

Mongi Slim Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 5/20/1965
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Mongi Slim (1908-1969) served as Tunisian Ambassador to the United States (1956-1961); as President of the United Nations General Assembly (1961-1962); and as the Tunisian Secretary of State for foreign affairs (1962-1964). This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s support for the decolonization of Africa, the effect of the Algerian War on global politics, and the mutual respect between JFK and President Bourguiba, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

MONGI SLIM

May 20, 1965
Tunis, Tunisia

By Dr. Lorna Hahn

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HAHN: Mr. Slim, we can begin with some questions concerning your early meetings or recollections of Mr. Kennedy. Do you recall when is the first time that Mr. Kennedy came to your attention or the first time that you made the acquaintance of Mr. Kennedy?

SLIM: I remember that he was Senator Kennedy when I first met him. I remember that my attention -- or our attention at the Embassy -- had been attracted to Kennedy because he was a young senator who had just emerged, and a number of friends including yourself had spoken of his potential and his talents, and of the interest he had in colonial problems. That must have been in 1957. We were very concerned about the situation in Algeria, the Algerian war, and the problems it was causing us in Tunisia. At the embassy we wanted at that time to be in touch with him to explain our relations with the United States and especially the difficulties we were having with France, concerning our own problems as well as the situation in Algeria. That was when I was first in contact with him.

I remember very well. He was a senator. I was accompanied by M. Habib Bourguiba, Jr. who was at that time minister plenipotentiary at the embassy. The interview took place in his office in the capitol. We discussed questions concerning Tunisia and the United States. First, the problem of our relations with the United States. First, the problem or our relations with the United States. At that time we felt that the American government, although they

wanted to cultivate our country's friendship, had certain reticences about the relations between Tunisia and the United States, mainly because the American government was very anxious not to offend or upset France, not only in her relations with us but in the problems France was having at that time in all her colonies and especially

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in Algeria. I was aware in the course of all my conversations, with President Eisenhower and especially with Dulles, of these difficulties and reticences on the part of the American government. And that's why I wanted at that time in my conversation with Senator Kennedy to bring out these difficulties and show him how this would always keep us turned toward the French position. This was the aim and policy of the American government at that time: stay on good terms with France first.

As I remember, we were in economic difficulties. It was also the time when France had just cut off her economic aid to Tunisia, and we were trying at the embassy to convince the American government to make up the deficiency by an increase in American government to make up the deficiency by an increase in American aid. We had our problems. I remember that he seemed very interested, and that without really saying anything definite against his government he explained that its attitude came from big bureaucracy and old habits of thought and foregone conclusions. This administration didn't want to change its ways, its methods, and its habits of thought. He spoke of the possibility of stirring these methods and habits up a little, of upsetting the routines and forcing them to change. I remember that we sketched out the Algerian situation in the course of that conversation. It was the first time I had spoken with him about it, and I pointed out the absurdity of the French policy that consisted at that time of continuing the struggle, the war. The French attitude that showed clearly that it was a matter [Interruption] and that the majority of the Algerians were devoted to France, to the Union Francaise, and so on. That's when I became aware of Kennedy's deep interest. He had, as I remember, offered some opposition at the beginning of our conversation. He wanted to defend the stand that France had done some fine things in Algeria through the process of civilization, education, and so on. I felt at that time that this was not what he really thought, but that in his first contact with an ambassador he didn't want to seem just set against colonization. I remember very well that he had offered me some opposition in the discussion.

At that time, I did not speak English, and it was Mr. Habib Bourguiba who served as an interpreter for us. The discussion lasted quite a long time; we talked for an hour. I left with the impression -- and I spoke about it to Habib Bourguiba, Jr. at that time -- that he was a very intelligent and energetic man who could be valuable in the future. I was not thinking at that time of the possibility of his becoming president of the United States. I had no idea of that. But I thought we could continue to keep in contact with him, and that a man with his wide-ranging, lively mind and his gift of the quick answer that I noted during the discussion, the immediate answer that tried to beat the opponent and cut off a possible argument -- I felt this from the first contact with him....

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I remember very well saying that with such possibilities, if our policies could reach the sympathetic ear of such a man, we could have a great resource in the American Congress. This was the first impression that I kept of him: of course, afterwards I followed his progress and had other contacts with him.

HAHN: I recall that there were some other people, including Tunisians, who had the impression that perhaps because Mr. Kennedy was young, perhaps because he was a Catholic, that he could not....

