

Edmund A. Gullion Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 07/23/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Gullion was a United States Diplomat in Saigon from 1949 to 1952; the Deputy Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Administration from 1960 to 1961; and the United States Ambassador to the Republic of the Congo from 1961 to 1964. In this interview Gullion discusses John F. Kennedy's [JFK] views on the roles of U.S. Ambassadors and diplomatic missions; Gullion's work in the Congo, 1961-1963; JFK's views of the Congo and of Africa; UN policy in the Congo and the U Thant plan; and Moise Kapenda Tshombe and Cyrille Adoula and Katangese secession, among other issues.

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Edmund A. Gullion – JFK #2
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
12	John F. Kennedy's [JFK] views on the roles of U.S. Ambassadors and of U.S. diplomatic missions
13	Gullion consults with JFK on the Congo, 1961-1963
14	JFK's views of the Congo and of Africa as a whole
15	JFK's Administration and UN policy in the Congo
16	The U Thant plan for the Congo
17	George C. McGhee visits the Congo
19	Moise Kapenda Tshombe and Katangese secession
19	JFK and Cyrille Adoula
20	JFK and Tshombe
21	December 1961—the United States attempts to initiate a meeting between Adoula and Tshombe

Second Oral History Interview

With

EDMUND A. GULLION

July 23, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Samuel E. Belk, III

For the John F. Kennedy Library

BELK: Mr. Ambassador, you recently testified before a Senate subcommittee, and in the course of your testimony you outlined your concept of what the role of an ambassador should be. Did any of that testimony parallel President Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] thinking? Did the two of you ever discuss this subject?

GULLION: Oh, I'm confident that the views I expressed in my memo for the committee paralleled the President's thinking. I don't mean by that that we ever sat down to discuss systematically as one subject the role of the chief of mission in new and developing countries. But since the contacts that I had with the President were chiefly within that context, we did have occasion to exchange views quite a lot. I think his attitude on the subject also had been formed by his contact, had been influenced by his contact with missions as he saw them in the field and the mission in Indochina way back in '52, I'm sorry, '51. The President, as you know, believed in strong executive leadership to stimulate action. He did not believe in a passive presidency. He thought that the presidency should lead and inspire. I think that he thought of the embassies as the extension of the presidential personality, if I can say that, and he tried to have a personal contact with the chiefs of mission. In his first months of his presidency he went about putting his concepts into practice, not only on this side, not only here in Washington did he eliminate a great many committees and tried

to compress and contract the staff method of doing things and make the presidency more responsive by eliminating a number of the committees, but he did prepare and send to the field his directives on the conduct of missions, in which he took great pains to point out that the chief of mission was the chief and that he was not merely *primus interperis* but something even more than that, that he was the real head of all of the representatives of the executive branch in that country. There had been before his presidency numerous attempts to define the President's purposes and prerogatives of the ambassador in the country team. I think that President Kennedy put in a very strong, new validation of the chief of missions' role, giving him ultimate authority as well as ultimate responsibility. I think that he certainly did, also, believe that in the new and developing countries that diplomatic mission had a very special kind of role. In view of the intense personal character of relationships in such countries, the fact that the influence that we could bring to bear often has to be through the medium of personal contacts rather than institutional, institution for institution. It's what the chief of mission can do with the man in charge or the man whom the power opposes that counts. It's difficult to give you a great many details of just how the President saw this. As I think I mentioned before, the President tried to keep very close contact with the work of particular missions. And he would call up a particular desk in the State Department to ask about a current problem, which would startle and amaze and certainly would brace up the people who got such telephone calls. He came to the State Department at least once to give his views on the Foreign Service, and he made a talk there, I think it was in, it would be about '62, in which he stressed his view, the desirability of initiative and responsibility on the parts of chiefs of mission.

BELK: Ambassador Gullion, you arrived in the Congo in September of 1961 and left at the end of February 1964. Were you in direct contact with the President during this period?

