McCloy, Zorin and colleagues (including me) worked out a so-called "Joint Statement of Agreed Principles" which has been sort of a bible or set of parameters within which, in a general way, the general disarmament negotiations have taken place.

The President wanted his speech at the opening of the General Assembly in September of 1961 largely devoted to disarmament. The Committee of Principals had several meetings

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to determine what the United States might properly suggest and which might hopefully be the basis for some agreements in this field. The President then met with the Committee of Principals on this and I attended. This took place a few days before he made the U.N. speech on September 25, 1961, and he, after pointed questioning, accepted what the Committee of Principals had presented.

I took exception to certain limitations on what we might well do and was the single voice against the ten members of the Committee of Principals with relationship to more ambitious reductions of nuclear delivery vehicles. I said that I hoped the President would not close his mind to the thought that there might be asymmetric reductions of nuclear delivery vehicles where we had a substantial strategic superiority and where we could probably only make progress in disarmament if the Soviets were not required to match exactly our reductions. And I hoped he wouldn't close that door. He said: "Well, I won't close the door, but as for now I am going along with the Committee of Principals' plan." At least he left the door open

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for further approaches on this matter and it was discussed many times subsequently with him. Mr. McCloy and his colleagues and I had come up with the basic points for the speech and, as I recall it, we met again with the President during the week before September 25.

That day Congress passed the Act establishing this Agency and it was signed by the President in his apartment at the Carlyle Hotel on September 26, 1961, the day after he made the United Nations speech. He invited McCloy, Adrian Fisher [Adrian S. Fisher] and me

there for the signing of the law, 87-297, and then announced my appointment as head of the new Agency. The picture I have here on the wall with the President, McCloy, Adrian Fisher, and myself was just after the signing of the Agency Bill and the naming of me as Director and Fisher as Deputy.

Thereafter during the fall there were a number of meetings on further development of our activities, the situation arising from Soviet resumption of testing, U.S. plans for resumption of tests, and related items on which this Agency developed

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details used by Stevenson in subsequent speeches in the General Assembly. The President took a personal interest in these also and all speeches were approved by him. I had a number of meetings with the President alone and others with him and Mac Bundy, with Dean Rusk, with the National Security Council and with the Committee of Principals. In several of those meetings we proposed to him points for a basic charter for general and complete disarmament more detailed than the general outline that was presented by him at the United Nations on September 25. Most of the negotiating at the United Nations during the fall of '61 was designed to establish a forum for later negotiations which were finally established to start in March of 1962 at the so-called ENDC, the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee.

We then worked out final details of the U.S. plan for general and complete disarmament and that plan was presented at Geneva after many discussions with the Committee of Principals, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others, and finally received Presidential approval. This was not a simple, easy, thoroughly agreed path along which we moved.

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MORRISSEY: Much of the development of the planning for arms control and disarmament was occurring at a time when the outlook seemed very dim. If I recall correctly, the Soviets renewed testing on September 1 and the Act went through Congress on September 25.

FOSTER: In addition, the Berlin Wall was built on August 13, 1961.

MORRISSEY: Right. In other words you seemed to be setting out an agenda at a time when it seemed quite dubious that the agenda might really provide the basis for progress.

FOSTER: Well, that would seem to be the case, but we approached it slightly differently and the President accepted our philosophy. We asked what better time is there to move toward arms limitations and ways to develop peace than when it looks as though you will really need it, and when, had you had these things in hand, you might have prevented the developments from taking place? We pressed that point of view in the Congress and many members supported it on a non-partisan basis. We got Bob Lovett, Al Gruenther, Tommy Gates [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.], Chris Herter, Jerry

Wadsworth [James J. Wadsworth] and Cabot Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] to testify, and, of course, many

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Democrats supported it. In spite of the period of tension, or maybe because of it, I was able to get all these Republicans, plus a letter from President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], and good support from Richard Nixon.

It is true that this was a dark period and one would have thought that this might kill the chances for our type of establishment being set up. Actually, the darkness of the period formed a backdrop against which our activities seemed clearly more essential than it might otherwise have been and the bill of goods was sold with the strong personal support of the President.

MORRISSEY: Did you do most of this seeking of Republican support yourself?