SLIM: I didn't have much experience in American politics at that time, so I thought that, too. It seemed to me that it would be difficult for Kennedy to become president of the United States, because of his Catholic religion and the attitudes existing at that time in the United States. I doubted the possibility of his success as president of the United States. I definitely had that impression at that time, perhaps not because of his youth. That was the opinion that Kennedy's opponents at that time were spreading in the United States and elsewhere, and it was my personal impression at that time. I will tell you very frankly, now that time has passed, that I was thinking of two alternatives: it was either he or Cabot Lodge -- whom I knew very well and could very well see as president of the United States.

HAHN: What was your impression of the speech which Mr. Kennedy delivered in the Senate in July 1957 concerning Algeria, and did you speak with him or with other people afterwards concerning the effects of that speech?

SLIM: We were -- I was personally -- very much impressed by his speech. It was for us the first speech of the kind by an official, a senator, a high-ranking American personality with responsibilities even as senator, speaking out so frankly about the Algerian problem and opening new perspectives. We were very impressed and very much pleased by the speech.

I don't remember having spoken to him about it immediately afterwards, I remember speaking about this speech in other talks I had with him later. But I remember that we and all the Americans that first we had at the United States Embassy were so happy that it was almost a celebration for us. But I remember that in discussing it with other Americans, I always emphasized the courage and boldness of a senator speaking out like that at that time, in 1957, about the Algerian problem and the war going on there. It was a manifestation of bravery and unquestionable courage that impressed us considerably, and that I think began to create at that time a new current of feeling not only in Tunisia but I believe even in other countries, among many Africans that I knew -- Algerians, Moroccans, and others -- a new

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current of feeling toward the United States in the matter of colonial problems.

HAHN: Did you do anything afterwards, immediately after that speech, in order to foster

or to encourage a greater understanding of North African problems on Mr. Kennedy's part, so that his way of thinking could develop perhaps in accordance with your ideas of President Bourguiba?

SLIM: As I have said, I don't remember having been in contact with him immediately afterwards. It's certain that we tried at that time to encourage the senator himself, by messages or by conversations with him showing our appreciation of his speech, to urge him to go still further in that direction. I also remember that at that time all of our press here had drawn attention to the speech and to the importance of its being made in 1957: you must consider this speech in the background of that time and not today. It was an act of great courage. In various discussions with Americans and even with Frenchmen, we made a point of emphasizing the importance of this speech, showing thereby that the United States, who have been and who remain traditionally staunch friends of France, who knew about French colonial policy only what diplomatic circles or French propaganda methods let them know of what was going on.... I remember that Kennedy before that used to speak of France as one of the great champions of colonization. He saw only the good side of that colonization -- health measures, social welfare, development of the Algerian economy.

As I have said, in my first conversation with him he cited the benefits of colonization in Algeria; he even cited figures in the growth of education, the number of children going to school, the economy. What struck him especially was the general economy, the development of agriculture and industry. But he didn't seem to know -- I say "seem"; he wanted to give the impression that he didn't know the real situation. That's why after the first conversation I wondered whether this was how he really felt, or if it now he wanted to appear, a man of politics who doesn't want to show someone he's seeing for the first time that he may be opposed to what's going on in Algeria. So that's why his speech impressed us, impressed me personally so much -- because at the beginning I had doubts as far as he was concerned.

In his conversation he seemed sold on the thesis and theory of French colonization, though he saw some improvements that might be made. But to realize the speech that his attitude was totally different, that was a most pleasant surprise for us. Of course, during the conversation I made a point of mentioning that what France was saying about the minority of Algerians who revolted was exactly what she had said about

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Tunisia in 1952 and '53: that Bourguiba and his group were only a tiny minority that didn't represent the Tunisian people. I didn't fail to point out to him that after independence they realized that the Tunisian people were behind Bourguiba and his group. Did this comparison strike him? I don't really know.

In the discussion it seems to me he also mentioned the French contention that after independence Algeria would fall into chaos. I pointed out to him, I remember, that they said the same thing before Tunisia's independence, and that after her independence things went very well. All of this is to tell you how impressed we were. Personally, I was deeply impressed by his speech, which had taken me almost completely by surprise. So in the beginning of the conversation it seemed to me that his argument did not reveal the real

essence of his thinking; it was a tactical argument to make me tell all I could about colonial problems in Algeria and Tunisia, about our relations with the United States of America, and so on.

We did all that was possible by every available means, through mutual friends who translated and took back to him our feelings of satisfaction about his speech. And I made a point of stressing this to him, personally, at the time of our next meeting, which took place I don't know exactly when, but certainly around 1958, perhaps after Sakiet.

HAHN: The next interview you had with Mr. Kennedy was in the spring of 1958, following the bombardment of Tunisian town of Sakiet Sidi Youssef by French airplanes stationed in Algeria that created an international crisis which concerned the United States very much and which was brought before the General Assembly of the United Nations. What did you discuss with Mr. Kennedy at that time and what ideas did he present which indicated that he had a special interest in that problem?