GULLION: Yes, I was. Of course, not only through the medium of cables, many of them, of course, the President saw. He used to be laughingly called, occasionally, I understand, the Congo desk officer. He manifested a very close interest in telegrams from the Congo. I refrained at slugging my telegrams for the President. It seems to me that that's an unprofessional way to do it as well as results in wasting your fire if you try to put your circuit of exchanges something outside the State Department one, but, of course, he saw the main ones. In addition to that, of course, I consulted with the President before going out to the Congo, and I came back on consultation three or four times. Each time I saw the President. I had dinner with him alone twice. I met with him with State Department advisors or separately three or four times during that period. I might also say that I had one telephone conversation with him, perhaps two—I believe it was two, yes, it was two—telephone conversations with him, rather interesting enough through the medium of shortwave ham radio and also through the military wireless net, upon some particular acute problems in the Congo.

BELK: Can you, do you remember what you discussed during these two conversations?

GULLION: Yes, I do. I don't know whether it would be getting ahead of our story here. The most important one, I think, had to do with bringing Moise Tshombe [Moise Kapenda Tshombe] and Cyrille Adoula together at the Kitona talks and some of the sort of surrounding circumstances that I brought to the President's attention. Should we go into those now or do you want to...

BELK: As a matter of fact, why don't we get to that just a bit later. You're quite right, we are getting just a bit ahead of ourselves. Mr. Ambassador, how would you describe the President's view of the Congo and of Africa as a whole?

GULLION: Well, I have to do some speculation here. I would say that my conviction, based upon my nearly three years there in the Congo and exchanges with Washington and with the White House, is that the President and I saw Congo and Africa in the same way. That is to say, I think he believed that our policy in the Congo consisted in promoting a unified Congo, not simply because unity is good per se, but that if the Congo should break into pieces that our Communist adversaries would pick up some of the pieces. It was in that light that he saw the Katangese secession under Mr. Tshombe as something capable of creating divisions in the Congo, which whatever might have been the intention of Mr. Tshombe would give opportunities for further divisions and subversion in the Congo. I think his way of looking at the Congo was influenced, in a degree difficult to trace, by his experiences with respect to Indochina and, of course, the important involvement he had with respect to the future of Algeria. I think that of his first episodes, his first contact, the first mark he made in foreign affairs had to do with Indochina and the Congo and disarmament.

But in Indochina he had, of course, in a way, challenged what was then the establishment when he was a young congressman, by indicating that the rate of development being held forth by the former colonial power or still colonial power was not adequate and that the success not only of its relations with that country but the future of Vietnam depended upon a more realistic timetable and a more realistic independence. I think he, of course, had somewhat similar views with respect to Algiers. I don't know the details of his pronouncements on Algiers. I do remember at one time expressing to him the view that it would be wrong to look for too many close parallels between the two places, but, you see, in his legislative period he probably had to take less immediate cognizance of the force of the attraction to our allies than of the responsibility that we owed to the alliance. I think that the classic dilemma in which the United States finds itself is that between our sympathy for the aspirations of emerging countries and the allegiance we owe to the alliance, we don't want to do things in the emerging countries that are going to weaken the alliance. We want to give our allies the benefit of the doubt on colonial policies and more than that we want them to assume more of the burden where they can do it advantageously without reopening old sores. And I

think the President with responsibility for a U.S./Congo policy certainly showed a tremendous amount of understanding and openness to the views of our Belgium allies and our British allies who were intensely interested in this problem, of course, and tried to strike a balance in the matter, along with our UN policy.

His views on Africa and his views on the Congo as seen by African leaders certainly had the strong endorsement of Africa. He was considered a great American President, if not the greatest, I think, mainly for two reasons, by African leaders. This was because of his insistence on what they considered to be the free and true line of Congolese development, because remember that practically all of black Africa, all African leaders rejected Katanga as an autonomous state or as an independent state and gave the back of their hand to Mr. Tshombe. A meeting of the PAFMECA [Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa] conference—that is of Asian countries—preceding the OAU [Organization of African Unity], in Leopoldville, produced a very specific endorsement of Mr. Kennedy's policies toward the Congo, a rather severe criticism of Mr. Tshombe, and unfortunately, because it didn't seem to be required, especially as bracketed with their expressed praise of Mr. Kennedy, a kind of a backhanded slap at the policies of some of our allies. I don't think that anyone can say that the President was some kind of a sloppy idealist about the patter of little brown feet or black feet or whatever the case may be, in fact one of the things that was so obvious about the President's makeup was that he, this kind of thing he thought was too sloppy. He hated people who wore their hearts on their sleeves, honkers as he called them, people who were just sort of do-gooder without any sense of realism. And he certainly was not about to go off half-cocked just to curry votes or do anything to say that well, because these countries want to be independent, just twist the lion's tail or push our Belgian friends into the corner. No, he tried all the way through to make a balance and at one time, as I think we'll come to a bit later in the development, I, as his representative, thought he was giving a little excessive credence to some of the views that were being asserted and urged by our allies.

