Walt W. Rostow Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 4/11/1964
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Biographical Note
Walt W. Rostow (1916-2003) was the Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs in 1961 and the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council from 1961 to 1966. This interview focuses on Rostow's professional relationship with John F. Kennedy, the Kennedy administration's policy towards Laos, Vietnam, Cuba, and Europe, and the operations of the White House during the Kennedy administration, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Walt W. Rostow

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This is a first tape of a first interview with Walt W. Rostow for the Kennedy Library. The interviewer is Richard Neustadt. We are talking in Mr. Rostow's office at the State Department. Rostow has a pile of papers representing homework on the first phases of his relationship with Mr. Kennedy and the Kennedy Administration. The date of this session is April 11, 1964. What else do we need by way of local color, Walt?

Rostow: It's a quiet Saturday.

Neustadt: Now say some more.

Rostow: The files around here are materials from the pre-election period and the campaign, which Fred Holborn has brought together plus files of formal memoranda and communications with the President, both when I worked in the White House and at the State Department. Our first job is to decide how we are to structure this thing.

Neustadt: What I would like to do at this session, if it seems sensible to you, is this, Walt. I would like to begin with questions relating to your initial contacts with Kennedy before the election campaign period and then go on to the transition period and on into your first months on the staff. As I wrote you, in theory today we ought to be able to cover some matters that run us into the summer and fall of 1961 towards the time when you came over to the State Department in December. As a practical matter, I doubt that this session will get that far, but it doesn't matter how far we get, wherever we stop and start again. And one other matter we ought to have clear between us: I see no point in this sort of an interview in trying to reconstruct historical incidents in the full scope of an historian trying to do a reconstruction attempt. I think our job here is to get out of you every perception we can about President Kennedy as a personality and as an operator - his ideas, his temperament, the way he looked at things, his growth and learning process. Historical incidents become illustrative. This

is not

is not an essay in trying to make you do all the work of all the historians.

Rostow: The caution is necessary, because the central problem here is: will historians be able to reconstruct the whole picture of what went into his remarkable computer of a mind? Everyone that worked with him has hold of a portion of the truth. No one, I believe, saw all the elements that shaped his thought and action.

Neustadt: I don't want you to start on it now, but I do want it on your mind: one of the fascinating and difficult things is to comprehend what you call that computer mind was and how it worked. The other thing that is hard is to reconstruct his characteristic compartmentalization of human relationships. As far as I can perceive he had a host of special relationships with all kinds of people and nobody's coverage was the same as his coverage. People were constantly being surprised by aspects of his relations with others. I don't think you should be too self-conscious about that either, Walt. You had one important compartment. You covered a range. I think if we explore that, then at the end we might be able to talk a little bit about your perceptions of other compartments and how the devil he kept all these differentiated relations in order. Begin at the beginning. There you were, Walt Rostow in existence, and you ran into this guy.

Rostow: I ran into him in the following manner. Fred Holborn was sent up to MIT because Kennedy had presumably heard that we were working on the problem of India and economic development. I met Fred in the office of a man named Bill Malenbaum. Paul Rodan was there and I simply walked into the office and joined the discussion. Fred was presenting to us the problem of the Sentator's interest in India.

Neustadt: When was this?

Rostow:

Rostow: This was in November 1957. I made some observations. Then I got word later from Fred that any time I came to town the Senator would like to meet me. The first meeting I had directly with the Senator was in February 1958. I was down giving testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on foreign aid. (Actually I had shaken his hand once in 1956 at Arthur Schlesinger's garden party at graduation time, but that was neither here nor there.) We talked about a speech on India, to which I later contributed. And we talked about the foreign aid problem, on which I was going to give testimony. He was present at that session and asked questions about India in order to get certain responses into the record. But what I remember best about that meeting is his questions about my career - what I had done at various times in the 1930's, 1940's, etc. He told me what he had been doing at parallel times. And then he made a remark which sounded quite outrageous. Here was one of the prime candidates for nomination for the Presidency by his party; but he said, "You came along much faster than I did." What he meant was that each of us was going forward hard in a chosen field: his, politics; mine, academic life. I had come along towards the top of my profession and he still had to make it in his. It was done without affectation. And it reflected that Greek definition of excellence that recurred with him; namely, that people should seek to express their personality to the maximum in one direction or another.

Neustadt: Was it clear to you at this time that his notion of his track had to encompass the Presidency?

Rostow: Yes. I think by the time I met him he had made up his mind that he was going to make a bid for the Democratic nomination in 1960. From conversations with others, my hunch is that he only made up his mind after he recovered from his illness in 1955 - perhaps sometime around the 1956 convention. I don't think it was explicit at that first meeting, but it was a common assumption between us.

I recall

I recall answering a question for Oliver Franks in England the next year as we walked in his garden after lunch. He asked why a man who was going out for the Presidency would involve himself so deeply in trying to get aid for India through the Congress. I said there were two sides to it. As a practical matter he had a reputation for being somewhat conservative in the Democratic party and that helping India was, roughly speaking, a liberal thing to do. It balanced his portfolio a little. But I thought there was more to it than that. Here he was a Senator and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, and he had a compulsion to do something creative with that position. His work on India and foreign aid was something he figured he might try to do from that base that was inherently important. And so it proved to be. The India-Pakistan consortium arrangements that flowed from it were, in my view, a milestone. I don't think it was a wholly calculated or cynical thing he was doing. And in the following year at the end of 1959, when he had every reason to turn his mind wholly to his candidacy, he continued working furiously with the liberals within the Republican Administration, fellows outside like me, and fellows like Senator Cooper in the Senate. I believe he felt compelled to use the base he had to do something interesting.

Well, to return to our first meeting. We had lunch in the Senate and that led to work on the India speech. And I was, from that time, firmly committed to him.

Neustadt: Walt, before you leave that tell me one thing in connection with that first perception. Do you recall any perception about this guy in that environment - this was not the only Senator you had run into. You must have an image in the back of your mind about Senators, how they feel about the Senate, how effective they are in the environment. Did you come away with any thought about this fellow as a Senator?

Rostow:

Rostow: The next time I met him is a better occasion to answer that question. Between the first and second meetings we kept in close touch - through memoranda, Fred Holborn on the telephone, work on the India speech, etc. The date of the second meeting was, I believe, in June 1958. It was a day when three enterprises he had been involved in came to a climax. One was the attempt to modify the Battle Act to permit freer trade with Eastern Europe; second was his labor bill; and the third was the Pakistan-India resolution which he and Cooper had been working on. It was towards the end of a tough Congressional session. I remember he looked thin. His feet were up on his desk. He was drinking a glass of milk, and, although he was tired and had taken something of a beating on the labor bill and the Battle Act amendment, he was in good form. Actually the Battle Act performance was generally regarded as a good show. The Eisenhower Administration had urged him to do this, but let him down at the last minute. He had taken a licking temporarily on the labor bill; but his India proposal had, I believe, been passed in the Senate. He wasn't depressed. He wasn't elated. He coolly appraised his batting average. It wasn't a great victory. But he was full of the details of the day in which three things he had been working on had come to a head. He talked about the technical political conditions that led to the three results with a wonderful precision and detail, and with complete lack of passion. He wasn't angry at the fellows that did him in on the ones that got away. This was just the way it turned out. It struck me that he had had a lot of fun fighting these three things through and hadn't come out too badly. He was full of an affectionate respect for the details of the political process. Even when he described in some detail just how and why the White House under Eisenhower decided they couldn't swallow the Battle Act repeal, having gotten him into it, and how they had communicated to him their reversal, there was not bitterness.

The other thing that happened was again political. He got on the phone to a friend in Boston - I don't know who it was - but it was an engaging conversation. He

said

said: "Can't you get a stronger Republican candidate against me in Massachusetts? I need a lot of votes and if they put up some bum, who is going to come out and vote?" I don't know whom he talked to, but Kennedy must have judged he had some influence on whom the Republicans would nominate. He was evidently worried about the fellow the Republicans were putting up because there wouldn't be enough of a contest for him to lay a basis in Massachusetts in 1958 for his nomination in 1960.

There was always, from beginning to end, a dual way of talking about politics with Kennedy; he was most respectful of his profession and fascinated by its details; but there would always be a half humorous quality. Remember at the press conferences - his comments were always deflating and semi-comic. He greatly respected the medium through which he worked - he loved the details and the manipulations, but there was always the sense of a game - a detachment from it. This was his chosen profession. He was making the most of it. He loved and respected it. It was just a sense that it was a game which should be taken seriously but not too seriously. It was a means to an end, not an end in itself.

I remember at this session he asked me what he should do about some protectionist piece of business that Massachusetts interests were pressing upon, what line he should take. He said he couldn't completely line himself up against these protectionists. I said the way to play that is to say that if you have an economy being run by the Republicans with a lot of unemployment in it, then the pressures for these protectionist measures would rise and I am going to stand up for my fellows to be sure they are protected. But the way to deal with protectionism was to get full employment and then structural adjustments could be more easily made in textiles, shoes, and fish. He could thus reconcile a respectable position with the need to support Massachusetts interests. He looked at me humorously and said - you are quite a politician aren't you. That's pretty good. I think I will use it.

Then

Then he asked me what he should say at the Smith commencement - this must have been around June. I said just talk about what you have been through. What it is like to wrestle through three issues in the Senate. Its problems, frustrations, and its creative aspects. Fred tells me he went and did it. I have never checked the speech.

From all this you got the sense of a man deeply involved in his profession and enjoying it immensely.

He was, of course, a relatively junior member of the Senate. When I appeared before the Foreign Relations Committee he questioned me only after three or four other fellows with more seniority. In that club he was obviously not a top boy. Seen casually, his relations with his Senate colleagues were good and friendly; but in the hierarchy he was not at that time...

Neustadt: Never was. They never forgot it either.

Rostow: That's right, and he never forgot it. And he came back to it. But he knew how the Congress worked. And to go to the end of this story - I know historians will debate whether he was effective or not effective on the Hill. But what he said in that last press conference about the legislation in 1963 and 1964 - when he said "westward look the land is bright" was, I believe, correct. He knew two things: one, the pressures for the tax bill were such that he would get it through; and two, they couldn't go home without a civil rights bill. I think both things were right.

Neustadt: So do I.

Rostow: I am delighted that President Johnson got a lift at the start in getting these bills through. But I think Kennedy was right in 1963 in being willing to lay back and let the pressures work up through the Congre Well, that is getting way ahead of the story, but to come back -- that was the second time I met him.