SLIM: I remember that interview very well. It was, as you were saying, after the bombardment of Sakiet Sidi Youssef on the 8th of February, 1958. I was presenting the case to the State Department at that time and called their attention to the gravity of the situation, especially to the French attitude of arrogating the right to pursue the rebels on our territory, and even to bombard them. I remember that he was already very much affected by the bombardment, very moved; the newspapers hadn't failed to publicize everything about what had happened, and he was sincerely troubled by the bombardment.

I had the impression that he was trying to find a means of preventing this sort of thing from happening again, yet without opposing France. He was seeking some way, some solution that would prevent such events from recurring -- but would not upset France; a solution, on the contrary, that would show that

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the United States remained on the French side, with deep sympathies for France.

That was the time when I began to show him the seriousness of another danger: the continuation of the war in Algeria might cause the demise of the leaders sincerely devoted to democracy, and with their downfall bring to the fore young extremists with possible leanings toward Eastern trends and forms. It was at that time or at our next interview that I explained to him that all the Algerians knew of the United States of America was American tommy-guns, American bombs used by the French army, American planes and helicopters bombing them and hunting them out in the bush.

I told him that for us -- in our Tunisian opinion -- the bombarding of Sakiet had been done by the B-26, an American plane, and that the United States government and public opinion should demonstrate by some action that they were trying to prevent the use of these arms. He defended the State Department a little. He was still just a senator. He defended the thesis that these were arms destined for common defense in accordance with the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] treaty. But I argued that common defense could not

beget or conceive an attack on a country that is a friend, like France: a friend of France, of the United States, and of all the western nations. I remember that this affected him very much. I don't remember whether he actually intervened or promised me that he would do so. But he seemed to me from the beginning of our interview very much interested and very anxious about the situation.

HAHN: During this period 1957-1958, when Mr. Kennedy first demonstrated a serious interest in colonial problems, he also had contacts with the Algerian nationalists in New York. During this period when the policy of the United States was favorable towards France and unfavorable towards the Algerians, do you recall perhaps any comments made by Algerian representatives concerning Mr. Kennedy and the interest which he was showing in their country and in their nationalist movement?

SLIM: I remember the Algerian reaction. At that time in New York there was a team of nationalists who later assumed responsibility, the Algerian Bureau. There were highly responsible Algerians who came to attend each session of the United Nations and the debates that took place every year on the subject of Algeria. I remember that they were very interested and had very much admired President Kennedy's speech. But in 1958, if I remember, though they were quite interested and wanted to encourage his attitude, they weren't thinking of Kennedy as a possible president of the United States. So, while

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his speech had meaning for them and they wanted to encourage him, it was not in the perspective of his possible presidency.

HAHN: I believe you also had some contacts with other Arab representatives. Did other Arabs, in your opinion, feel that Mr. Kennedy was a coming personality and if so, did they favor his ideas? In other words, there were several Arab countries who were not favorable towards the moderate policies practiced by Tunisia, which impressed Mr. Kennedy during these early years. Do you perhaps recall any statements concerning Mr. Kennedy or his ideas, which were made by other Arab ambassadors or heads of state during this period?

SLIM: I remember that in the group of Arab ambassadors in New York as well as in Washington we talked about Kennedy's speech. The general impression was that this speech, although it was from their point of view very moderate and from ours very courageous, could nevertheless serve as a means of propaganda against France in the Algerian war matter.

But I don't remember that there was either in Washington or New York any feeling that Senator Kennedy would someday become president -- and in the very near future, since he became president in 1960, two years later. I didn't have the impression that they were thinking of him as a possible president of the United States. So, they were interested in his

speech but, you know, in Arab circles and in our own countries we are much more given to violent rather than to reasonable and moderate forms of verbal expression.

HAHN: You have spoken so far about the general interest which Mr. Kennedy demonstrated in Tunisia's policies and his general interest in the problems of colonialism. When is the first time that you recall that Mr. Kennedy showed a very specific interest in Tunisia, and in President Bourguiba, and in an idea proposed by President Bourguiba?

SLIM: It was in 1959. A year later, I had a third contact with Senator Kennedy. At that time -- I must look into my files again, I don't know whether it was at his request or at the embassy's request -- but there was a contact after the speech made by President Bourguiba during the Sousse conference.

This speech brought out for the first time the idea of a decolonization round table. President Bourguiba proposed gathering together for round table discussion representatives of all the nationalistic Africa countries struggling for their independence -- first of all the Algerians who were struggling at that time in a violent way, by war -- all the nationalist African peoples and all the government officials of the colonizing countries.