BELK: Ambassador Gullion, what was the President's attitude toward the United Nations and the late Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld [Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld]?

GULLION: That is an exceedingly difficult question because it covers such a tremendous amount of ground and time, a very hard one to answer usefully. Of course, the United States, when the President came to office, was already committed to the Congo, the UN experiment in the Congo. What is not generally known, I think, is that when Lumumba [Patrice Lumumba] came to this country, shortly after independence in the summer or fall of 1960, he asked for direct U.S. assistance, military support, and the United States told him don't do that, you know, that's not the thing to do, you don't want to have your country in the Cold War. The thing to do is to ask for aid from the United Nations. This is the modern way of doing things. This was something of a new idea to the Congolese. The reasons, of course, were that we did not want to see the Congo

become the terrain of cold war or hot war or anything else, and we had behind us the history of Korea. We were just spectators of what

[-15-]

the French were up against in Algiers, and it seemed that the UN was the way to isolate this situation. We were the principle financial backers, and we backed all of the UN resolutions. Before Mr. Kennedy, of course, we had a lot to say with the form of those resolutions and tried to moderate them in our sense, but we backed them when Mr. Kennedy was President and before he was President, and we, of course, put up most of the money. Other countries put up the troops, mind you, and had we put up troops we would have supplied a pretext for the Soviet Union to put up troops. Moreover the idea of American troops operating in the Congo would have certainly been a very difficult concept to accommodate. There were some fears of the UN which must have been apparent to President Kennedy, from fears about the UN that it would be a Trojan horse for Soviet infiltration; the center of Africa right there in the cockpit of Africa is the Congo. Actually, I don't think anyone could have predicted it, but it turned out the UN was if anything a bulwark against Soviet infiltration, and the Soviet Union certainly came to feel that this was a barrier to their efforts in the Congo. They thought that the Secretariat, under Hammarskjöld, was against them. And it was because of the Congo and from the Congo, in the Congo that they evolved their troika concept, the idea of organizing and dividing the Secretariat into three groups representing the so-called neutrals, the Soviet bloc and ourselves, the free world bloc. The President backed the UN policy, and certainly during the period of his lifetime it looked to be a very considerable success for himself, the Administration and for the United States as well as for the UN because it achieved what it was sent there to do. We were not brought into the Congo directly. Africa was not made a prey to the Cold War. The country developed a duly elected government which the UN could treat as sovereign. The Congo did not break into pieces. When I arrived there as his Ambassador in 1960 there were—in '61, I'm sorry—there were three secessions in being, not just one. One of those secessions was dominated by a communist element. It would not have been in being had there not been the rightist secession from Mr. Tshombe in Katanga. These things during the President's Administration were resolved, and the UN was the instrument. Now, the President backed these things. This was not without the tremendous soul-searching on the part of the whole Administration, with himself at the head of it, and I was privileged to see something of this. Of course, being an ambassador in the field you're not behind or in every consultation at home, but on my trips back here I could see a great deal of the way the President was weighing these things up. I would say this, that I do not believe that there would have been a prolongation of the UN's tour in the Congo had it not been for President Kennedy when it was prolonged from, it was supposed to have finished in December of '63, and the prolongation was reached until June, and, getting way ahead, our current troubles, of course, ensued right on the removal of the UN from the Congo. But we wouldn't have had the extension for at least six months if it hadn't been for the backing of the President. It is also true that the President—this is a subject which you will want to classify—the President's views on the U Thant plan for the conciliation of Katanga after the Kitona agreement had failed and had then not implemented in the judgment of the Administration at that time was that the Tshombe faction were most at fault. The U Thant

plan was conceived, and it provided for the integration of the country's military forces, money, finances, and then it provided for a series of sanctions through three stages. I was in on these consultations, and

[-16-]

I was in on those at the White House and the evolution of this plan. The part that I think that is sensitive here is it was my firm belief that the President was much more committed and interested and in support of a plan with strong sanctions than his closest advisors were prepared to credit him with, with being. And I say this because the versions of our consultations over here at the White House were extremely watered down in transcription as entered the State Department files. You will see that this is a delicate matter.