FOSTER: A great deal of it, plus, of course, Mr. McCloy's visit to President Eisenhower which I believe President Kennedy suggested. I talked to Lovett, Gates, Herter, Nixon, Lodge, Nelson Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] and others. I also talked to Democrats, but I was little better set to get the Republicans than others were.

You're quite right in recalling the renewal of testing. A great many of our discussions during the fall with President Kennedy bore on whether we should rush into testing right away.

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He personally continued to feel we should proceed slowly on that and attempt to get the Soviets to stop their testing even after it started. He was particularly insistent in view of their threat to explode the very large weapons. He and Prime Minister Macmillan [M. Harold Macmillan] made a special effort to try to get them to stop that because of the amount of fallout that would be occasioned thereby. He tried by personal confidential letters to Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] from himself and Macmillan. We prepared drafts of a number of letters on this subject that the President sent along to Chairman Khrushchev.

The U.S. was also studying during this time ways in which we could test quickly as a last resort but delaying in the hope that we might join with the U.S.S.R. and U.K. in a renewed limitation. When it became apparent that the U.S.S.R. was going to go on with testing, and when it became apparent that they had made considerable progress in their series of tests, it was decided by the President that the U.S., in spite of its desire to terminate testing, had to resume. This was done in April, 1962. The President held off approval until after we had started

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negotiations again at Geneva, but he reluctantly instructed AEC to proceed within a month of the March 1962 reconvening of negotiations in Geneva. We continued to let it be known even there that if the Soviet Union would join in a testing limitation, we still would not start again. The President finally decided the U.S. had to start because the Soviet Union would not terminate their testing nor agree to limit themselves in any way.

Much discussion with the President during the fall of 1961 and the early spring of 1962 had to do with how we would test—whether there was any proper way to get the Soviets to stop. Then, during the spring, there was a series of meetings with the President. The dates are in my engagement calendar but on many of them I don't remember the specific subject, but there were entirely on our areas of responsibilities.

MORRISSEY: Do any of those prompt any specific recollections of any thing of note?

NORDNESS: You might mention the speech of March 2 in which he announced the decision to resume testing and the conditions under which we would be prepared to stop testing. You had quite a bit to do with that.

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FOSTER: Yes, I did. The President asked me to chair a committee on those, and I reported for the committee on February 26 and 27. I met with the President and with Mac Bundy, and I think Dean Rusk and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. There had also been an NSC meeting in January to debate the question whether to test and when. There would be minutes on that, of course, January 18. But the February 26 and 27 meetings were for helping draft his March 2 announcement. Then there was another meeting on March 6, an NSC meeting at the White House, which I did have some notes on: "...the U.S. is prepared to reduce strategic nuclear delivery vehicles in Stage I without reducing other major armaments." This is the "open door" that I said I had gotten the President to agree on—alternative methods of reducing to agreed levels. I don't know whether you want this much detail or not.

MORRISSEY: Sure, the more the better.

FOSTER: The President continued to be interested in methods of reducing strategic nuclear delivery vehicles even then and what limitations should be placed on

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production and testing of items which were to be reduced. This formed the background and basis, really, for President Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] nuclear freeze, so-called, the major point among the proposals on January 21, 1964, at Geneva. But that was discussed with President Kennedy as far back as March 6, 1962, you see.

The question did arise whether if Red China was not a party to the treaty, could the U.S. take some of these actions? President Kennedy had great concern with the future threat

of Red China and he considered many things which might minimize that threat because he, looking down the years, felt that China might well become a greater threat than the Soviet Union. He had some hope of common activities with the Soviet Union against China and so many things we discussed bore on Red China.

One of his major worries in this regard was how to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons. How could we, the British, the Soviets, France—how could we keep this tremendous and most threatening of all forces in the hands that presently control it? It was felt that at least there was some degree of restraint on the part of the leaders of those countries,

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whereas in China, obviously, there was none. China was saying: “Let’s have a nuclear war because if everyone else is killed, there will still be 300 million Chinese left,” and this sort of thing.