The third

The third session was, I believe, the first time - on August 8, 1958 - I had ever discussed military matters with him. It laid the basis for much future work in the campaign and beyond.

I was down in Washington with C. D. Jackson to do the basic draft of Eisenhower's Lebanon-Jordan speech before the UN. Two fellows who had less right to draft a speech on the Middle East I cannot think of. But there we were. And it turned out a good speech. In any case Kennedy asked me to have breakfast on the Friday of that week. He was working on a missile gap speech. He had been pressured by fellows in the Air Force and Joe Alsop to talk about the missile gap. I tried to explain the ambiguity about the missile gap, in particular that it was not simply a question of whether the Russians had more than us, but whether they had sufficiently more to conceive a first strike as a rational act. I tried to deflate a little the more romantic parts of that argument and to focus on the need for an enlarged US second strike capability rather than on the numbers on each side. That was what we talked about at breakfast.

He knew exactly why I was in town, but never asked me a question about the Middle East.

Then we drove down to the State Department. He drove a convertible. He observed it was a little dangerous for him to drive a convertible seeing as how they argue I am too young to be a candidate. But the danger was mitigated because Hubert and Stu also drove around in convertibles. Then he asked whether it was all right for me to be seen by my Republican friends being driven up to the State Department by Senator Kennedy. He did it humorously, but there was an understanding of the position that I might be in. I said no. They know I am a Democrat. It is quite all right. But the most interesting thing in retrospect was his talk about Hoffa on the way down that morning. He said: I have never met a worse man.

This is

This is a bad man; this is an evil man. And for a person as sophisticated as Kennedy it was a rare flat moral statement. He generally judged human beings with compassion, and understood that life was complex and all kinds of people had a right to be around. But it reflected an element which people sometimes missed about him. There were moments when things were good or bad; and Hoffa was a bad man. He said I look across at this fellow, at the hearings, and reconstruct the motives for what he is doing and they are evil. It was a lovely morning. Washington was very hot during the day, but it was cool and bright then, the way it can be in August; and suddenly came this deeply felt statement that here was a fellow who was evil.

Another similar reaction came much later. We were talking, before Ikeda's visit in 1961, in the White House about the miraculous post-war decline of the Japanese birth rate. And suddenly he said with rare feeling: but a lot of this was abortion. I explained that it was true they had a long history of infanticide and they had done quite a lot with abortion, but they were getting on with birth control by other means. But this simple uncomplicated reflex against abortion came through.

Incidentally, that Friday was memorable for another reason. I spent an hour or so, in his Senate office with Nixon, round about noon. The first time I ever talked to him. I put this in the record because C.D. Jackson, with whom I saw Nixon, knew of my breakfast with Kennedy. He asked me afterwards what I thought of Nixon. I told C. D. I had just seen these two fellows on one day. With Kennedy you knew this is a lively, interesting, recognizable personality. Whether he gets to be President of the United States or not he will be somebody interesting. This is a perfectly definable man. With Nixon, after talking to him an hour and a half (it was not a bad talk - we were trying to line him up in case we couldn't get our Middle East speech

through

through Foster Dulles), you felt if he doesn't pull off his Indian rope trick and get the Presidency, you have no idea what kind of personality he will be.

Kennedy at this time was a man who was committed to go out for the nomination to the Presidency. In order to do that you obviously need a lot of ambition. You must make sacrifices in time and in other values; but you never lost a sense with him that this was a whole personality. It was different with Nixon.

Well those were the three times that I saw Senator Kennedy in 1958, before I went on sabbatical leave. When we got on the boat - the Liberté - there were some flowers from him and a message of some sort. We kept in touch all through that year. There was a lot of correspondence through Fred Holborn. And I did some drafting and other things on Kennedy's account in the period September 1958 - September 1959. But is there anything you want to ask about 1958?

Those are the three meetings. I worked on the India speech, foreign aid, and began conversations about military matters.

Neustadt: There is one thing I would like to ask. Holborn - Holborn was your channel?

Rostow: Yes, Holborn was the channel.

Neustadt: What are your perceptions about Kennedy's use of Holborn for this kind of thing?

Rostow: He had a gift for orchestrating a great many human beings not only for his purposes but for purposes in which they would be most effective and fulfill themselves most. He used Fred intensively in this period. I think Fred was vastly more important in this period than in the White House. He was important because he was liaison with the

academic

academic community; with the more sophisticated parts of the newspaper world; and with a part of the diplomatic world, not only the Germans but others. He also did quite a lot of drafting, as I recall. You've got to remember that Senator Kennedy was awfully thin on the ground at that time in those connections. Right down to the time he came into the White House, for example, his knowledge of the bureaucratic establishment was thin. Fred was the main channel to Cambridge. He did a lot of work generating contacts and connections between the Senator and what you might call the intellectual, bureaucratic elite.

Neustadt: Well Fred was a channel for me too in that planning period before the election. So I have some perception of how this works. Also it is fascinating that Fred emerged out of nowhere to pick up this link and there is another question I want to simply throw in here. We know we are talking about a marvelously useful instrument. I don't know whether you are aware that somewhere in this period between 1958 and 1960 while Holborn was performing precisely these kinds of functions Ted Sorensen became bitterly opposed to it. He tried at one point to get the Senator to dispense with his services. He regarded him as a security leak. An extraordinary tension arose of which I was never aware during that period, but which I was able to reconstruct afterwards. I simply want your comment on this. This must have gone on for a couple of years with Kennedy perfectly aware of it. He persisted in using Holborn in these ways and somehow fended Sorensen off. Did you perceive any of this?

Rostow: I had forgotten about it. But I have two comments to make. One of them is a personal connection with the affair. I don't know when the time was - I think it was after I came home from my sabbatical leave in 1959 or early 1960. Ted, I got word, was trying to set up a separate academic empire. I associate it vaguely with Williams. It was a separate group he was trying to build up somewhere. I didn't know Ted Sorensen at all. He called me up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and

said

said he wanted to talk with me about setting up an additional academic circle. Not knowing what this was about, but knowing things were working well through Fred - and having the Senator designate Fred as my contact with him - I felt loyal to the man, and was quite cool with Ted. I wondered afterwards, when I worked well with Ted, if there wasn't perhaps something we had to get over. Ted and I got along well; but I occasionally wondered about that phone call.

At that time I did not know Ted and I didn't really know who the other members of the staff were. I had met some of them around the office when I was there in June 1958, but I didn't know the layout. I just quietly went along the path Kennedy had laid out.

After the election there was a second crisis involving Fred which illustrated how the President dealt with his people. Mac Bundy asked me if I thought that Fred could serve on the White House national security staff. I said he was perceptive and good and we could certainly use him. Then there arose from somewhere the charge that he leaked to the press. I don't know what he leaked or didn't leak. I have no notion of the specific gravity of the charge. But Mac decided he couldn't take him on; and this, I assume, was a great sadness for Fred. But the President, with typical loyalty, found a slot for him and kept him on the White House staff from beginning to end.

Kennedy's style as administrator was like nothing else I have ever seen and I sometimes thought I could guess its origins. He comes from a large family. I remember once, near the end of his life, meeting in Naples, Croce. There were his children, in-laws, the grandchildren, and then some hangers-on. He would feed perhaps 25 people at an enormous long rough wooden table. Well, Kennedy ran everything on this kind of extended family basis. Put another way, he was the center of a wheel. He was capable, because of his great energy and human capacity, to maintain more reliable bilateral human relations than any man I have ever known. Whether it was the Senator's office as I got

to know

to know it in 1959 and 1960, or the campaign, or the Government itself - it was always the same pattern: of spokes out from himself.

The nature of the human relations he built were important. Once someone was taken in to be part of that wheel, he stuck. The tie wasn't made casually. I think Kennedy made a fairly quick judgment as to whether he would take somebody in or not; but once he decided, then that relationship was reliable. Time could pass. All kinds of things might happen; but you knew you could go back to him and pick up where you were. Because of this reliability in these relations, the ease of communication, the knowledge that you could come back and pick up and it was there, the men around him strained less to get his ear, they were less anxious if they didn't see him for awhile, than with any man of power I have ever seen. He had a marvelous gift for orchestrating people. The Sorensen-Holborn clash is one of the few cases of which I was at all aware where there was any raw competition in the atmosphere around the White House.

Neustadt: But this, of course, was a big pond then. I take it there was plenty of water to swim in. Sorensen I take it found out there was plenty of water to swim in.

Rostow: We each had a different historical connection with Kennedy. Mac Bundy's, for example, was different than mine. The people he wove together represented almost geological layers in Kennedy's experience: old friends from pre-war; college friends; the PT boat friends; and so on. These people all respected one another, because they knew they were linked as spokes in his wheel. And because they were attached to him they came, more often than not, to like each other. Kennedy took great pains to make sure that the people around him were not set into competition; he was against it. The only way he could do that was by exerting enormous energy to maintain these bilateral ties and being prepared to see a staggering number of people. But it was more than a trick. Even when we

were seeing

were seeing one another often - when I worked at the White House - when you would go down the line at a reception I never remember a time when he would shake hands without making reference to the last piece of business we did together or the last memo I had sent over. And I am sure he did this with other people. He looked at people and thought: what is my connection, what is the link I have at this moment; and he would convey it. This is partly memory; and if you like, a politician's trick. But it is a device of the highest order.

One of the last times he spoke to me was in this vein. It was at the lunch for Victor Paz, President of Bolivia on October 22, 1963, to which Elspeth and I were invited. Paz referred in his speech to the concept of take-off. In the days when I was in the White House, we had all these fellows from the developing countries coming in to see the President and they almost always made reference to the concept of take-off. We used to wait to see how long it took for the reference to emerge. He once teased me about it, suggesting that their references had more to do with their interest in aid money than in my virtue as a social scientist - to which I agreed. But as he walked out from the Paz lunch and passed me - puffing a cigar - he said quietly something like: "there goes the take-off again".

But my point, for what it's worth is that here was a man who grew up in a big family; his administrative techniques appeared almost an extension of that style and experience. He perceived sensitively the qualities in other people, and then took great pains to orchestrate them in ways which would make them as effective as possible.

In the early days in the White House - February or March 1961 - we were in the middle of a load of crises, for three days running he came back to the problem of finding a job for a man. He kept asking:

where

where would he fit? Where is he going to be effective? This was a man without political importance. Finally, he found the slot.