BELK: Yes.

GULLION: I remember when I left for the Congo I believed that if there should not be integration that the plan would be pushed through, all through its phase two, phase three and the rest of it, with economic sanction built into the plan. And then after reaching the Congo it came out that these were to be contingent. Now let's get back more onto the record. At the same time that the President was backing the United Nations' solution out there, he and his Administration were leading an effort to make the solution palatable to our allies, the Belgians. And I think that Mr. Spaak [Paul-Henri Spaak] and the President deserve a great deal of credit for eventually bringing Belgium if not to all-out support of the United Nations, at least to that point, for example, where Belgium also thought that the UN should continue on in the Congo, thus reinforcing the natural worries of Belgium inhabitants out there. I believe that everyone who could see that with the approach of the withdrawal, with the date of withdrawal of the UN approaching toward the end of 1963 and fearing a renewal of secession, believing that the Katangese elements would have another go after having tried two times before, were certainly anxious to avoid a trial by force if this could be avoided in any way. And, of course, the President was back of this effort to avoid this trial by force.

If I have one very serious question and reservation or chapter that I would have written differently had I been the President, it would have been that period when in November and December of '63, just before the last blowup in Indochina—I'm sorry, in the Congo—that Mr. McGhee [George C. McGhee] came to the Congo—and this will be classified. Mr. McGhee is a good personal friend of mine and a fine man and otherwise been very difficult. Mr. McGhee came to the Congo trying to avoid this trial by force, if it should come to that, avoid the, really the application of the U Thant plan as conceived by the UN because, mind you, the U Thant plan as conceived by the man whose name it bore, did include the progressive sanctions. The UN did not, looked on it as something more extensive than the U.S. was then regarding it. I think, also, however, that the visit of Mr. McGhee reflected very strongly the effort to conciliate within the Administration, the Party, the views of such spokesmen as Senator Dodd [Christopher Dodd]. Senator Dodd, of course, was the principle apologist and defender of the Katangese view, thought it was legitimate, bona fide, devoted to a kind of a general federation of the Congo which he thought was only realistic,

best suited to the Congo, and that Mr. Tshombe was a bona fide representative of these views, and Mr. Dodd frequently sought compromise in these matters and, of course, made a great many

[-17-]

speeches, in fact even the country in presenting his views. And I believe that he had a great deal, he was certainly listened to a great deal by the President, saw him very often. And, mind you, I mean this corresponded with a deep malaise in the United States, congressional certainly, worrying about the fact that we were supporting the UN, and the UN seemed to be drawn deeper and deeper into things that would result ultimately in the use of force.

It was very difficult for the American people or for anyone to conceive of the UN as an instrument applying sanction, including the sanction of force even though that was foreseen and provided for in the mandates of the UN. All of these and one more, one stronger, when, of course, the range of sympathy for the Katangese success, secession in this country included extremist elements, the sort of people who say, well, get the UN out of the United States, and the U.S. out of the UN. It also included very respectable elements, much more balanced groups and people, great men in American political life who were the authors of the, promoters of the Atlantic Alliance and things of that kind who worried about the strains on the Alliance that were being produced by the Congo affair and the primacy that the UN seemed to be taking in our regard over the Alliance and, also, who doubted the capacity of the UN and, also, doubted its suitability for a struggle of this kind and feared what might come after the UN left. Well, that kind of reservation and skepticism was not very outspoken. It was loyal in its support of the Administration, but it exerted a great many questions. And the President, of course, is in position to have to heed to those. I think all of these things, legitimate and otherwise, focused in the mission of Mr. McGhee. It was very difficult, as I say, because it seemed to me to be devoted to a policy quite opposite than the one that I was pushing. There we were both, two heads under one roof, and Mr. McGhee went down to Katanga where he was greeted by flags and banners saying, "Down with Gullion. Hurray for McGhee" and things of this sort. So that your question, "What was the President's attitude toward the United States," I'm afraid, has opened the floodgates here for a lot of things that are circumstantial and surround the matter, but what I'm trying to show is that the President supported the UN in the rather audacious policy and that at the same time he was tremendously under the pressures of all sorts of other considerations, and he was striving desperately to find the right balance in them. My own personal belief was that at one point he had gone farther than I would have counseled him to do. But I think that he was quite satisfied, I think it must have been at the time, up to the time of his death, he must have been satisfied with his Congo policy and the way it had worked out.