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President Bourguiba's proposal suggested that the round table might include countries that were friendly to the colonizing countries and that favored decolonization. Following Bourguiba's line of thought, it seemed possible that the United States might be included. President Bourguiba's idea was that this conference could envisage reasonable stages taking into account the process development and the colonizing country's interests and -- commitments reasonable but short stages that would lead to full, sovereign, and complete independence of the colonized country by amicable means, without having... As I was saying, President Bourguiba's idea was that this method would allow the colonized peoples to free themselves from colonization by peaceful means. President Bourguiba's idea was the first to avoid bloodshed; second, to prevent the hard feelings that develop after every armed conflict between a colonized people and their colonizers; and third, to maintain an atmosphere of trust and friendship between the former colonizer and the newly independent country, to maintain normal, friendly relations and hopefully a sincere cooperation on an equal footing between the formerly colonized people and the colonizers.

I remember that I had an interview with President Kennedy at that time. He was very interested in the idea presented by President Bourguiba, and asked me a number of questions about it. How did the President envisage this possibility? He wondered, for instance, if the idea could be initiated through the United Nations, or could it be started by having the colonizing countries themselves advocate it?

I remember that that was one of the questions he was pondering. He felt that it would be better if the round table discussions could be held by the colonizing nations themselves, who would take the initiative without going through the United Nations. From his viewpoint -- I remember very well -- if they went through the United Nations, there would be some

countries that he called "extremist" who might lean toward demagoguery and prevent a normal evolution of decolonization by friendly means. He knew very well -- he emphasized this -- that in the United Nations all tendencies from one extreme to the other exist; he wanted to avoid recourse to the United Nations as much as possible to prevent the intervention of nations who were perhaps not as interested in decolonization as in their own aims of ideological propaganda, and so on.

So at that time we talked about difficulties that could come from the colonizing countries, and I reminded him that the Algerian war was going on. I mentioned that as early as 1956 I had been present at a big discussion, between President Bourguiba and M. Guy Mollet -- then president of the French

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Council of Ministers -- during the negotiations for independence or afterwards, I don't remember exactly. It was a discussion at a dinner where other members of Parliament were present, and President Bourguiba tried for more than an hour to convince Guy Mollet and the French government to change their tactics and avoid war, to stop the war and to discuss matters with the principals of the Algerian war. He emphasized the importance of doing it at that time, to retain the friendship of the Algerian people, to maintain sincere cooperation without driving the Algerian people to excesses and extremes.

I remember very well: I pointed out that time to Senator Kennedy that Guy Mollet -- one of the leaders who, as secretary general of the French Socialist party, is supposed to be very liberal -- was showing some reluctance to discuss the process of independence for Algeria. I was saying to him, "You see what we have to contend with." You mustn't forget that it was then 1959. I was telling him that there were officials, especially in the French side, who could envisage the possibility of the round table as proposed by President Bourguiba. He mentioned to me that the English already had a semblance of a round table with Nigeria at that time, and almost a round table that had led to Ghana's independence. There was a development under way at that time in London, a sort of round table without being a round table, a discussion between those responsible in the English government and the Nigerian nationalists, that would eventually through friendly means bring about Nigeria's independence.

He showed me the example of Great Britain, while I spoke to him, of course, of France. We had not come to any definitive practical conclusion, but the discussion was most interesting. He seemed to me at that time really very much interested in colonial problems and their solution.

I had the same impression -- I don't know if it was exactly something he said or just an impression -- that he saw rapid decolonization as a means of stopping certain developments that were beginning to spread, certain Eastern trends starting to invade Africa and Asia. I had the impression -- was it an impression or something that he explicitly said? That it was a very sure way to oppose communism in Africa and Asia.

HAHN: I believe you discussed questions of colonialism with many American congressmen, senators, and other officials. During this period of, say, 1958-1959,

was it your impression that Mr. Kennedy had ideas which were far more intelligent and more far-sighted than most of the other persons with whom you discussed similar questions?

SLIM: Certainly. I had the impression that he was very far ahead. In the matter of colonial problems, he was very seriously thinking of ways of starting a rapid

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move to decolonization, to put an end not only to colonization but especially to the cold war that was going on full-tilt everywhere. To him, a rapid, friendly decolonization, especially if begun then, would be the means of stopping the cold war and preventing its extension to such an area as Africa or Asia -- especially Africa where the large majority of colonized nations remained in 1959.

HAHN: During the first six months of 1960, Mr. Kennedy was concerned with trying to obtain for himself the nomination of the Democratic party. During that period, do you recall further indications on his part of interest in this idea of a round table to discuss problems of decolonization, or do you recall any other indications of interest in colonial problems in general, or Tunisian or North African problems in particular?