His view was that a man's duty and destiny on earth was to find the means for a maximum expression of his personality. If they fitted his pattern of operations, he wanted to use them; but he knew that they would be best used by him if they were at maximum effectiveness. That is ninety percent of administration anyway; the perception that administration consists of organizing to make human beings effective. But there was also a moral feeling that if you had responsibility for people they ought to be happy and effective. This, I think, is why he kept returning to that Greek definition of excellence.

Neustadt: Well I diverted you with this. I find it fascinating that he would not dispense with either of these guys, nor would he permit their apparatuses to be dismantled. I am sure you are right he didn't encourage competition - if it happened, however, he would rather have it then remove any spoke. He never wanted any spoke removed - sending Ted off. There is something in that - I don't know all the details of it. It is a precursor of some things that were to happen later.

Rostow: Moreover, there was an important perception behind all this. I don't know at what stage in his life he perceived that the fundamental problem of an executive is to make sure that the choices he faced were not predetermined by his staff - that the nature of an executive's problem was to carry on endless guerrilla warfare with everyone around him to make sure they weren't closing out options that he wanted to keep open....

Neustadt: Now he must have had this long before he hit the White House.

Rostow:

Rostow: No doubt. I don't know where he got it. But it's the sign of a potentially great executive. The other essential is, of course, that when all the options are arrayed you can make a correct net judgment under very complex and chancy circumstances. But, you know, taking away a spoke from his wheel meant also the loss of a line of communication. It narrowed his alternatives. When Mac Bundy and I were taken on he told me over the phone what I am sure he said in almost identical language to Rusk and McNamara. He said his Secretaries of State and Defense could be absolutely confident that no decisions would be made in their fields without their being heard and their views taken as those of the President's senior advisers; but he wanted to have available, when he made decisions, as wide a range of choices open to him as possible. To expand the alternatives throw up by the bureaucracy was the function of his White House staff. So he had defined the Executive problem in this mature way from the beginning.

Neustadt: OK. Well let's go on to getting toward the campaign period.

Rostow: We were in Europe from September 1958 to September 1959. But I kept in touch with Kennedy. I confess that until Fred Holborn brought in just this morning the file of letters that we exchanged over that year I had forgotten just how much Kennedy business there was. Operationally it centered around foreign aid. In 1959 he built up to an effort to get a Development Loan Fund of $7.5 billion for five years. They lost on that but they did get, at the end of the year, the resolution on the India-Pak consortium. In Europe I worked with the British Treasury and other people to try to get the British and the Germans to come forward with moves to make it easier for the Eisenhower Administration to get this Bill passed by the Congress - the general notion being that Congress was more likely to move if the UK and Bonn were making parallel initiatives.

And so

And so I was writing a lot of letters. I won't go into the details now as it is not important; but the Senator sent Fred over to Europe in the middle of this. He came to Cambridge. I believe he talked with the Treasury people in London. The correspondence, as I say, is mainly about aid matters; but there is also talk about the 1960 campaign and drafts of various sorts. I did a draft which I think was pretty much used as written. It was a review for the New York Times by Kennedy of Arthur Larson's book - A Republican Looks at His Party. I sent drafts over on India-China, the economic and ideological competition about which Kennedy spoke in the Senate. So there was a certain amount of lively communication. I got Oliver Franks interested in what the Senator was trying to do in the aid business; but his judgment was that you couldn't get the British Government to take so sensible an initiative at that time. In any case the strand of our connection was maintained over that year. And when we came back that Labor Day from our sabbatical, Fred Holborn was down at the boat helping us. And as I carried in the bags to our house at Belmont - after a year away - the telephone began to ring and it was Senator Kennedy. He asked, in effect, if I would enlist for the duration. He asked if I would help from here on out. I made an immediate commitment to do so. Well, what went on during that sabbatical was of minor interest: foreign aid, a book review, speech drafts, etc. The simple point is that continuity was maintained, he picked it right up as I hit shore.

Would you like me to move on, Dick, to the latter part of 1959?

Neustadt: Yes, I would because I think this gives us an indication of his building of a relationship. How he used people. You might as well be a guinea pig.

Rostow: Well, you know all the things that he had to do. And I am clear right down to the present

time

time that I was never an absolutely critical figure in his enterprise. But this fellow wanted the assets that I could bring into the show, and he took great pains to do it nicely.

I have the feeling that we met in the autumn of 1959, but neither Fred nor I can remember the time. I was down and gave testimony - it may have been in November to a wrap-up session of the Subcommittee of Statistics of the Joint Economic Committee which was doing a Soviet-US economic comparison. I committed myself to do this in Europe and I had to work hard to do it. While picking up threads at MIT I took all the specific narrow reports generated by the Committee and made a synthesis; and then came down and answered questions. I think I probably saw Kennedy then although I am not sure.

The first reference I have in my files is to a call in which he asked me what view he should take on birth control. And the first paper I have in the Kennedy file for that autumn is my recommendation, that is, we talked on the phone and after some reflection I wrote down the position I thought he should take. The position, roughly, was that he should say that his policy judgment on birth control had nothing to do with his personal views. But in terms of the highest considerations of US foreign policy it would be wrong for us to make it a condition of our aid that countries should adopt population control or make their adopting population control policies a condition for denying them aid. But the first time I saw him was at the meeting shortly after he announced his candidacy in the Democratic primaries. The date was very early in January. He gathered all the Cambridge eggheads in the Harvard Club on Boston side of the river. I think it was a Sunday afternoon. It was a remarkable, and somehow I remember it as a particularly dignified, occasion. It was in a big room, somewhat bare. They had set up stiffback sort of chairs in a big semi-circle. There must have been

25 or

25 or 30 people there. The Senator was late. He came in with T e d, Fred and some other people. I didn't yet know all the characters. Perhaps Kenny O'Donnell was there, I am not sure.

There he sat, absolutely alone in the center of a room. And what he said was very simple. He said I have announced my candidacy for the democratic nomination. This will be difficult, but it is possible. If I get the nomination I believe I can defeat Mr. Nixon. In that case I will be the President of the US. From the present forward, therefore, I wish to speak to the issues seriously conscious that I may be President. I am not asking you to support me in the Democratic primaries. I expect you to support, if you are a Democrat, the man of your choice. I am not asking you to support me in the election, if I am nominated. I am asking you now, each in your own field, to give me the kind of advice you would give a man who may have to bear the repponsibility of the Presidency. That's it. And it's almost verbatim. He sat there with his legs crossed, with that wonderfully spare, precise, coherent talk that was natural to him on quasi-formal occasions but where there was no preparation. Then he asked for questions. He was pressed on the birth control issue by Dean Clark of the Harvard Medical School. He said he had no more problem with birth control than a Catholic judge has in granting a divorce. And he spoke of Dr. Parran's position as a Catholic, Surgeon General who was quite content to give money voted by the Congress to states which wished it for population control purposes.

Then he was asked if he couldn't come out against a law in Connecticut which makes the practice of birth control itself illegal. He said I have a lot of problems this year. I don't think I can solve that problem for the citizens of Connecticut right now. Out of that meeting came the Cambridge group, although several of them, including myself, were well and truly engaged much earlier.

<u>Neustadt</u>:

Neustadt: Who were those people?

Rostow: This would have to be checked - it is an incomplete list. There was Max Millikan, Paul Samuelson, Dean Clark, Ithiel Pool, Abe Chayes; and so on. I just don't recall. The formal organization of the group didn't take place until after the convention. What I recall of that meeting was the lucidity of relationship he was establishing with these people; and the high seriousness with which he took the step of formal announcement of his candidacy. And I think what he said about his chances was honest. He was always candid about his political situation. I think he thought it would be tough to get the nomination, but he had a deep conviction that he could beat Dick Nixon. He knew he was undertaking something that was close - possible, but certainly not a sure thing - and this is what he asked of us.

Next, I had one of the longest talks I ever had with him. It was at a curious moment, between the two halves of the Wisconsin primary. It was in Georgetown. I forget why I happened to be down there. But he was in shirtsleeves, I think it was in the morning after breakfast. I talked to him an hour and a half or so.

He began on the primary itself and projected one of these simple reactions which it was easy to miss unless you saw him often. He talked about campaigning up in the northern dairy countries and the seriousness of the agricultural problem. Then he held out his hand and said: I have a big hand, but I have been talking to fellows with hands twice as big as mine from milking cows. They get up at five in the morning, and because the milk price is too low, they work these hours and live this life for damned little. He was really moved by this direct contact.

Then he talked in a rare way - at least I never heard him make a point in this way before or since. He

was usually content to leave intellectual points implicit and concrete. He was not given to philosophizing, although he was perfectly comfortable with intellectuals. He talked about the decision to go into the West Virginia primary. He said experts give you advice, and you must listen to them. But the problem is to identify the important elements the experts may leave out. He said take this decision about the West Virginia primary. All the experts have lined up for me why it is ridiculous for me to go into West Virginia. One: Hubert is to the left of me and these fellows are hungry and unemployed and New Dealish. Two: they are 95% Protestant. Three: if I get defeated there, I am out. It is an awful risk to take under the circumstances and the experts can make it very persuasive. But they are forgetting one simple overriding point. I have no right to go before the Democratic convention and claim to be a candidate if I can only win primaries in states with 25% or more of Catholics. I must go in there. And I am going in.

We also talked about the CIA - its quality and limitations.

I remembered this conversation about the critical elements experts leave out many times - Bay of Pigs, the Laos crisis of 1961, Nassau among others.

Fred Holborn thinks he was back in Washington briefly from Wisconsin for some newspapermen's dinner and, perhaps, to meet Ben Gurion. I met Fred Dutton for the first time on this visit.

Then we met on three occasions in June. The first of them, I think, was at Deidre Henderson's party at the time of the Harvard commencement round about June 16 or whenever it came that year. Deidre had a big party in her apartment on Beacon Hill. She was a sort of maid of all work for the whole academic Kennedy

gang

gang in Cambridge, churning out research memoranda, making sure deadlines were met. Kennedy came into that crowded room with Ted and I don't know who else was there, but quite an entourage. He came over to me. I said to him I know what the opening sentence of your acceptance speech should be - this was shortly before the convention. He said: what. "This country is ready to start moving again and I am prepared to lead it." And I told him why. Do you want to record the story of this phrase?

Neustadt: I think it would be worthwhile.