Now you say what did he think of the late Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. I don't know. One of the curious things about it is that he and Mr. Hammarskjöld had had only the very slightest of contacts prior to Mr. Hammarskjöld's death. At least this is what I was told by the advisors of Mr. Hammarskjöld, his closest advisors in the Congo who said to me that they regretted that there had not been more direct contact between Mr. Hammarskjöld and the President. I'm sure that there would have been a tremendous amount of contact. I

think it was just one of these things and not anything that stemmed from a conviction or a policy on the part of the President. I think that some of the UN people worried that this

[-18-]

might be the case, however. And, of course, the President was tremendously involved and interested in and terribly distressed to the circumstances of the Secretary General's tragic death, when the plane went down and, of course, he was interested in whether this was an assassination or whether it was an accident and, of course, from the very beginning was interested in the constitutional crisis of the UN that the death of the Secretary General opened up.

BELK: Did the President have any special reaction to any of the Congolese personalities during this period, Cyrille Adoula, Moise Tshombe, or others?

GULLION: Oh yes, very definitely, very definitely he did. Mr. Tshombe was a much, the better known, best known of the Congolese personalities. There was something picturesque about this Katangan operation and the idea that it was brave little Katanga. I don't know. Let me say parenthetically, what the views of Mr. Tshombe will now be with respect to the organization of the Congo state, whether he still wants a loose confederation with a great deal of autonomy for Katanga, or whether now that he is, at least the time being, the head of the Congolese government, whether his views have changed and whether he's for something that tends more toward a federalization in our own sense. But anyway, Mr. Tshombe's identification with the cause of Katangese secession and, mind you, it was secession. I mean, depending upon how the wind blew, the way it blew occasionally he was talking about a general confederation, but he also at the same time was negotiation for the recognition of Katanga as a separate state, you know, down to the extent and, I won't classify this because it's in the record, of offering two million dollars to a Central American state if it could produce evidence that it was recognizing or would recognize Katanga as a separate state. The deal didn't come off. But Mr. Tshombe is a picturesque man and a man of considerable political talents on the hustings and speaking and that kind of thing. He was much the better known.

Mr. Adoula, when he emerged from the Louvanium Parliament, which the UN helped provide the setting for, as the chief of the government, was not known. He was a detribalized man, a Leopoldville man. Of course, he was a member of a tribe, as all Congolese are, but he hadn't kept up that kind of thing nor contacts with the native district. He had the labor union background, and he was a kind of a compromise candidate, but he had also been sized up by many including the UN people as being a most serious and responsible fellow.

Parenthetically, I'd say that the thing about him that struck me was his long span of attention as compared to many Congolese leaders. He could persevere. He could think about one object and have it in view for a longer time without letting his attention wander, be distracted, and he could work hard. This is what distinguished him. Now I think that Mr. Kennedy came to have a genuine respect for Mr. Adoula. After the Kitona agreement, Mr. Adoula came to the United States to visit the United Nations. Because of the nonaligned

position of his country he was at that time while becoming increasingly involved with the United States and friendly with it, he wanted to bill his visit as a trip to the United Nations. And then, as he said, since it's not

[-19-]

polite to pass a man's door without accepting his invitation to come in and break bread with him, he came down to see the President. I was along at that time, and he made a very excellent impression in the United States at that time. This was probably the peak of the Adoula group's fortunes or standing in the States and the corresponding nadir of the Katangist faction.