The President decided that it would indicate his interest and concern by having the reconvened disarmament talks commence at the level of Foreign Ministers. He had also indicated that he himself was willing to meet if real progress could be assured. The ENDC was to begin on March 14, 1962, and Rusk (along with Arthur Dean, who was to remain as head of the delegation) and I went for about the first three weeks. We met with the President, of course, just before we left, for his instructions. We left on March 9, and that day Rusk, Fisher, Dean, and I met with the President. When Rusk and I came back later in March, we had another NSC meeting on March 28 in which we reported to the President and the NSC on the various things that took place in those three weeks. On April 6 we met at the White House with the President to talk about the major U.S. proposal—the draft outline of a treaty for general and complete disarmament in three stages, which we

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were going to table in Geneva. He gave final approval. This same treaty is still on the table in Geneva and under negotiation.

On April 18, 1962, the day on which it was tabled at Geneva, the President and the Vice President met again with the Committee of Principals to put the final blessing on that proposed treaty. It is an historic document and has resulted in taking the steam out of Mr. Khrushchev’s famous 1959 speech in which he proposed general and complete disarmament in four years. And by virtue of this treaty, which was worked out in this Agency in detail, there is little propaganda value left in their original proposal. While our draft is only the basic outline of such a treaty, it nonetheless highlighted, for purposes of education generally and particularly of the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Conference, the complexities and questions that have to be resolved before the world can move toward general and complete disarmament with its need for peacekeeping forces and settlement of disputes by legal means.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any specific recollections of the meetings with Kennedy and some of the people

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you mention here that would indicate something about Kennedy's style of operation, his ways of making decisions, his general outlook on the entire problem of disarmament?

FOSTER: He was always the quickest man in the room to grasp the implication of a basic proposal. He would listen to people, but he didn't listen too long if one began to wander and, yet, he was able always without hurting anyone's feelings to turn the discussion to something else. He had a deep and abiding sense of the importance of moving in the direction of arms control and disarmament and he was able to inspire others to join him. He considered this field one in which he personally understood the basic requirements, having worked in it for a long time. He told me this on many occasions. It wasn't only that this was in the Democratic Platform for 1960—this objective was in his mind during his Congressional days since World War II. Therefore, he did not participate just as an observer. He participated, shifted, added, moved things, sometimes by a quantum leap beyond what had been developed. He would take off from that as a platform and make bold additional suggestions. He didn't want just short

[-18-]

briefs. He wanted to have details when we presented a paper. As you know, he was a rapid and omnivorous reader.

While we tried to save his time as much as possible, he required detailed presentation and would ask about technical details. This is one of the fields on which he spent much personal time. I think because of that, Rusk has testified publicly that about half of his time as Secretary of State was devoted to these issues and this is because the President himself was always probing: "What are you doing on this? How do you propose to meet this? Is it possible if we did this that such and such might happen?" He had personal competence in the field which gave him confidence and he never feared to jump in, but at the same time he let his colleagues argue. I could argue with the Joint Chiefs before him. He would let me carry the argument, then he would say: "Well, all right, there is a basic question here, and let's have this looked at from both viewpoints. What we have got to do is to weigh the alternative risks of not doing something as contrasted with what Bill is talking about in cutting back military resources."

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And this is the way he appraised the Test Ban Treaty. He said: "I know there are risks if we stop, but what are the risks if we go on, and I want you, Dr. Seaborg [Glenn T. Seaborg], on the weapons viewpoint, and I want you, General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer], (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the spring, summer and fall of 1962) to give the military appraisal, and you, Bob McNamara, I want you to balance these two. Then I want Bill's input as to negotiability or what might be achieved if we go on with this."



During 1962, many of my discussions with the President were mostly about the likelihood of negotiating a Test Ban Treaty. He called Arthur Dean back a couple of times when there were questions in the Congress. Dean and I went before the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy to explain our proposals and the Soviet reactions. The President wanted from Dean his first hand opinion on Geneva negotiations. However, that session of the Conference recessed without a Treaty. It was to reopen in July and we hoped to come back with some additional suggestions.

In June and July of 1962 the Vela Program (on which up to now almost a quarter of a billion dollars has been spent)

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produced some scientific breakthroughs that we felt would justify our relaxing somewhat the requirements for on-site inspection. This would require a basic political decision as to whether the United States—having, for security reasons, pressed during the Eisenhower Administration for 19 or 20 on-site inspections and for some very elaborate systems—could, based on these new scientific findings, reduce the requirements for a verification system and still protect our security interests. This was a big question and was the same as that which went to the Senate in 1963 after the Test Ban Treaty in the three environments was signed.