Rostow: When I came back from sabbatical I had to stay in Cambridge and fulfill a number of commitments I had made while abroad. I didn't have a chance to get around the country. But in the winter and early spring I accepted a number of engagements - just to get a feel for things, to see what the country was like. As I had talked to people - reserve officer groups, MIT clubs, university people - all kinds of people - not merely those interested in foreign policy, I concluded there was no single crisis issue but there was a general diffused sense of uneasiness: in some cases about Russian missiles; in some cases about the balance of payments deterioration; in some cases about unemployment or education, or the state of their city center. I thought the way to organize this uneasiness - over a broad front - to articulate it, respond to it, and create a sense of direction - was for Kennedy to say it is time for us to get moving again. Well the Senator noted this idea at Deirdre's party. I was down in Washington shortly thereafter and saw him in his office. He asked me if I would fly back with him. We went back on The Caroline. We talked at great length about this phrase. And then I believe - this will have to be checked - he told Fred on the phone and Fred reported to me that he tried out this phrase in some speeches up in the northwest before the convention. And he sent word back, by phone, through his office to tell Walt that

he liked

he liked it fine.

I would like to say something else about that trip back to Boston in The Caroline. It illustrates a quality which was pretty well concealed from the country in its view of Kennedy as a Senator and a candidate; it gradually emerged as President - and became stronger still in retrospect. On the plane were two pregnant women - his wife and his sister, Jean Smith. We had been waiting down at that part of the airport - North Terminal - where private planes check in and out. The kids were running around. It was terribly hot. And Abe Chayes had a couple of kids he was taking back. And there were these two nice, sweaty, pregnant women. Kennedy was late. Then he had to make one more phone call. Jackie quietly but resignedly complained of the delay. Then we all piled on the plane. Then he got the women back in the bunks; then he got the kids settled down, one by one and buckled in, with some flash of conversation with each that really got to them. Only then did he turn to some fish chowder, a haircut, and while this was going on, his business talk with us. This was a man who all of his life was at home with women and kids and human situations. The picture of him was that of a cool cat, impersonal. But we can talk later about that.

Neustadt: Of how cool is meant, especially.

Rostow: It was a special - a particular quality. But my point here is that his response to human situations was immediate, simple, and comfortable. This was a very natural man. When we got on the plane the first thing he did was to get a haircut. I remember later on in January 1961 - ten days or so before the Inaugural - meeting him for breakfast on Beacon Hill. He walked out without affectation and stark naked. This was a man comfortable with human beings and human situations.

In addition

In addition to the phrase - let's get this country moving again - we talked about a speech Nixon had just given. He underscored passages in this speech. He then said something close to this: "politics is all right. There is latitude in what you can say in political debate. But these things Nixon said should never have been said by a politician. They violate the rules of the game. You know that son of a bitch shouldn't be President of the US, should he?" I am sure that beneath all the stylized clash of professional politics, Kennedy deeply believed that Dick Nixon should not be President of the US. He didn't think Nixon was wicked - a Hoffa. But he thought Nixon didn't know where the rules of the game lay. His lines of action and taste were fuzzy. He had this speech underlined, precisely identifying the places where Nixon went beyond the correct competitive discourse of American politics, in Kennedy's view.

Neustadt: He looked at him that way during those TV debates.

Rostow: Yes in the TV debates as well. We will come to that a little later. But this was just a ride back. He came out with his entourage. I remember we had a very large white poodle then, who climbed all over him. He took all that in stride. He met Pete and Elspeth there to pick me up. But that comfortable, spontaneous side of his nature they preserved up in the Mansion later. My narrow point is that all this didn't project in his period as a candidate.

Neustadt: Well there is something that perhaps you could shed some light on. A strong sense of privacy.

Rostow: Right.

Neustadt: To project that I think he would have found offensive.

Rostow: It comes through best in some of the pictures published after he died - for example, the one of the golf cart with all those kids. Well it emerged; but it was something he wouldn't project - he wouldn't exploit. Once you were taken inside the operating circle you would be permitted to see it and respond to it. But this was not part of politics. This was part of being a guy.

Well, now we come to the campaign. I was part of the rear echelon. I was in touch by two channels: one by phone with Fred; and the other with Archie Cox, who was supposed to funnel and organize all this academic material for use. There was an awful lot of paper.

As useful as anything I did in the campaign was an assessment of Nixon's probable course of campaigning. Fred says he can't find it, because Kennedy took it out of his file and it is with Mrs. Lincoln's papers. But as an old intelligence officer, I read every word there was about Richard Nixon. I studied each of his campaigns and then made an assessment and made a prediction. I said there is only one way this fellow knows how to operate. He is going to lay back. He is going to pick soft-on-communism issue in the last month or so. And he is going to ride it down to the end. I urged: don't leave any fish hooks lying around. Be prepared for the issue and the thrust.

It was the Quemoy-Matsu issue that actually emerged. I never knew quite how Kennedy got into it. Once it was on, I helped formulate his final position: namely, whatever long term policy was desirable we were not going to get off the islands under threat.

My formal job in the campaign, aside from sending assorted memoranda down to Archie, telephoning almost daily with Fred, and sweating it out like everyone else, was military policy. Starting early in 1960 I

built

built up from my own knowledge, from books, from contacts with Rand and with various military types in and out of the government - a consolidated military position paper. I cleared it in the Kennedy camp almost like a government paper. And it holds up tolerably well as a statement of what the Kennedy Administration did in military policy and why. It was used a little in one speech, I think, but the major reflection of it during the campaign was, of all places, in a Kennedy review of a book by Liddell Hart. But a campaign operated from a plane was not easy to follow from the rear echelon. We all were busy. But fellows as far back as I didn't have the foggiest idea of what was helpful and what was unhelpful. Some of it was used, some not, Only the correspondence and the campaign material itself will show.

Neustadt: Did you by any chance get mixed up in the last TV debate? - the interjection of the Cuban issue?

Rostow: I am almost certain the answer is no. But at a distance it was hard to know what was used and how. I did make some observations about Cuba during the campaign. I believe I advised Kennedy to lean on the Alliance for Progress side of the equation and to isolate Castro. I did not know of the Eisenhower Bay of Pigs plan.

Looking at the campaign as a whole, I regretted the Quemoy-Matsu issue and tried to help get him out of it. And I didn't think much of overplaying the Cuba issue. But that is all in the papers. But a campaign is an intimate tactical affair, hard to help or second guess from the distance. They knew what they were doing.

My last job in the campaign was to stand guard for an hour at that big endless Nixon TV show to see if there was anything that Kennedy would wish to reply

to that

to that night. I must say I found that latter stage of the campaign scary - the emergence of Eisenhower. The attempt to get people to see Nixon in continuity with Eisenhower - rather than as an alternative to Kennedy - was worrying. You could feel the margin narrowing. It felt like a close thing.

Neustadt: You were mostly in Cambridge at the time?

Rostow: I was mostly in Cambridge. I did come down to Washington but Kennedy was out campaigning at that time. I did not see him from, I should say, the trip up on The Caroline until December when I came back from Moscow. You know about the trip to Moscow.

Neustadt: Right. We ought to talk about that.

Rostow: Before we do that let me get one thing in the record, just for fun. In the third or possibly the fourth Nixon debate there was a moment in which I said to Elspeth: "There goes the ball game. We are going to win." It was a moment when Nixon was laying on heavily the soft-on-communism pitch, hacking away solemnly at Kennedy and the Democrats. Suddenly the cameraman switched to Kennedy's face as Nixon was talking. It was one of the most beautiful shots of his face I know - a big relaxed grin. The cameraman must have sensed the drama of this. There you had Nixon trying to portray the Democrats as weak and shilly-shallying. Suddenly you pick up Kennedy's face and you knew it just wasn't going to work. No matter what silliness was said about Quemoy-Matsu, this was not a guy on whom you could hang this label.

There was a quality in Kennedy which comes out in the debates, which you are liable to miss if you get too rational an analysis of the guy. He had an overdrive - he had moments of grace that transcended all of the elements you would add up in a man's character. He could produce an extra margin of

performance.

performance. Sometimes you could see it in speeches. He would hack along - sometimes better and sometimes worse - but there was a capacity suddenly to rise. Ideas, rhetoric, movement and personality would all come briefly together. Not for long. But it was special. And it would happen under pressure - Bay of Pigs time or the first TV debate. When that first debate was over the election was almost settled. The only question was how much Nixon would be able to get back. But under that kind of pressure Kennedy could produce something that transcended all the staff work and planning, including his own.

Neustadt: Some people of course - most people I guess operate the other way under pressure. A lot of people do. This is again part of that World War II junior officer quality you mentioned before. There are two things I would like to pursue for a minute. The first, what must have been a rather odd period for you from election day until your arrival at the White House. And second, the Moscow trip and its consequences. The latter interests me particularly because an awful lot of yak is in the semi-public record about - so we ought to be clear in this record. The first one is -- well I don't care which way you take these.

Rostow: Well let's do Moscow and then how I finally ended up in the White House.

Now, Moscow. I had been to a meeting at Dartmouth in November - just before the election. I had been asked to go up to meet a group of Soviet citizens on a cultural basis. Kornechuc, a member of the Central Committee was there. They tried to convey to us a sense that we had to take disarmament seriously and that there was a brief moment before some unnamed Soviet forces would move in, and make a movement towards peace impossible. I have memos in the files on that meeting.

A Pugwash meeting on disarmament was scheduled in

Moscow for late November. The Russians surfaced a social scientist on their delegation list. He was head of the Institute of World Economics and Politics named Arzumanyan. Those organizing the US team then wanted a social scientist. They asked me if I would go, perhaps because of the recent Dartmouth experience. I called Allen Dulles, representing the Administration. He said I should go. I did a memo to Kennedy and said: here is what it is about; do you want me to go or not. If you think I ought to be working here or if you think it would embarrass you, by all means say no. He said go.

So we went. While in transit there were some newspaper stories about my being assigned a post in the Kennedy Administration. When I got to Moscow they took me more seriously than I deserved. Jerry Weisner and I were referred to on one occasion as guerrilla fighters for Kennedy.

Speculation about that trip centered subsequently around two things: first, what part we had in getting the RB-47 pilots back; and, second, what message I brought back to the President-elect and the Secretary of State-designate. On the latter, it is all in writing. I filed a report which is available. On the pilots, the story turns on talks with Kuznetzov, the deputy Foreign Minister. I saw him once for an hour and a half with Jerry; and, then, once for an hour and a half alone. We checked with Tommy Thompson as to what we should say to him. At the top of the list was to get the RB-47 pilots home. I am sure that everybody and his brother talking to the Soviets in Washington at this time were saying the same thing. I would like to believe our talk brought about their release, but, I don't believe it for a minute. It was just a small cheap dowry to Kennedy.