I recall a luncheon which the President gave for Mr. Adoula, and the President used as the text in his extemporaneous remarks the Jackson text, in our federal union it must be preserved. I cannot recall, I don't think the speech was written out, but this was quite a striking parallel to make in view of the struggle in the Congo. And I remember his remarking how amazing it was that during his remarks the President saying that they'd passed a picture of I believe it was Jackson [Andrew Jackson] in a gallery of portraits somewhere in the White House on the way to the luncheon that the President, I mean that Mr. Adoula had identified that President by his number in the sequence of Presidents in the succession of Presidents which would be pretty hard for an American schoolboy to do who had just been studying the succession of Presidents. There was a considerable amount of personal correspondence between Mr. Adoula and the President. One time when I came here with Mr. Adoula staying back, the Kitona agreements had not been implemented, the long negotiations that followed between Adoula and Tshombe had not borne fruit. There were gathering storm clouds with the approaching date for the UN withdrawal. The problem of Mr. Adoula in trying to govern an invertebrate society and an invertebrate government were wearing on him. There was a corrosion, erosion of his spirit, and he wrote and said about as much to the President in a handwritten letter which I waited for him to finish writing as I was taking off, not ready to go from his office. When I got back the President had not yet seen that letter because I brought it with me and left it for putting into the channels for distribution. I told him about it, and he asked to see it. And he was tremendously struck, I think, by the human tone of the letter, the ethos of it as much as what it had to say. What it had to say was that, "I, Mr. Adoula, can do no more. I'm thinking of quitting. This thing has gotten too much for me. I don't know what's going to happen. I can't bring it off," and so on. And of course our Embassy, acting under the Administration's instructions, encouraged him to stay.

Now his attitude toward Mr. Tshombe, I think, evolved. At any time he would have preferred, as all of us would, peace rather than war and would like to see the Congolese settle this thing peacefully. And, of course, what would have seemed to anybody as it couldn't and ought to be settled among reasonable men. But I believe that the President went through phases of successive dissatisfaction and disenchantment with Mr. Tshombe. There were successive efforts to reach agreement and successive feet-draggings on the part of Mr. Tshombe and a continuous kind of a drumfire of sniping by Mr. Tshombe. I think that the President, if I could put it this way, would take into account Mr. Tshombe's lack of advantages in letting Mr. Tshombe upset him. Still I don't think that it can be overlooked that Mr. Tshombe used to revile the President of the United States in interviews with the press

and accuse the United States under Mr. Kennedy of having committed genocide on the American

[-20-]

Negroes and then transferring the same policy to Africa. This kind of thing, as well as the various assiduous long, long conducted Katanga lobby propaganda in this country which was extensively financed—and it'd be an interesting inquire to where all that money came from—was bound to fret the man of high tension, of the President. One of these things came to a head. You know, without writing a book about this you can't put things in proper perspective, and I don't like any kind of *obiter dicta* on this tape to set historians on a wrong trail, so I don't want to go at great length into this, but I think that one has to consider the great incident of the Tshombe visa.

Mr. Tshombe had been invited by a conservative political group to address it, and he had applied for a visa. It was pretty clear in the Congo that a visa for Mr. Tshombe would have at this time, would have been looked upon giving aid and comfort to the enemies of that republic. It would have been as if, for example, Mexico had invited General "Beast Butler" [Benjamin Franklin Butler], as the South used to call General Butler, down to visit it after the occupation of New Orleans, or, let us say, if President Jefferson Davis [Jefferson F. Davis] had been received in Toronto, in Ottawa or London. But I don't think this was so much the point. The State Department was seized with the problem of whether Mr. Tshombe should come and on what grounds is a visa case, should it be considered. U.S. doctrine at that time was for freedom of travel. You didn't have the statutory right really or the statutory basis, it seemed to some, to refuse a visa just because the man was conducting hostile propaganda against you or because he was leader of a civil war against a country with which you had, a government which you had good relations. Mind you, you either looked at it as a scrap between rival politicians. And depending somewhat upon the currents of opinion in this country, different American leaders tended to regard the struggle in the Congo. Sometimes it was just a scrap between rival politicians. At other times it looked to them as if this were a great war. Well, certainly when Mr. Tshombe applied for his visa, he was not at a very high level of regard. But the State Department found it very hard to make up its mind about this matter because there was the statutory problem, the legal problem. There was also, it seemed to have a tremendous involvement with American domestic politics. It was hard for the State Department to take a stand in, and I participated in a conference with the President which all, very many of the high command of the State Department participated in. I remember thinking at the time what an extraordinary assemblage of high officials to deal with one visa case. But we came to the President without our minds made up, and his view is very simple. "Why should I give a visa to that fellow. I don't want to." And that was the ruling. We thereupon had the decision on Mr. Tshombe.