SLIM: In 1960 I was again in contact with him. He was beginning at that time to be interested in colonial problems. He continued to be deeply interested in the relations between Tunisia and the United States. Indeed, during the course of a conversation with him -- I don't know if it was the 1960 one -- he was troubled because the American administration wasn't showing the same diligence and zeal to help in matters of cooperation for Tunisia's economic development as was being shown at that time to the Latin-American or Asian countries.

He was concerned. He gave me the impression that he was completely against.... He was for greater cooperation with other countries that were being helped by the American government. But at that time he gave me the impression that he was also thinking of his electoral campaign. That's why in 1960, when I saw him after my return from Tunisia -- I was in Tunisia for some occasion and had returned, it must have been in June or July 1960 -- I conveyed to him President Bourguiba's invitation to come and spend the summer in Tunisia. He had to decline. He spoke of his keen desire to come to Tunisia and to accept the invitation, but he couldn't at that time since the electoral campaign was going to begin and he had to stay in the United States. But he promised to come afterwards to Tunisia.

I had the impression that he was beginning to be worried about his campaign. He was still interested in the relations between Tunisia and the United States and in colonial problems and their evolution, but he was preoccupied by his electoral campaign. I don't know if it's an impression or something he said, but I had the impression that for some months he was going to soft-pedal his courageous attitude about colonial problems -- which I understood perfectly.

HAHN: During the campaign in 1960, he thought of delivering a speech concerning the proposal of President Bourguiba on the round table, but he never delivered that speech,

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perhaps because the crisis occurred in the Congo during the months of July and August 1960. Did you perhaps have any discussions with Mr. Kennedy or his representatives concerning either the crisis in the Congo itself or in particular the role which Tunisia was playing in the Congo to try to restore order to that troubled country?

SLIM: I remember that very well. After his election, I heard rumors that he intended perhaps to talk about the round table proposal -- Bourguiba's idea of decolonization through round table discussions -- and then there were rumors that he was hesitating to talk about it. Personally, I didn't know why; maybe what you say is true, but I didn't know it. Then when President Bourguiba gave me the assignment of the United Nations solely and I was to leave Washington as ambassador, I recalled my credentials -- and I was the first ambassador to be received by President Kennedy in 1961. That was when he told me himself that he had intended to speak of Bourguiba's round table proposal, but considering the Congo situation, he decided not to.

HAHN: You were the first ambassador to be received by Mr. Kennedy after he was elected President of the United States. This came as a tribute to you personally as well as to your country and to its president and his politics. How did this meeting come about? Why was it that he chose to talk with you before anybody else?

SLIM: I requested the return of my credentials, my "Letters of Credit to the President of the United States" -- since November, that was Mr. Kennedy -- and then I had to wait until his inauguration, in January, I believe. So it was not until then that I went to take my leave of the President of the United States. He detained me, saying, "I'm glad to have this chance: I wanted to see you. First, I admire President Bourguiba and your country's policies; I respect him very much. Second, there are very important problems I have to face immediately that I'd like your opinion about."

He kept me there and we discussed a number of things, especially the decolonization problem. I remember telling him that we were expecting him to talk about Bourguiba's policy since he admired it. We were expecting him to make some allusion to Bourguiba's round table proposal on decolonization. I remember that his answer was that he had really intended to refer in his speech to Bourguiba's proposal, but he had hesitated because of the Congo situation that had had considerable effect on American public opinion. The possibility of the decolonization round table couldn't be brought up then because of the Congo trouble.

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During that conversation, President Kennedy -- he was president then -- asked me questions about the Congo situation and some way to find a quick solution, and about the United Nations. I remember very well. At that time there was the *troika* matter that Mr. Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] had just brought up in the preceding session, and there were attacks against the United Nations and Dag Hammarskjold. The third and very important matter that Kennedy asked me about was the situation in Algeria and the developments in the war there. In the discussion with him I clearly stated my opposition to the *troika*, of course. I remember that he was very interested and very opposed to the *troika* principle.

As far as the Congo was concerned, we discussed together the possibility of a solution through the United Nations -- the strengthening of assistance and cooperation; the supplying of equipment, technicians, and experts to further the normal development of the Congo; and the Congo unity. He was very much for unity in the Congo, there was no doubt about that. He clearly opposed Katanga's secession. I remember very well, too, that he was in favor of a real fight with Khrushchev, if need be, apropos of strengthening the United Nations. The responsibilities of the secretary general should belong to one man only; he was deeply convinced of that. As far as Algeria was concerned, he told me that he was aware of the danger of continuing the war, and that he would exert every influence to convince France that it must be ended as soon as possible.