I recommended strongly to President Kennedy that we accept those relaxations in our proposals and after several meetings, hearing us, the members of the Committee of Principals and the NSC, the President authorized tabling two treaties at Geneva, one covering comprehensive limitations on testing and one applying to testing in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater only. They were both tabled on August 27, 1962.

The President knew that this step would raise political

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difficulties. He instructed me to call on approximately 60 senators personally. I told them why and how the President had decided on doing this, the basis for these changes. Some of them accepted it, some of them argued with it. I appeared before the Foreign Relations Committee, the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, and the Preparedness Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee.

The Preparedness Subcommittee instituted a long series of hearings which started with the Secretary of State and myself and went through the Department of Defense officials and all of the Joint Chiefs, plus anybody else who wanted to talk on the subject. Those hearings lasted from the fall of 1962 (the report has just been distributed) all through the Test Ban debate in 1963, but the President because of his knowledge of the Senate wanted me to “hand-carry” this proposal to various members with the statement that the President personally had considered all aspects. He was confident his decision was right, but he wanted me to discuss this with his old colleagues and others on the Hill. He took deep interest in reports I made to him on the reactions of particular Senators and he got into the act by personally reassuring some of those to whom he was

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close. The actual negotiation of the Treaty followed events in Cuba in the fall of 1962.

As to Cuba itself, I sat in on perhaps four or five of the Excom meetings. I was called in by the President because among alternatives for getting rid of weapons in Cuba was a denuclearized zone, a proposal in which Cuba would be joined by all of the other Latin American states. This denuclearized zone was considered as a possible counter-proposal to Khrushchev, to be associated with an inspection system to which the Soviets had tentatively agreed. The President wanted our ideas on overt inspection since ACDA had spent much of its research funds in this field and we had a lot of background on the subject. So I sat in on four or five of those meetings, including the famous Friday night meeting when the President received the capitulating letter.

I had an opportunity to observe the President during those meetings where the possibility was faced over three or four days of pulling out all of the nuclear stops. And while he became progressively more tired looking, he never lost his poise, his judgment, or his restraint in giving the Soviets a

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chance to withdraw. He kept the military from striking prematurely. They were apparently inclined to favor, on several of these occasions, sinking some of the Russian ships, plus air strikes on land. The President was absolutely in control of himself, the situation, and the group around the table. I didn't attend all Excom meetings, particularly at the beginning. I had to go out of town to make a speech for Secretary Rusk when he had a "diplomatic illness" following discovery of missiles in Cuba. But I did get in on the last several of them and watched the drama unfold.

Probably because of that Cuban episode, the President received a confidential letter on December 29 from Mr. Khrushchev accepting a suggestion of President Kennedy's that now that Cuba "is behind us" the U.S. and U.S.S.R. should take steps to move ahead in arms control. Incidentally, this part of the Kennedy letter was prepared by us at the President's request. Khrushchev didn't answer the U.S. letter for about two months, but then he said: "Let us first take a look at nuclear testing. I am prepared to negotiate."

The President referred that letter to us for a draft response. We prepared a response covering a proposed Presidential

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instruction that he appoint me to meet with a representative of Mr. Khrushchev's in New York, Washington or Geneva. This was accepted by the Soviets and initiated some three weeks of negotiations on this subject in New York and in Washington. I was in contact with the President almost every day in person or by telephone after the negotiations began to report or for further instructions.

In Mr. Khrushchev's letter he said that he would accept 2 to 3 on-site inspections, which was a revision of the Soviet position before Cuba. At the same time we had reasonable scientific assurance that it would be safe for us to come down to something under 10 on-site inspections. My job was to try to see if we couldn't come out with a compromise between the

two figures of 10 and 3. However, the Soviets were unwilling to move at all. Therefore, I informed the President that I thought the Soviets were going to break these negotiations off and return to Geneva. As far as I was concerned, I felt we should accept the break because there was no use of offering our last figure if it wouldn't move them. It would thus be better to return to

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Geneva and negotiate there where we could go on without as much pressure. The President agreed. They did break up our conference about 2 days later and we had still not revealed our lowest figure. We never did during those discussions.