Another episode which I think is of some importance, at the time of Kitona, that is the President, was the so-called round two. The Katangese had fired the first shots, but in any case the UN had considered, had continued in December of '62—December of '61, I'm sorry—and Mr. Tshombe—I've often wondered whether he expected that he was going to be taken up on the matter—launched an appeal for the good offices of the United States or of

the President, President Kennedy. I think that this had to serve the purpose in the informational

[-21-]

program of Katanga of drawing increased attention to the alleged horrors and devastation that was being wrought on Katanga and on Elisabethville, which, of course, was not, was tremendously exaggerated. But this appeal for a mediation was one that drew attention to it. But actually the President took an initiative and decided that we'd bring together, try to bring together Tshombe and Adoula to talk at a disused former Belgian base, although the site was Kitona, was later picked out and with the UN and with me as the Ambassador present. And our exchanges with, I don't know, but I think the President was consulted on all these. I think we did try to adjust this perspective a little from the idea of mediation to one of good offices on the matter.

Well, it happened that Mr. Adoula at the time that this thing occurred was out of Leopoldville, about as far away within the Congo as he could be while Mr. Tshombe was in Elisabethville where the skirmishing was going on. I could only communicate with Mr. Adoula through the UN I remember that this enabled me to put the invitation in such a way that it had the best chance of being accepted. If he had put, if the invitation in such a way that it had the best chance of being accepted. If he had put, if the invitation in its original sort of sense to Mr. Adoula had gone for it I doubt if he would have come because he wanted to enter into no such negotiations on the basis of two equals. And the idea was that Tshombe was a provincial President and he was a chief of government, and the matter shouldn't look as if two higher states were meeting to, on the field of the cloth of gold or field of battle or anything else of the sort. I had the possibility of adjusting the invitation to him in such a way, in this message that he could come. Now with Mr. Tshombe it was quite a different matter. Some of the first reactions from Mr. Tshombe were to make it appear as if this had some way indicated a weakness on the part of the United States or the President that this was being done. At every moment before he came to Katanga, Mr. Tshombe wanted to make it appear, wanted to make conditions prior to his leaving, you see, conditions as to a cease fire and stipulations about there would be no more fighting. I can't recall all this, it's a matter of record. But these were the kind of conditions that, it was very difficult to treat with. Well this one occasion when I did have occasion to talk to the President on short-wave radio telephone, amateur or military amateur net, I forget just which. But I remember repeating to the President some of the impact on Tshombe of his invitation, and the President's reaction was quite violent. He did not want this fellow to have this view that he was going to put down all sorts of conditions about this or that there was any weakness on the part of the United States or weakening of U.S. policy because it was prepared to help bring these people together so that the fighting would not go on. And he ripped out to me a series of instructions, one, two, three, four, five, just off the cuff which were very firm and straight and categoric. I seldom if ever on purpose, because it goes back to the whole period of the time I knew the President, ever made any record of what he or I said to each other. In this case, because these were instructions to me, I said back to him on the telephone, "I repeat for confirmation these points, one, two, three, four, five." I recall this incident because you asked me what was his attitude toward Mr. Tshombe. I don't think the President would ever stoop to letting himself

by annoyed or irritated by Mr. Tshombe, but I think that the espousal of Mr. Tshombe by some very strangely assorted groups of supporters in this country did irritate him. This was true. I did once have the

[-22-]

occasion to say to him, this is off the record if you will, that Mr. Struelens [Michael Struelens], the propaganda agent who got Mr. Tshombe, his client, an awful lot of newspaper headlines, but that he could not really be said that he was doing a good job because he made the President of the United States mad at his client.

BELK: Could you cut it there for a minute? This is the second tape of an interview of Ambassador Edmund A. Gullion, former United States Ambassador to the Republic of the Congo, Leopoldville. The interviewer was Samuel E. Belk, National Security Council staff. The date is July 23, 1964; the place, the White House.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-23-]

Edmund A. Gullion Oral History Transcript – JFK #2
Name List

A

Adoula, Cyrille, 14, 19, 20, 22

B

Butler, Benjamin Franklin, 21

D

Davis, Jefferson F., 21

Dodd, Christopher, 17

H

Hammar skjöld, Dag Hjalmer Agne Carl, 15, 16,
18, 19

J

Jackson, Andrew, 20

K

Kennedy, John F., 12-23

L

Lumumba, Patrice, 15

M

McGhee, George C., 17, 18

S

Spaak, Paul-Henri, 17

Struelens, Michael, 23

T

Thant, U, 16, 17

Tshombe, Moise Kapenda, 14-17, 19-23