He gave me the impression at that time that he had great respect for President De Gaulle [Charles De Gaulle]. He thought he might be the one to find a peaceful solution for the Algerian problem. During this conversation, President Kennedy emphasized his admiration for Bourguiba's policies and attitudes and for the means he was marshaling to solve our internal problems and to further our position in the international domain.

He asked me to convey his invitation to President Bourguiba: he would be very happy to have a direct man-to-man discussion with President Bourguiba -- which later took place.

HAHN: During the end of 1960 and the beginning of 1961, that is, the period when Mr. Kennedy assumed power, numerous African nations became independent. You at that time were very active in the United Nations although you were not yet president of the General Assembly. You were very influential, as I recall, among the new African diplomats. Did Mr. Kennedy or one of his representatives, for example, Chester Bowles, try to contact you to try to have you follow a certain type of policy within the United Nations among these newly arrived African delegates?

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SLIM: Yes. I remember quite well. It was Chester Bowles who contacted me. I had a long discussion with him; he told me he was representing Kennedy. I don't remember if it was after Kennedy's inauguration or a few days before, but it was around that time. I remember that there was talk in Washington circles at the time of the possibility of Chester Bowles becoming secretary of state. I asked him about it and he said the President was still undecided; he didn't know whether he was definitely planning on him or on someone else. Chester Bowles told me that Kennedy had asked him to get my opinion

on certain problems -- the problem of the Congo and the newly independent African nations, their needs, and what policy should be adopted toward them. He indicated to me the American government's desire to be on friendly terms with all the independent nations of Africa.

We talked at length then and very openly about the situation in Africa and in Algeria and how the trend there could be changed. I believe I talked with Chester Bowles about the American vote at the United Nations. I reminded him that in the preceding year, it was only at the last session that we had managed to change the American delegation's vote. The delegation had voted no, and then finally changed from no to abstention at the last minute -- about ten o'clock at night. I remember mentioning to him my hope that with the new Kennedy administration this abstention would evolve into a yes for a resolution on the Algerian problem. Chester Bowles was very clever. He didn't want to commit himself. He told me that everything would depend on the wording of the resolution, but he assured me that President Kennedy's feeling was in favor of ending the war in Algeria by any means, and of furthering the progress of the time hadn't come yet to bring the matter to public attention, but that diplomatic action could be just as effective as a vote in the United Nations.

HAHN: After Mr. Kennedy was inaugurated as President, he invited President Bourguiba to come to Washington as the first official state visitor to the United States, again a great honor to you and your country. In your preliminary discussions concerning that visit, what explanation did he give as to why he chose President Bourguiba as his first official guest?

SLIM: In the course of the conversation that I was talking about, he told me, as a matter of fact, that to show his esteem for the policies of Tunisia and President Bourguiba, he was most anxious that Bourguiba should be the first chief of state to visit Washington under the Kennedy administration. That's how he felt at that time. I told him I wouldn't fail to convey that to the President, who would be happy to come -- which he did. He was the first chief of state to visit the United States during the Kennedy administration. Kennedy himself had

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made a point of telling me that he was keenly anxious to have President Bourguiba as the first chief of state.

HAHN: Why?

SLIM: He told me because he felt it was a kind of homage, an affirmation of President Kennedy's admiration of the policies of Tunisia and of President Bourguiba in both internal and external matters.

HAHN: In other words, you are saying that President Kennedy was stating his admiration for the policy of moderation, of careful planning which President Bourguiba had

followed in Tunisia with reference both to internal development and external relations. is that also the reason in your opinion why President Kennedy made Tunisia one of the pilot-states for long term American assistance?

I believe Tunisia was the first country to be considered actively. Could you give your recollections of how these negotiations came about?

SLIM: I'd like to correct something in what you've just said, that is the word "moderation" in politics. Because it's a word that's beginning to take on rather a different meaning. I would call it a bold but realistic policy, a policy bearing in mind the realities.

To answer your question: I wasn't ambassador, but I was present at the discussions in Washington between President Kennedy and President Bourguiba between the American officials and Bourguiba, Jr., Tunisian ambassador to the United States. I remember that President Kennedy and the Kennedy administration wanted Tunisia to serve as a pilot nation in matters of cooperation between the United States and other countries. I remember something I'd like to emphasize here. Although after January I had not been present, had not been the one in charge of Tunisian diplomacy in the United States, there is something important to be brought out concerning Tunisia and the United States. The United States if you remember, was categorically opposed to the whole policy of positive neutralism proclaimed by certain countries of Asia and Africa and championed at that time by India, Yugoslavia, and Egypt. And in that discussion President Bourguiba did not speak of positive neutralism but of non-alignment between the two blocs. It was the first time that the expression was used by a chief of state at an official dinner. President Kennedy, who knew about it -- since it had been discussed in private -- responded publicly at the dinner and with great courage, saying that the United States applauded a systematic policy of non-alignment with respect to the two blocs, that this would strengthen the American policy of peaceful coexistence.