Then the President sent me back to Geneva where I spent 4 or 5 weeks negotiating with Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov [Vasily V. Kuznetsov], primarily on the comprehensive test ban. In private meetings with him, on the President's instructions, I lowered our "bid" somewhat but had the Soviets shown any interest I was told by the President that he might be willing to go a little further. We did finally publicly offer a figure of 7 on-site inspections in hope of shaking this loose. Those were the President's instructions. He had asked me whether at that time I would be able to get an agreement if we "go to 5," and I said, "No, Mr. President, we won't." So he said all right, let's stick on 7. That was what was released and that is the present public number.

We stayed at Geneva doing what came naturally, which was to continue the negotiations. In May, however, the President decided he and Macmillan would make one more strong attempt to really make progress. So again the President went into the

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letter-writing business.

We participated as usual, with the White House staff, in drafting the next letter, again trying for a test ban. Then I was able to sit in on the drafting of the June 10, 1963, speech, the American University speech. You recall that Khrushchev responded to that with, "Why don't we negotiate a limited test ban?" Averall Harriman [William Averall Harriman] was selected to go to Moscow for the negotiating because of his old acquaintance with Mr. Khrushchev. On instructions from the President I was to stay here as chief of staff to back him up. Our Agency provided most of the Harriman staff, since this was our field.

Harriman's deputy was my deputy, Adrian Fisher, who contributed tremendously to the actual negotiation of the treaty. We met each day after the team arrived in Moscow with the President to consider the reports of progress and to prepare each day's instructions. That was, as I recall, on the 18<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1963, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> Harriman got back with the initialed treaty in accordance with the President's instructions. Dean Rusk and I flew to Hyannisport to meet

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Harriman and then to meet with the President there.

The President approved my joining on the delegation which went to Moscow for the signing, and several of us met again with the President about the Moscow trip on August 2. Later, in the preparation for the hearings before the Senate, I had several discussions with him as to our basis for confidence in the treaty and for an appraisal of who was for or against in the Senate.

The last time I saw the President was November 18, when he met with the Committee of Principals just before he went on his Texas trip. Earlier I had gone to the White House for the treaty ratification, which President Kennedy signed on October 7, and I received one of the pens he used in signing. I was making a speech in Detroit at the time when the President was shot and returned at once to Washington for the funeral and burial ceremonies.

As mentioned earlier, the President took a deep and personal interest in the field of arms control and disarmament. Therefore, I was privileged to be at many meetings on the subject with him. Before I went to open a conference the President

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usually called me over for his last instructions, and I reported to him when I returned. These meetings were almost always just devoted to the business at hand—what did I think of the conference, what did I think of the prospects, what would I suggest as possibilities for the next act, what should he be doing with Macmillan. This sort of thing.

A most amazing man, who even after his death still lingers in my mind as one of the liveliest persons I have ever known. I can still see him and, so to speak, feel his personality. He had great persuasiveness, I must say, because when he first talked to me I felt I already had a very important job in connection with national defense. Actually, it was necessary for me to resign from some 50 activities to take this job. I was chairman of the board and president of 3 major defense activities, either suppliers or “think” factories such as Aerospace. But, he convinced me that there was no more important job in the world than this, no matter what my other commitments were. You knew he felt it was that important and he made you feel that it was extremely important that you personally take

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it because you had had so many different but related activities over the years.

He was a most loyal supporter of my activities. If I got into trouble on the Hill, he was behind me one hundred percent. One always had the feeling of his really deep interest in what you were telling him, and how, and why, even when he was under great stress and strain.

NORDNESS: There are three points. One is that the basic treaty which was negotiated in Moscow was the same treaty we had tabled in Geneva the year before. The President announced at the time Harriman went that Mr. Foster would be his Chief-of-Staff back here, guiding the negotiations, handling the instructions to the negotiators. Up at Hyannisport, although I don't recall his exact words, he did mention to you and to Mr. Rusk and Mr. Harriman his own views as to the importance of this treaty in terms of the whole broad spectrum of international relations. I don't know whether you recall his

words, but it seems to me that he, in a very quiet way, was elated, and as he discussed the treaty and where it might lead us to, he did

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offer a few profound remarks as to the significance of this.

MORRISSEY: They were said privately in...

NORDNESS: Privately.