We talked at length about German policy and Berlin. When Kuznetzov asked what they should do, Jerry said: "Do nothing." We all agreed there were times when inaction was a good policy. We tried to explain that

we are

we are a country that can't work on a two-track policy well: if we have a Berlin crisis we are not going to be able to talk very seriously about arms control.

What I brought back was, first, a report of what these fellows tried to say to us. The message was inherently contradictory. They tried to say to us that they were serious about disarmament; they wanted to have a German settlement on their terms; they were going to give us hell in the underdeveloped areas; but they wanted to be nice to the Kennedy Administration. The second more tentative element in my memorandum of report was an assessment of what the message meant. The assessment was tentative because I didn't then have access to intelligence on our relative missile capabilities. The message could have been an effort to soften us up. In any case, all this is in writing as it was put down at the time. Let's drop it.

The meeting with Kennedy when I got back was interesting. He had sent word he wanted to see me immediately. I came down to Washington from Boston the day after I got back from Moscow. He was still in the Georgetown house. It was December and cold. The newspapermen were set up with coffee across the street, clocking in who went in and who went out. I came in right after breakfast, quite early in the morning. Our conversation went on a long time; but it was broken in the middle by a lovely event. Kennedy suddenly broke off and looked at his watch. He said: sorry; stay here; I have to get over to the hospital to bring Jackie and the baby home. Out he went into the cold without his coat. I never saw a more radiant girl than Jackie on her return. John from the beginning looked like a recognizable character - a clean-cut, sturdy fellow. I know babies. Some look like someone right away - some don't. John did.

I reported the Moscow trip along the lines of the memorandum.

But he

But he had something else on his mind, which was the appointment of his Secretary of State. This was the morning he decided on Dean Rusk. /What follows on this subject is not to be made available or released for twenty years; that is, until 1985./

Well here is the way the conversation went. He said: "I am in clover with my Secretary of Defense. I only met him yesterday; but he is first rate." Kennedy was happy with McNamara from the first. He had also met Rusk the day before. The impact was not as happy or as unambiguous. He found Rusk, who was exceedingly well recommended, mentally and physically heavier than he had expected. He had three candidates for Secretary of State, and he asked me what I thought of them - Fulbright, Bruce, and Rusk. I recalled what he had written in the campaign about the President's relationship with the Secretary of State. I said I drafted it; but you signed it; and it was right. It emphasized that the relation between the President and Secretary of State was highly personal. The prime characteristic of a Secretary of State should be that the President be comfortable with him. He agreed and smiling said - choosing a Secretary of State is a bit like getting married. I feel most comfortable with Fulbright but he's got a pro-Arab background which makes it a little complicated in New York; and there is also his civil rights position. I argued that once he was relieved of the need for re-election in Arkansas all this would wash out and besides you have no need to worry about the Jews in New York. You are plenty strong enough there. If you want him, get him. Then he said: "But Fulbright is so lazy." That stopped me.

Then he went on to Bruce. He said Bruce was good and experienced; but he didn't know whether he had the energy and force to do it.

Then he turned to Rusk. He never had met Rusk before. He had not expected him to look as he did. It didn't quite fit the picture of the fellow who had written the article on the Presidency and foreign policy.

Rusk,

Rusk, he said, had very good recommendations. Then he asked my view of Rusk. I said I had not seen a great deal of him - a little bit here and there. My knowledge was secondhand, from men who had served with him in the State Department earlier and from those who were on his Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panel on foreign policy. My impression from a distance was that he would be a superb Under Secretary. I just didn't know whether he would be a good Secretary of State. He was a thorough pro, well-balanced and experienced. He had been through the Korean war; and I simply didn't know.

But that morning he was on this decision; and he talked round and round about these three men for a long time.

Neustadt: McCloy had already fallen off?

Rostow: Yes. On that morning there were only these three. That was the way it had narrowed down.

Then he told me he wanted me to be head of the Policy Planning Council, but we couldn't make it definite until he had appointed his Secretary of State and I had talked with him. When I went out newspapermen asked me if I had been given an appointment. I said something like - we'll see and I went off.

But it is a morning I recalled at the time as well as in retrospect for the simple joy of getting Jackie back, with the baby all right. That meant an awful lot to them. It was a boy and Jackie was well. It was an enormous lift. You could see it in their faces.

And, then, of course this puzzling choice he had for Secretary of State. I then went off and had lunch at the Metropolitan Club with Charlie Bartlett and Fred Holborn. We knew Kennedy was leaving that afternoon for Palm Beach and probably would decide on his Secretary of State before leaving. In the middle of lunch Fred was called to the phone and came back to tell us it was Rusk. His only comment was - and I don't know

whether

whether this was Kennedy or not - Rusk will be easier to fire if it doesn't work than Fulbright or Bruce.

Now the trivial business about my job. There were two problems that arose and I think they converged in Rusk's mind. I met Rusk at the Statler hotel. We discussed his views and my views on the Planning Council. And we went forward on the assumption that I would take the job. It wasn't final; but it was a very far forward discussion.

Then we met again and he asked me to do a memo for him on what he felt was the most searching problem that one had to face: that is, how to defend American interests without nuclear war. I wrote a memo which was a summary of what we had built up on military policy in 1960 with more in it, however, on the illegal sending of arms and men across frontiers, guerrilla warfare, etc. Then Rusk froze at the controls on my appointment for two reasons. First, he suddenly saw a morning meeting surrounded by men none of whom he knew: Soapy Williams, Chet Bowles, Ball, etc. And to him I was another of these characters. He hadn't known me well. He had a picture of me as a professor who wrote books, who could perhaps contribute to speeches; but he had no sense that I had operated seriously in government. Second, there arose a security problem of the following kind. I had been a consultant to the Eisenhower Administration right through. In 1953 my security status was challenged and then fully reaffirmed after a careful re-check. I operated all through this period with a top secret clearance. I was also the chairman of Nelson Rockefeller's Quantico Panel that laid out a pre-Kennedy military and foreign policy but also contained the aerial inspection proposal used at the 1955 Summit Conference. But then Nelson got into bad trouble at the end of 1955. He went on to a second Quantico Panel that would put price tags on the kind of military, foreign aid, etc. program we had earlier outlined. The whole right wing gang in the Eisenhower Administration went out to get him. One of the ways they tried to embarrass him was to raise security objections to certain of the

people

people he wanted for the second Quantico Panel. As I was told the story they went through my security file at the State Department. Loy Henderson said I was not a security risk, but I was controversial. And I was dropped from that second Quantico Panel as controversial. This was the winter of 1955-56. I went on as a consultant to the Eisenhower Administration, including the drafting of Ike's 1958 Lebanon-Jordan speech in the UN. And in 1959 I was on one of Keith Glennan's space panels. By 1961 the old security nonsense was completely out of my mind.

But Rusk didn't know all of this story. And here he was being pressured to take a planner who was a book-writing intellectual idea man, of doubtful operational competence, with a controversial record to boot. (Rusk and Robert Kennedy read the full file on me and decided it was a matter of "controversy" rather than "security".) So he decided to ask me to be deputy chief of the Planning Council. We met down in a hotel here and had a very rough session.

I said I don't think I will do that; but I asked whom do you want me to be deputy to. He said I can't tell you, because I haven't checked with the President-elect. I said it would be quite improper for me to rule out being a deputy to anybody. There are obviously some men to whom I'd be proud to serve as deputy. But I told him I didn't think his proposal would work. A deputy ought to be a fellow who implements somebody else's ideas. I had explicit ideas about the Council we had discussed. I thought the deputy ought to be some other fellow, who would execute this guy's views. He said I will call you up and let you know the man's name when I have cleared it with the President-elect.

So I received the call from Rusk up in Belmont. He said: "I am now going to tell you the name of the man we want. It is George McGhee." I said, literally: "Dean are you out of your mind? What the hell are you thinking about?" He said: "I have known George a long time, he is very able." I said: "I have known George

just as long as you - from Oxford. He is a fine fellow and he is a great operator. But he is the last man in the world to do a planning job." He said: "Well he has been reading a lot of books in Texas. You know, he is quite an intellectual." I said: "That is not the point. Planning is not his cup of tea." And so on.

It was a hilarious conversation, just eyeball to eyeball.

Incidentally, George later called me up and was very nice. He told me the job wasn't his idea; but he'd be glad if I joined him.

But after this call I sat down and wrote a letter jointly to the President-elect and Secretary Rusk which I still have locked up in my file. There must be a copy in their files. I said: This is what I think the job is; either give me the job as planned; or we can discuss another; or I'll be quite happy in Cambridge. But forget about the deputy post for me.

Then Kennedy called. He said, take it. We will get George an Ambassadorship by July - perhaps in Pakistan. We will get all this cleared up and everything will be all right. I said no it won't work out and don't worry about me. I am delighted you are elected. I have a lot of things to do, and you have a lot of fine fellows with you. You don't owe me anything. This is just fine.

But he wouldn't let it alone. And he came up on Sunday night for his last Cambridge meeting with the Harvard overseers so we would meet for a Monday morning breakfast. I think it was January 9.

This is

This is a second interview by Richard E. Neustadt of Walt W. Rostow, April 11, 1964.

Rostow: Then, as I say, the President-elect came up for this last meeting, before the Inaugural, of the Harvard overseers on a Monday morning in January of 1961. He said he would come up the night before so I could have breakfast with him and we could settle the question of my working in the Administration. And we met in his apartment on Beacon Hill.

It was a remarkable occasion. Milling around in the living room of this tiny place were the secret service men, Kennedy's personal entourage, and a collection of local politicians in to see the President-elect back in his own town. I was brought to an inner room. Kennedy came out, put on his shorts and bathrobe. We settled down in a breakfast nook. I asked permission to raise one matter of substance before we talked about a job. I said I wanted to leave one thought in his mind before the Inaugural. We will not be able to sustain in the 1960's a world position without solving the balance of payments problem. The balance of payments problem is not a question merely of our trying to cut down on expenditures abroad or trying to increase exports. It goes to two fundamentals at home. We must have a wage discipline that relates increases to the average increase in productivity. And we must modernize our industrial capital stock. I talked some about the possibilities of easing competition between Reuther and McDonald by getting them both to accept the same rules and take some benefits for the working force in terms of increased output and higher employment rather than excessive money wages.

I then talked about the obsolescence of American capital plant and the need to get our plants modernized and to get modern R&D spread out from the three industries where we have it - electronics, chemicals and aerospace - into housing, steel, metal working, textiles, construction - all things that use up our resources.

Kennedy

Kennedy didn't forget that conversation. The only domestic job I did in the White House was on this problem.