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This is something that I think must be brought out, and I want to do so now. President Bourguiba had decided to uphold this policy; but to hear from the mouth of the American chief of state not only no opposition but approval of the policy seemed to us a most reasonable and realistic way of creating the atmosphere of peace and detente necessary to prepare for eventual permanent peace between the nations. It was a very courageous thing on Kennedy's part. I remember he detained me for a moment as I was saying goodnight to him later that evening. "Are you happy?" he asked me. "Yes," I answered, "I'm very happy."

HAWN: In your opinion, then, Mr. Kennedy launched a completely different type of policy with regard not only to colonialism but with regard not only to colonialism but with regard to the foreign policies of newly independent countries. Is that correct?

SLIM: That's absolutely true. Because, as I've mentioned to you, the preceding administration couldn't even conceive of the expression. Of course, the policy of

positive neutralism but in another form, as non-alignment with respect to the two blocs -- that was an act of courage, that's certain.

HAHN: In September 1961, you were elected president of the General Assembly and in that capacity you had many contacts with either Mr. Kennedy himself or representatives of his administration. What incidents do you recall during which he tried to use the United Nations as a means to resolving problems either in the colonial field or in other fields?

SLIM: After I became president of the United Nations, I had only one contact with President Kennedy. That was when he came to make his speech to the General Assembly. I remember a discussion I had with him in the president's office before and after the speech. He was very convinced of the need of strengthening the United Nations by every means. Remember that at that time Secretary General Hammarskjold had just disappeared, and there was the problem of choosing his successor. He or his representative had tried to convince me of the value of my taking the post of secretary general, but then the problem seemed different. I remember clearly that he had decided to strengthen the United Nations by every means. But I wasn't in contact very much with him then. I did speak with Stevenson who came in to see me two or three times, and said that President Kennedy had asked him to see me specifically, that he wanted to ask such-and-such about some United Nations question. I was then no longer acting as the Tunisian representative but as president of the United Nations; it was another approach, another way of acting and thinking. But the impression remains with me

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that he wanted very much to strengthen the United Nations. There had been different ways proposed, including the *troika* principle. But he wanted a stronger United Nations with the secretary general's responsibilities in the hands of one man who would remain independent toward all governments, as provided by Articles 100, 101, 102, and so on, of the Charter.

HAHN: When you were acting in the capacity of president of the General Assembly, you could be more objective in your observations, perhaps, than when you were leader of the Tunisian delegation. In that capacity then, as president of the General Assembly, what differences in attitude towards the United States could you observe in delegations from Arab or African countries? Also, what changes could you observe in the behavior or the attitude of the American delegation at the General Assembly; in other words, what concrete changes could you see in the United Nations General Assembly which were perhaps the result of the election of Mr. Kennedy?

SLIM: I remember at that time... Was I getting another perspective and way of evaluating things with my new responsibilities, or was there really a change? I had the impression that the United States was trying to avoid intervening directly with the delegates to get them to adopt the American attitude or position. As far as the

relations with the president of the General Assembly are concerned, I don't know what the relations were before with the other presidents -- since I hadn't sat in the private office of the president -- but I know that everything was very correct between the president of the United Nations and the delegates. I didn't see any difference between his relations with the United States delegate and the delegate of the Soviet Union or some little country of Asia or Africa. They were all very correct and very respectful of the president's responsibilities.

HAHN: It was while you were president of the General Assembly that the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba occurred. What do you recall as being your own personal reactions to that incident and perhaps what other reactions do you recall on the part of other delegations at the United Nations?

SLIM: I remember that my personal reaction was a feeling of indignation. I wasn't happy about the invasion and, of course, my responsibilities didn't allow me to say so except in the privacy of my office. But it was something we didn't like at the time, and personally I regretted that the Kennedy administration started out that way.

HAHN: Were you surprised perhaps that this invasion was undertaken by President Kennedy?

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SLIM: I was really very much surprised that the invasion was undertaken under the Kennedy administration. It wasn't until afterwards that we realized that it wasn't conceived and developed during that period.

HAHN: Also, shortly after Mr. Kennedy became president, there occurred the crisis here in Tunisia concerning the French evacuation of Bizerte. That was at the end of July 1961. What was your impression of the position taken by the United States at that time and during that crisis?