FOSTER: Yes, we sat around his living room in Hyannisport with Dean Rusk, Averell Harriman, Adrian Fisher, Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], Ned Nordness [Nedville E. Nordness] and myself and had a relaxed drink or two in the balmy air of a summer's day. He stated that he felt that this was the most important thing he had accomplished thus far in his Administration—the achievement of a limitation on testing. He did appear elated. It was a result of his personal persistence. As to the last letter or two, which apparently brought it about, some of us rather felt it perhaps a little undignified to make that last try. However, he would not give up before one more try because the stakes were so high. Then, of course, in effect he backed up this philosophy in the speech at the American University. But he started this final successful negotiation by a letter when he said: “Let us take another crack at this thing, because this is too important to let nature take its course.” He, of course, was so right.

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NORDNESS: It is rather paradoxical that this interview is taking place on the first anniversary of the Test Ban Treaty.

FOSTER: Did you design this, Mr. Nordness? I never thought of that.

MORRISSEY: Strictly coincidental. I didn't realize it until I saw the editorial in this morning's Post.

FOSTER: I didn't connect it at all. This fellow Nordness is a very dedicated character. I suspect he had something to do with this being on this particular day.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any additional specific recollections of the preparation of the American University speech?

FOSTER: Yes, I sure do, because this appeared to be one of the most rapidly prepared speeches in history. However, Ted Sorensen said the President had had the idea of doing this particular kind of speech in his mind for some time. The President was in Hawaii, you remember, due to make the speech

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the next day. Five of us, I guess, sat around in the Situation Room of the White House most of that day before. Ted Sorensen and Mac Bundy said: "The President wants to do something that really is moving. Here are some general thoughts he left with us and we've got to produce a final product and get it off so he can see it on the airplane as he flies back. He is due to land a half hour before he makes the speech, so this really has to be good since he will not have time to work on it long himself."

We sat around—a very small group, and this was one of the smaller drafting groups—I think it included George Ball [George W. Ball], Glenn Seaborg, Mac Bundy, Ted Sorensen, and myself. Mac probably has this record. I can't recall who the others were. We worked like hell all day. Then Ted Sorensen, I think, sat up all night with his remarkable ability to polish and write and was able to send each of us and the President the final draft about six or seven in the morning to see if there were changes to be made. We had another meeting just before the speech, after we got the President's comments back by cable. I think the final pages of the speech may have been sent to the President as he was actually delivering it at the University.

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NORDNESS:       Meanwhile, over that period you got that last communication from Khrushchev stating that he agreed to meet in mid-July.

FOSTER:           That speech apparently was the final push that followed on the letter exchange and brought about the Khrushchev offer. The President and Mr. Khrushchev exchanged several letters, and some of these were held very closely and as far as I know still are. The President sat in on our meetings every time we got a response from Moscow on the progress of the "hot line" negotiations in Moscow. During the Treaty negotiations in Moscow, the President met with Rusk, Bundy, Tommy Thompson [Llewellyn E. Thompson], George Ball, Ben Read [Benjamin H. Read], and myself. I think that is all. The President played a direct and intimate part in the wording and everything else during that week or so. And as I say, he did so not as someone who had to be told what the facts were. He was master of the subject.

NORDNESS:       As I recall, Mr. Foster, didn't he direct that all the cable traffic out of Moscow be directed to the White House and they would determine distribution?

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FOSTER:           That's right. Actually, we all came to the White House to read some and recommend answers right there.

MORRISSEY: When you had reason to communicate with him, did you automatically go through Mr. Bundy or someone else on the White House staff?

FOSTER: Well, it depended on the situation. When I was negotiating in New York with Ambassadors Tsarapkin [Semyon K. Tsarapkin] and Fedorenko [Nikolai Fedorenko] and later with Kuznetsov, I went directly to the President. Normally Bundy was the man I contacted whenever I wanted to set up a meeting preparatory to a Committee of Principals or to a negotiation. I would tell Mac what I had in mind so that he could have the President's back-up papers available and Mac usually would sit in on it, but not always. I had a good number of meetings—just the President and myself—but normally Bundy handled staff activities in our field. In the special negotiations following the exchange of letters after Cuba, I dealt directly with the President, either by phone, or I would call up Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and say I would like to see the

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President. But, normally Bundy was the man. Mac is thoroughly familiar with our business in all its detail with the possible exception of certain Hill contacts where it was either the President himself or Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien].