Then we talked about my job. I told him it would be unwise for me to try to be a deputy to McGhee. And I would not do it. He made a rather half-hearted effort to persuade me. Then he said: "Well, we will have to find something else." I don't know whether it was then or later that the notion came up of my working with Mac in the White House. But I seem to remember some reference to a White House job. My concern was to make it as clear to him as I could - face to face - that he should feel no sense of obligation about a job. If it didn't work, I would be quite content in Cambridge.

Neustadt: You made it perfectly clear. I am sure you made it clear.

Rostow: I made it concrete by telling him what I would want to work on as an academic - the stages of political development....

Neustadt: But he did not want you not to be in the----.

Rostow: That's right. In the midst of all the things he had to think about, this truly minor matter was on his mind - getting the lost sheep into the fold. Everyone else was set up. He really stayed with it.

Neustadt: I know one other. He got me in on what to do about Arthur. He just wouldn't let these things drop.

Rostow: No.

Neustadt: That's interesting.

Rostow: It is interesting. I don't pretend to know enough about any other man - let alone this very

special

special one - to explain behavior. But he acted as if governed by the notion of an extended family. Once ties were built up, he acted as if he would suffer a real loss if the tie were broken. That was the way he operated. He gave enormous attention to where people fitted in.

Well, in any case, Mac got in touch with me and asked if I would come down in the deputy post. It was finally agreed. Mary, Elspeth, Mac, and I had a drink on it; but I don't think it was much before the Inaugural that it was settled.

It was an uneasy time as we didn't know whether we were coming or going. We couldn't plan for the house or the children. On the day before the Inaugural, with a strike and a snowstorm holding up trains and planes Elspeth and I decided it wasn't often a friend was sworn in as President. So at 5 p.m. on the 19th we began to drive through the snow. We arrived at 6:30 a.m. here, driving all that time. We had an hour's sleep at Dick Bissell's. Then we went to pick up our tickets from Fred Holborn, as Senator John Kennedy's office was being closed out. Then the Inaugural and the Ball. I was sworn in the next morning at 9 a.m. in the Fish Room. The first time I said "Good morning, Mr. President" in the White House it was to Harry Truman - Kennedy's first caller.

Now are there any questions you want to ask about this period?

Incidentally, I now have the memo in front of me reporting conversations in Moscow and reflections on them, if you want anything from it.

Neustadt: You might indicate what it is, just for the record.

Rostow: It is entitled aide memoire - personal and confidential - Moscow disarmament talks November 27-December 7, 1960, a document of some 19 pages.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: I would like to ask you one incidental question and then I would like to move on to the national security staff and the first operational and managerial difficulties you encountered. Just one incidental. I didn't know you at the time - in any sense of knowing all your background and nothing about your intelligence background. Right after the election I tried to elaborate on one of the memorandum I had given Kennedy before the election about the need for a special assistant to the Commander-in-Chief-elect who was to be a guy who would brief him up to competence on the workings of the intelligence system and community. And he never quite saw it and I couldn't get into it in depth. I said to him once there must be someone you really trust inside the intelligence community, there must be somebody. You tell me who that is and let me talk to him about this thing and then you talk to him. Who is that? His answer was Dick Bissell. Well I did talk to Dick. Dick was prepared to talk to him but he never pursued it. I have always been curious about whether he ever talked to you or anyone you know of about the operational character of his problems as President, in relating to this community, and to the kind of material you got from them, and the uses and non-uses of the material.

Rostow: I recall only a passage on the operational end of the CIA, in Georgetown, between the two halves of the Wisconsin primary. We talked of the sort of instrument it was, its possibilities, limitations - and if I remember correctly - its overuse during the Eisenhower Administration. No I never got into the intelligence process with him.

Neustadt: You are one of the very few people who might have.

Rostow: That's right. But when we got to the White House, Mac and I split up the jobs - Mac handled that. There was an advisory committee on intelligence:

Killian,

Killian, Jimmy Doolittle, Clark Clifford, and others. Mac handled the institutional side of national security.

Neustadt: The first thing that happened to Mac is that Andy Goodpaster, before he left, passed on to the Army aide the actual - physical stuff. Mac could never get his hands on it.

Rostow: That's right.

Neustadt: That happened so quickly.

Rostow: Ted used to do that. Ted was a perfectly good briefing officer and a perceptive fellow. I think there is a lot of good that could be said for Ted Clifton. But I don't know whether there ever was a systematic review by the President before or after. Only Mac would know that. There were some matters on which I took issue with the intelligence community. I disagreed, for example, with the initial 1961 estimate of what the Chinese Communists could do in Southeast Asia. It was based on a bad logistical analysis. I challenged it and gave my reasons. But I was not in that side of the business systematically, only as substantive responsibilities got me into intelligence estimates.

Neustadt: Well that is incidental. I have a feeling that that part of the bureaucracy remained almost a total mystery to him until he had been through the Bay of Pigs.

Rostow: I think that is right. I don't think he was ever clear as to how an intelligence estimate was made; the nature of the compromises; and how you had to reach deep into it to understand what people knew and didn't know; what they believed, what they said because of previous commitments; what they said to cover their flanks against future investigations; and so on.

Neustadt: Even at the end he wasn't clear.

Rostow: That's right. And Mac I think never dug

into

into it; although I may be wrong. And Lord knows he had plenty to do. I would do it on the issues where I was engaged, partly because I had begun governmental life in 1941 in intelligence. You have to find the man down at the bottom who has the files. The real structure of government is an inverse pyramid. You have one man who is knowledgeable; and layer after layer is built on his knowledge, his files. But I never tried to do it for the President systematically. I was never in a position to do so.

Neustadt: OK. Well there you and Mac are - January 21 comes. You have to relate to each other and to the President and to the two Secretaries. My impression, which I give you for comments, is that there was no firm notion beyond what you say he had said to the two Secretaries.

Rostow: That's right.

Neustadt: He didn't want to be out there naked and alone. That was about it. You started - plus the notion that you had better scrap everything that was there and start again.

Rostow: Well that was the big decision, and it was done rather carefully. I was responsible for the staff work leading to it; although Mac and I had agreed in Cambridge beforehand that probably was the thing to do. I had considerable experience of the machinery in Eisenhower's Administration and even earlier. I had known the Psychological Strategy Board. I gave testimony to Bill Jackson's committee in 1953 which defined the real problem not as a psychological warfare problem but as the problem of coordinating in some effective way the various instruments of foreign policy. I had watched the OCB unfold. I had the impression from friends in the Eisenhower Administration and from what I had seen of its results that it had gone dead. It had become a heavy bureaucracy. Moreover, State was fixed in the position of never letting a serious situation be gripped

by the

by the OCB machinery. So you had extremely skilled people churning out papers on schedule; but all under a mandate, in effect, never to let serious issues be gripped by this machinery.

Now the Pentagon instinctively wants to have a White House committee rather than State Department leadership. But State always has the reserve position that it has the cable lines to the Ambassadors and it has ways of keeping issues out of interdepartmental machinery, unless the White House explicitly orders the contrary. The normal jockeying in the town is for the Pentagon to force things towards the White House; and State to keep them away.

To return to the OCB decision. I knew I had my prejudices. Therefore I read about a hundred papers. I also called in all the principal figures on the OCB and NSC staff to make the best case they could for retaining the machinery with appropriate modification. I read the OCB files day and night till I was convinced that what I had thought was true, really was true. I found case after case of papers where, after endless impeccable staff work, on an interdepartmental level, the gut issues were evaded. I remember, in particular, a paper on Iran. Then we made the recommendation to the President that the OCB machinery be abandoned and that the Secretary of State assume the coordinating function. Kennedy thought that Mac and I were a couple of nuts. Here we had a considerable empire in hand - here we were surrendering power, some 90 slots, or whatever it was.

But we convinced him the right course was to try to get the State Department to lead.

When I went over from the White House to State he reminded me of this. He said: "You know we gave up the White House machinery. That means that we over here can only make judgments on what is turned up by the bureaucracy. We can't plan from here. We have to plan from there."

In any case, that's how the decision to kill the OCB was made.

Now you

Now you want to know how Mac and I worked out our business. It was a pragmatic common law arrangement.

First, Mac was clearly in charge of the shop.

Second, we split the crises. I did Vietnam and Laos; he did Congo and Cuba. We shared Berlin but Mac did most of it. I came in usually at times of acute Berlin crises.

Third, Mac understood that the President would not want me to report through him. The President wanted to maintain this spoke in the wheel.

Fourth, Mac would tend to handle the urgent business, except in Laos and Vietnam. But I would do the longer range stuff. For example, I did the first planning list that we worked out for the town. The President went over it personally and left his mark on it. It was approved February 23 (I happen to have it here). It remained the planning map for national security affairs for a year, until I was operating out of State.

I also generally handled problems from underdeveloped areas, except Latin America, and economic issues. Mac did AEC, Pentagon problems, European matters - although I would generally have a word on major European matters.

On most day-to-day issues I handled the staff; that is, I had Bob Komer on the Middle East, Sam Belk on Africa, Bob Johnson on the Far East. In effect I had a small staff on the underdeveloped areas, although they were not wholly cut off from Mac. On Europe, as I say I came in when things were hot. For example, I drafted Lyndon Johnson's Berlin speech; I worked on the President's July speech on Berlin; I came to the Acheson meetings on European policy; etc.

On Cuba, I came in when they were on the beaches and helped mop up. What Mac and I did was to find a common law split which roughly matched our respective talents. Only Mac can tell you whether he was uneasy

with this.

with this. It was not a simple relationship; and I am sure it gave him some problems. But I think Mac understood that I liked him and respected what he was doing; that I would argue my position against his when we disagreed; and that it would probably work best if I had a tolerably clear group of things to do. I think there was no move I made that he wasn't informed of at all stages; but we split the job. We would both have been uncomfortable, I think, if we had tried to make it work with me as Mac's subordinate in a more conventional way. Now what problems that posed for the President and for Mac I don't know. But that is the way it was.

Neustadt: It fit immediately because Laos was right there on your doorstep.

Rostow: Laos and more than that. The President arranged at the beginning that we meet for a half hour once a week to take stock. The first meeting was January 26; the second, was February 2. And on either the first or the second such session - I think February 2, probably not January 26 - what happened was this: Andy Goodpaster, knowing of the meeting, gave me a copy of a memo by Ed Lansdale. It was a report of his tour of Vietnam in December of 1960. Ed had a long background on Vietnam. He had been out there in the early days of Diem after 1954. It was an extremely vivid and well written account of a place that was going to hell in a hack. I came in to see the President with this memo in my hand. I knew I had only a half hour; but decided it was critical that he get the full flavor of it and I handed it to him and said you ought to read this. He looked at it; noted its length; and asked - all of it? I said: yes, all of it.