SLIM: That was in July, during the Kennedy election [sic]. He was president, but I was not yet president of the United Nations. During that period I was not in contact with President Kennedy. It was especially Ambassador Habib Bourguiba, Jr. and then Mr. Bahi Ladgham, who had come from Tunisia, who saw the President. But my impression was -- if I remember -- that the Kennedy administration was very, very upset by the Bizerte affair. On the one hand, the Kennedy administration couldn't admit the Bizerte incidents -- or rather, the battle of Bizerte -- they didn't want to admit it. They felt it wasn't something that could strengthen the bond not only between Tunisia and France, but between Tunisia and all the Western countries and especially the United States. But on the other hand, the Kennedy administration had taken great care not to frighten France. They were very reluctant. Was it Kennedy himself directly, his advisors, his secretary of state, or the American delegation? The American position would have gained by opposing France more courageously, especially in the public debates. Of course, the Kennedy administration --

Kennedy himself, his Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and so on -- had emphasized that they preferred to act through diplomatic channels, that they hadn't failed to negotiate with France and to make confidential statements to the French government about this matter. But the Kennedy administration was hesitant at that time.

HAHN: Did you find then that relations between Tunisia and the United States actually changed very much after Mr. Kennedy became president, or in effect did they become similar to those relations which existed when Eisenhower was president?

SLIM: It's certain that the relations between Tunisia and the United States developed very favorably after Kennedy took over the office of president. I mean, that after that we felt that the American government had decided firmly to cultivate and maintain friendship with Tunisia, and to make Tunisia a pilot-nation in matters of cooperation, and so on, even after the Bizerte incidents. Even, I'd say, after the misunderstanding -- not to use a stronger word, but since I'm

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not speaking diplomatically -- after the intense reaction of inner rage that I personally felt toward the Kennedy administration wanted to show that they still wanted Tunisia's friendship. And President Bourguiba, too, tried by every means to show that even in that situation we wouldn't have wanted to see the United States and the Kennedy administration assume with regard to the Bizerte affair.... Even with that, we still....

HAHN: There were other acts of friendship towards Tunisia undertaken at that same general period, for example the Peace Corps was started at that time and Tunisia again was one of the first countries to receive volunteers. What is your opinion of the idea of the Peace Corps in general, and more specifically, what is your impression of the work accomplished in Tunisia by the Peace Corps volunteers?

SLIM: Personally, I applauded the creation of the Peace Corps. The work accomplished to this day by the volunteers has been admirable. Of course, I've heard of quite a few instances -- especially during certain African or Afro-Asian meetings and in personal contacts -- a lot of criticism of the Peace Corps, especially criticism of the meddling by certain members of the Peace Corps in the internal affairs of the country where they happen to be. As for us here in Tunisia, we've never had anything of that kind: we've had devotion and serious effort to help Tunisians and Tunisians to create, build, and develop our country. I don't know if those criticisms are sincere or not, but as for ourselves, there was nothing of the sort, no foundation for such criticism.

HAHN: Do you recall your impressions upon hearing the news of the assassination of President Kennedy, your personal reactions, and, if possible, can you recall your reactions as to how your country might be affected by the loss of President Kennedy?

SLIM: I was really horror-stricken by the news. I never expected that to happen. We were so full of admiration for Kennedy's personality. I was, myself. My country, my president, everyone, we were truly horror-stricken by an act that seemed to me inconceivable. We were so deeply grieved not only because we felt the personal loss of a sincere friend, but because the world was, we felt, losing a veritable architect of peace -- a courageous, intelligent man who, if he had continued to live, could have consolidated even more the understanding and cooperation and peace among the nations. We were horrified. We couldn't imagine what would happen in the domain of international affairs and in the relations between our country and the United States, what changes would develop in these relations. But we were truly horror-stricken.

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HAHN: In your opinion, what was the most important legacy for Tunisia left by the administration of Mr. Kennedy?

SLIM: I believe that in the relations between Tunisia and the United States, what will remain from the Kennedy administration is a feeling of genuine trust between our two countries. I believe Kennedy created this feeling of trust. It's possible to have to be always on guard in discussions even with countries with whom the relationship is very friendly, but with the Kennedy administration an atmosphere of absolute and total trust was created. So that when I'm with an American official I no longer take any precautions in discussion of any subject whatsoever.

I think that this is a very important in the relationship between countries: there should not have to be any precautions in discussing any problem whatever. Even when there is a clash of opinions, we should not have to be on guard or measure our words and our reactions, or have to wonder, "If I do so-and-so, what will my opponent's reaction be?" To be able to speak frankly and directly what one things on any subject -- I think Kennedy created that atmosphere between Tunisia and the United States.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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