MORRISSEY: From a political viewpoint, Mr. Stevenson in 1956 had been hurt by injecting the disarmament issues into the campaign. I was wondering whether Mr. Kennedy was in any way mindful of the political liabilities of emphasizing disarmament.

FOSTER: Well, he recognized that there were political minuses in pushing this, but he felt strongly that the overriding national advantages from a limitation on testing were, in the long run, politically advantageous, as well as right. And he accepted that what is right is usually politically advantageous over a period of time. But he had a deep personal feeling about the necessity of stopping testing and the necessity of controlling further dissemination of nuclear weapons and the necessity of doing something about ostracizing or containing China. He felt somehow there must be a way in which the rest of

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the world can prevent China from becoming the kind of a destructive force which all of its public pronouncements indicate it desires to be.

In this connection, the following is obviously very sensitive but shows his willingness to consider politically dangerous moves. It has to do with China and non-dissemination. While he publicly supported the Multilateral Force in order to give the Federal Republic of Germany a feeling of participation in nuclear weapons consistent with its growing contribution to NATO strength, he appeared to be quite willing to consider giving up MLF as a trade with the Soviet Union if he could get non-dissemination, and if he could ultimately

get the Soviet Union aboard in taking action, if necessary physically, against China. He said: "You know, it wouldn't be too hard if we could somehow get kind of an anonymous airplane to go over there, take out the Chinese facilities—they've only got a couple—and maybe we could do it, or maybe the Soviet Union could do it, rather than face the threat of a China with nuclear weapons."

In his thinking out loud he was willing to speculate about unconventional ways of meeting what he saw as a major threat

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down the years. You no doubt recall his speech as to his concern about a world in which there might be ten or fifteen or twenty nuclear powers.

MORRISSEY: To what extent do you think Khrushchev was prompted by threatened proliferation of nuclear weapons in expressing his willingness to negotiate?

FOSTER: Well, I am sure they have an interest in non-proliferation. They say that if we will give up the MLF, they will sign a non-proliferation agreement with us tomorrow morning. They said that as recently as the first week in July, 1964, to me through Valerian Zorin, their Deputy Foreign Minister. No, I think they recognize, as did President Kennedy, that proliferation poses a tremendous danger. This is certainly one of the things that had an influence on Mr. Khrushchev's agreeing with us on a treaty, among other factors.

I think the exchange of correspondence between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Communist Party are revealing documents in this regard. The educational approach of the Soviet Communist Party letters to the Chinese Communist Party

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as to the dangers of nuclear war and the dangers of irresponsible handling of nuclear weapons indicated that our education campaign has had some considerable effect. Our educational campaign being made crystal clear largely by Mr. Kennedy's decision to go, if necessary, all the way in Cuba plus constant negotiations at several levels in Washington, New York and Geneva.

MORRISSEY: People have pointed out the very obvious fact that Mr. Kennedy often stationed Republicans in very sensitive posts in defense, diplomacy, and finance. What is your reaction to this?

FOSTER: Well, of course, one could not help but notice this to be the case. But, I have never felt that he did this in my case so that I could take the abuse. He undoubtedly felt there was some virtue in a Republican being in a spot that could be as unpopular as this, but I think he, in making this particular choice, and with all due immodesty, recognized the fact that I had been Deputy Secretary of Defense during



the Korean War, Head of the Marshall Plan, Director of the Purchases Division for the War Department during World War II, Co-Chairman of the Gaither Committee, and Chairman of the U.S. Surprise

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Attack Delegation at Geneva in 1958. So it just happened I was a Republican, which, in addition, might help in being able to fend off some attacks. I don't mind that because I believe in the tremendous importance of this activity. But the President was absolutely unpartisan in his relation with me. He accepted my position a number of times against others in the Committee of Principals. I could never ask for better support than I had from President Kennedy. I didn't always expect to get 100 percent of my requests. Sometimes my positions were taken with a view of instilling movement into things that otherwise could readily become blocked.

I think President Kennedy was a master politician, a great leader and a great human being. I base my judgment on my experience in and with government over about the last 25 years and on having now served under five Presidents including President Kennedy.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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