He then read every word. It was well written. Kennedy looked up and said: "This is the worst one we've got, isn't it?" He had been briefed by Eisenhower on Laos, Congo, and Cuba; on the missile business - on all of these things - but not on Vietnam.

One possible

One possible reason is that it took an awfully long time and a lot of misery before the military looked at the Vietnam problem as distinct from the Laos problem. This linkage from the Laos side went back to the shape of the contingency plan - SEATO plan 5. It was a Mekong Valley plan essentially (to regard Laos as part of the Vietnam problem would have made better sense). From that moment the President's work on Vietnam, guerrilla warfare, and all the rest can be dated. From that afternoon my job was not merely to follow Laos and Vietnam. It was to help the President get the Pentagon and the whole town to take guerrilla warfare seriously; to get the coordinate work going that found its institutional basis finally in Max Taylor's counterinsurgency committee. This arose out of one of the planning tasks. Dick Bissell saw it through as almost his last act before leaving government in the wake of the Bay of Pigs disaster.

After this session I rounded up for the President, Khrushchev's January 1961 speech on wars of national liberation; also assorted Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara, etc. I went down to Ft. Bragg and began to get into how the government was and was not organized to cope with this range of problems. Even with a President leading the way it was like turning the Queen Mary around in the Hudson with a tug to overcome the built-in inertia and to get this business taken seriously. In May General Taylor came aboard. We joined forces fully. He became, of course, the senior aide to the President in this field; but we worked well together, I think, and never disagreed on a big issue.

The task, of course, was not merely Laos and Vietnam. It was policy in northeast Thailand, Latin America, and other areas.

In any case, that is how the President got started in this field.

Neustadt: It is interesting that you date it that early.

Rostow:

Rostow: It was that early.

I am sure that, to the end, Kennedy regarded Vietnam as the worst of his problems. It was so far advanced by the time we got to it. The period between 1958 and 1961 had not been used well. The Communists had Vietnam at Mao's Stage Two - advanced guerrilla warfare. With an open frontier to boot. That is a hard disease to cure.

Neustadt: Was there a change in his view of the links between Laos and Vietnam before and after the Bay of Pigs?

Rostow: The first stage was one in which the military grossly deluded the President as to what Phoumi's capabilities were. In early February an offensive was launched to capture the Plain of Jars. The official military position was: Phoumi says he can do it in five days; we think it will take three weeks. The Indians I worked with throughout the government (including the military) were much less optimistic - and so were my reports to the President. At the end of three weeks Phoumi's troops had gotten nowhere. Then, early in March, the Communists pulled up a couple of mortars; let fly; and the Laos bugged out. I never saw a worse performance by our military - knowing them since the summer of 1941 - than their advice to a new President in 1961 on Laos. They were wrong about the situation on the ground. They were wrong in the structure of their planning. They were wrong about Communist logistical capabilities which they grossly overrated.

In the showdown on Laos there was a meeting, unforgettable for all present. Lemnitzer was away. I have the impression that the Vice President had asked at a previous meeting that everyone file in writing his views. There were seven views: The Chiefs of the four services (including the Marines), and the three service secretaries. The issue was what to do about the creeping Communist offensive towards the Mekong. There was no order, and no consensus. I remember Bobby Kennedy saying: "If the Marines won't go in there I

guess

guess we'd better stay out." It was chaos. It got better after General Taylor came aboard; but I doubt that Kennedy ever wholly lost his suspicion of the military after his early 1961 experiences.

To return to your question. Laos and the Bay of Pigs were parallel and reinforcing experiences.

Neustadt: Let me ask you one opening question. Then perhaps take a march through the period at the next session.

As I recall that late January-early February period, when you and Mac were getting yourselves installed (these first things you have mentioned: Lansdale's memo and other things were happening) was also the period when planning for the Alianza para el Progresso was going forward and other hopeful enterprises. If I have it right, his sense and the sense of the people around him was that there was considerable malleability - of a world opening up. I would like your comments on the ambiance, the atmosphere in those first months because I think they had an impact on policy.

Rostow. Well I am trying to make sure that I am not getting out of phase with the way things really happened.

Neustadt: Try to think now of the pre-Bay of Pigs. That is a great watershed.

Rostow: Yes, pre-Bay of Pigs. Well, in the field where I worked - Laos and Vietnam - when I had taken a good hard look at the situation, in those first days and weeks, I concluded that this was the worst mess I had seen since 1942. Let me be explicit. I saw no way that we could protect vital US interests without the application of American forces or a demonstration of an evident will to apply force. Our political leverage had to be enlarged. The situation on the ground was so bad that I didn't see how diplomacy, by itself, was going to work.

So in

So in the field where I bore some direct responsibility I judged we were in bad trouble.

I will tell you something else about that period. I have worked in government - on and off - since September of 1941. I went through the worst period of precision bombing in the war. I saw the period in 1942 when the allies appeared to be losing both the Far East and the Middle East; and the battle of the Atlantic was being lost to boot - and I saw through some fairly sticky post-war problems.

Until 1961 I had never taken home a problem of public policy and worried about it, in the sense that it was on my mind when sleep got light. But I did worry about Vietnam - where it was hard to get people to understand how tough a well-advanced guerrilla war, with an open frontier is. My nightmare was - and it remains - that we wouldn't deal with it early enough. Things would go very bad. Then we would have to deal with it convulsively, in a war. We would let the thing sag away from us into a mess where nothing short of a substantial war with Communist China would redress the balance. I had a sense that unless I could get people to understand it and face it early this might be the outcome. I wasn't afraid that we wouldn't fight to save Southeast Asia. I was sure we would and I am sure we will. But I was afraid that we would do so under certain circumstances that were too damned dangerous in a nuclear age and too costly.

And so I struggled with this thing.

To come back to the pre-Bay of Pigs days. We were inherently cheerful people. We were getting on with the job. The newspapers were full of this new President who obviously made a favorable impact on the country. But I was dealing with a dead rat, right from the beginning.

And so the Bay of Pigs simply confirmed my sense that this was 1942 again. You can see this analogy in

some of

some of the memoranda I wrote as I tried to help stabilize things after the Bay of Pigs.

But the short answer to your question is that the pre-Bay of Pigs period looked a lot more serious than it did from outside the government, because I had been following Southeast Asia.

Neustadt: How much of a gap was there between you and Mac and you and the President - you indicated that he saw from Lansdale's memo that he had a bear by the tail.

Rostow: I think the President took the Laos problem seriously from the beginning; and I think Mac didn't: partly because he wasn't working on it and partly because -- this may be wrong you will have to check it with Mac -- there was a slightly Lippmanesque quality in Mac's thought that this part of the world isn't all that serious. I am not sure. But if you ask Mac he will give you an honest answer. And he still may hold some such view. But when I first advocated a policy of pressure on North Vietnam - to give them some reason to turn off infiltration - and when I supported putting troops in the Mekong valley in the spring of 1961 so we would have some bargaining power at a conference I believe Mac thought I was slightly mad. But ask him.

As for the President, I am sure that all through early 1961 he felt things were still sliding against us. Perhaps, for him, it didn't hit home viscerally until the Bay of Pigs. But I am confident his view was that things were still getting worse. I remember Mac and I coming in once and his saying: "Well, what's gone wrong now, what's fallen away from us now?"

You've got to realize what a mess the Congo was and how near to being totally unmanageable. It was just barely short of being out of hand.

The Indonesian

The Indonesian thing looked ominous. The Russians were investing a billion dollars and trying to start a war with the Netherlands, then Laos and Vietnam. Moreover, Castro at that stage, was projecting a lot of political and psychological attractive power from Havana. He hadn't defined himself as a Communist yet. His anti-US nationalism and generalized radicalism were popular.

Then, of course, there was Berlin.

From my point of view, which might not have been everyone's, this was tough business and a quite familiar kind of business; that is, seeing the country work itself out of a reasonably deep hole. It wasn't that I was unoptimistic. I was sure we'd make it somehow. But things didn't look easy or cheap. And the Bay of Pigs really added to it. There was little gaiety in my line of work. We weren't uncheerful; but it was a hard time.

Neustadt: Because you, in a way, were living in a different world than, say, Ted Sorensen.

Rostow: That's right.

Neustadt: A somewhat different world than Mac.

Rostow: That is probably correct.

Neustadt: And I don't think this is true of the later staff.

Rostow: That may be right. I remember estimating it would take us about 18 months to work our way out of the hole we were in. I think I put that figure in a letter to an old friend, Dick Hatch. You've got to remember I was a consultant on and off throughout the Eisenhower years. I knew the extent of the dry rot in some areas. With the press I used the image of a car with weak brakes sliding backwards down a hill.

We had

We had to apply enormous energy. For awhile all we could do was slow down the rate at which it slid against us. But the same energy, if sustained, would bring it to a stop. And once it was stopped, the same energy would begin to move it forward.

Well, it was something like that sequence that Kennedy achieved in the 18 months or so before the Cuba missile crisis.

Neustadt: Two things to identify for next time - it is clear what your major concerns were and what your major contacts in those first six months up to and including the Berlin crisis were. How much involvement did you have with your earlier interests in the missile gap and in the Alliance for Progress? Are these matters which we ought to cover?

Rostow: As for the Alliance for Progress, I had very little if anything to do with it at this stage. I was involved in Kennedy's 1961 aid message. I waded in hard because Ted's first draft was not much good. Actually neither Ted nor Mac had their guts in the development business. Ted was worried about aid on the Hill; and Mac's idea was that we seek a billion dollars in contingency funds, since aid was political, and let the President handle it. But on this subject, above any other, I knew where the bone structure of Kennedy's thought was. And Ted reacted - as often - extremely well to criticism of his first draft.

I made a list this morning after going through the file for the first period - memo by memo - of the issues that file reflects. The big item is Southeast Asia, and the issues connected with it: guerrilla warfare, the Taylor committee; and setting up his task force to go to Southeast Asia in November.

Then there is the planning list and setting it in motion.

Then

Then there is the post-Bay of Pigs policy - the effort to get equilibrium again, including the speech at Ottawa. It was an exercise in reestablishing the balance of our policy and getting back on to the big constructive enterprises after being thrown off balance.

I fought and helped win the battle to get the President to back Japanese membership in the OECD which is an amusing marginal story. I made some speech contributions. But I should say the big things are: Southeast Asia; planning; prices and wages; and recovery from the Bay of Pigs.

Neustadt: OK why don't we try to get those next time.

Rostow: All right.

But I have a general observation I'd like to make at this stage.

One way to look at Kennedy as President is that he was the repository, and ultimately the instrument for carrying out the consensus built up in the 1950's as men inside and outside the government assessed Eisenhower's errors of omission and commission. That consensus determined the directions the next wave of American energy would take. In the 1950's I was one of many who helped make that consensus in certain fields. For Kennedy I was one of the lines of communication to that consensus. But he was the fellow who took that consensus and gave it life: in military policy; in the concept of partnership in the Atlantic alliance; in the new aid concepts; in arms control; in education; in health; in race problems; and price and wage policy.

These were the issues at which, in the Eisenhower period, fellows on the outside were at work, and so were a certain number of activists inside the government.

That is one of the reasons why you find great

consistency

consistency between what the President said in The Strategy for Peace and what he did. I don't know of another case where a candidate's programmatic position emerged so clearly, in fact, as his program.

Now the real job is, of course, to carry out a program. Saying it, didn't make it happen. But I did want to make the point in general that you stirred up by recalling the aid business: there was much more bone structure in Kennedy's position than many people perceived or even perceive now.

And that was partly because he was the repository for the accumulated staff work of the 1950's.

Neustadt: There is only one other case I know of and it is not altogether coincidental and that is that an awful lot of the social welfare measures of the New Deal which go all the way back to 1919 and for all those years out - there was a consensus - through Francis Perkins.

Rostow: That's right. That is why they could go so fast in certain matters, some of which were, of course, actually pioneered in the states.

Neustadt: But that is the only parallel I think there is.

This is our third session. Richard Neustadt interviewing Walt Rostow on April 25, 1964.

Neustadt: We are going to pick up where we left off and as a preliminary Walt Rostow is going to set down three things he has just recollected.

Rostow: Before you came today I thought of three things Kennedy said in 1961 which might be missed from the written record.

One

One concerns Laos; the second concerns Cuba at the time of the Bay of Pigs; and the third concerns the Berlin wall.

In 1961 the Laos issue centered on whether, in the clutch, the President would put troops into the Mekong valley. Historians will be able to sort out the mess there was in Laos and the disheveled advice with which the President was confronted. It will be easy to reconstruct the desire of a President to avoid having to put troops into Laos - his desire to bluff his way through, without installing troops, but without losing the Mekong. But he made a remark to me one day which reflected what would have been, I believe, his governing attitude if it had actually come to backing his play by landing the Marines he loaded at Okinawa in May 1961.

Kennedy said roughly: "In 1954 there was a Geneva conference. There was a war during the Geneva conference; and Dienbienphu occurred during the Geneva conference. The Eisenhower Administration could take that because it was the French who were mainly involved. I cannot take a Geneva Conference without a ceasefire. I cannot take a Geneva conference, a war, and a Dienbienphu.

My feeling is that despite the virtual unanimity of Congressional opinion at the time against it; despite Eisenhower and MacArthur telling Kennedy never get troops onto the Asian mainland; despite the tremendous lack of confidence he then had in the military and with good reason - despite everything - that if the Communists kept creeping down towards the Mekong, he would have put those troops in.

The second observation is on Cuba, and came a little earlier in time. It was during the mop-up of the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy said that the Free World could afford having the British spin off after Suez and virtually withdraw from an effective international role for a while. It was only 7% of the Free World after all.

He said

He said the Free World could function somehow with the French all tied up in Algeria. They, again, were about 7%. But we were 70%. And if we went through the kind of obsessive private breakdown over Cuba that the British and French did over Suez and Algeria, the whole Free World structure would collapse.

This perception lay behind that extraordinary performance after the Bay of Pigs. It was one of the greatest things I have ever seen a man do - he pulled his gang together; his family; his government; his country - working over Eisenhower and Nixon - holding the country steady as it took the shock of the Bay of Pigs.

Neustadt: It was a superb political - in the broadest sense - performance.

Rostow: Yes. It was one of the handful of occasions I cited the last time, when I referred to Kennedy's capacity to rise in ways for which you didn't see the rational foundation - just an instinctive rising beyond conventional performance.

Neustadt: Well once more if we may - I have a perception from June of that year. After he had come from Ottawa with that back trouble, with the physical misery and was on crutches, there was this great gallant external performance of picking up after the Bay of Pigs. Also let's not turn our faces back and let's not have caterwauling, but internally he was terribly shaken by it - this rising you are talking about is more than pull yourself up by your own bootstraps - it somehow transcends your own uncertainties. Am I right about that?

Rostow: You are right. This was a time - in the post-Bay of Pigs period - when I probably saw the President more often than in any other single period. Mac went away for a couple of weeks, and I did his job as well as mine. That meant I was up there in the morning briefing him, at a time when he was going around the Mansion on crutches. It was a soul-searching time for

him.

him. He knew he had been set back in his performance as a President. Laos compounded on Cuba; and Berlin compounded on Laos. He felt things were sliding against him, sliding against the Free World. Despite a full consciousness of the seriousness of the position - and this almost symbolic backache - he summoned a capacity to do a first-rate job in Canada; to deal with Khrushchev lucidly; to come back from Vienna and make his military dispositions.

He was helped in all this by the first favorable break: he got his ceasefire in Laos without having actually to put the troops in. I think that was the first beginnings of a sense that he could crawl out of this pit. Then, of course, came the Berlin speech and the build-up in the military budget. There was a growing sense of confidence now that he had Taylor aboard. He also had Clay in Berlin who was sometimes difficult but worth it. It was obvious that the Berlin game wasn't over; but the Russians were taking our build-up seriously. And then after the Taylor Report in December he began to see that it was possible that Vietnam wouldn't fall apart immediately; although we warned him that it could never be settled with an open frontier. Then, after Castro had announced himself a Communist in December we got the Punta del Este resolutions which threw Cuba out of the OAS but also began to pull Latin America around into facing the problem of indirect aggression.

There were, over the months after May, a series of things that happened which helped. But that summer - it was a lovely summer - and I keep remembering the contrast between the weather; the pain he had to hide; and the murky problems all of which had the possibility of disintegration in them, in important parts of the world - he somehow moved forward.

I used to see how he dealt with visitors from abroad; Ikeda, for example; Sukarno; Keita of Mali.

He handled

He handled all these people with poise and grace. He did creative political things with them, despite this underlying misery. It was a great performance; and, you know, you just felt enormous affection.

Neustadt: There was in him, if I understand it, an extraordinary curiousity about everybody's politics and about every kind of political phenomena. These leaders were animals with a fascination all their own - at least in that period.

Rostow: Kennedy's style in dealing with them was, in a way, quite uniform and it took these fellows by surprise. They cameinto his office. There was this young and handsome President of the United States with all those bombs and all that money. They were proud but poor fellows. They didn't know quite what to expect from him.

He would begin by describing his position and his problems. He would describe quite objectively the specific issues creating anxiety for him on the world scene: Southeast Asia; Indonesia; the Congo; Cuba; Berlin. Then he would talk about the limits of what he could do about them - abroad and at home. He would lay out quite professionally, for example, his domestic problem with foreign aid and in other fields. In describing these problems he would say 99% what he would say privately to his own staff. It was an almost wholly candid description of his problem as a working politician. And this came through. It surprised them I think. In any case he would evoke from them, even from a slob like Sukarno, a much more candid statement of what their problems really were.

One of the best of these interviews was with Keita of Mali: an enormous, dignified fellow who came over after the Belgrade conference with Sukarno. Kennedy had one meeting with both of them in which Sukarno did all the talking. Keita just wrapped his robes

about

about himself in silent dignity. The President asked to see him separately.

The President described his problems to Keita in the usual way. And then Keita described what it was like to take over a new country.

He said, in effect, it is just a piece of territory you take over. The first job is to try to get some beginnings of a sense of national unity; and the second job is to get a police force that can give you order.

He told of how he came over in 1960 during the Eisenhower Administration and asked for some old DC-3's and some jeeps, a few radios, and light arms for police work. He was turned down and then accepted similar items from the Communists. He candidly discussed how the source of his aid did affect the kind of speeches made and resolutions supported at conferences.

He then addressed himself quite directly to the President. He urged him not to worry too much about Communism in Africa. Your anxieties are understandable because of your world position; but the Russians are not going to get through to the Africans. They haven't enough sense of humor. And the Africans are profoundly nationalist. There will be an independent Africa. Then he initiated some talk about the Azores. He said I understand that you are over a barrel on the Azores, given its military importance; but you can't expect me to solve that problem for you. My people feel deeply about Angola and I feel deeply about it. Our brothers are being killed. I want you to understand my position. I understand yours; but I can't take you off that hook. It was that kind of conversation. And I'm sure the whole series of such conferences.

<u>Neustadt</u>: But he established this.

<u>Rostow</u>:

Rostow: Kennedy established the tone of candor - an atmosphere in which two hard-pressed men, dealing with a dangerous intractable world, talked essentially as equals about their problems and limitations, so that, when they couldn't act together, they understood why they couldn't and had that special bond of having explained why face to face. But he immediately responded at exactly the same level of candid talk as Kennedy initiated about his foreign policy and the domestic-political relationships which determined his foreign policy.

That - aside from his personal charm, his graceful introductions to the family, the impact of his intelligence - that was essentially what he communicated.

The net impact of these interviews may be one of the things hard for historians to establish. My sense - at the time and in retrospect - was that these personal links - including his correspondence - kept men and issues from going completely around the bend.

Kennedy never met Nasser. But their correspondence was interesting. Nasser, incidentally, wrote a quite remarkable letter to the President after the Bay of Pigs, expressing respect for the way the President handled it and almost saying what Myrdal said: Did I put in what Myrdal said after the Bay of Pigs?

Neustadt: No.

Rostow: Nasser's letter showed an understanding of the dilemma the President faced. Myrdal loves, of course, to be offbeat. He came over shortly after the Bay of Pigs. He announced firmly: you have a great President. I said I think so; but why do you think so. He said: the Bay of Pigs - if Kennedy called it off he would have been dead politically in the United States. The Republicans would have had an issue forever.

Neustadt: Because, of course, it would have become known.

Rostow: Yes. The Republicans could have argued that Kennedy didn't have the guts to go through with something that would have eliminated Castro once and for all. Everything unpleasant that happened subsequently in Cuba would have been directly on Kennedy.

Neustadt: Right.

Rostow: On the other hand, Myrdal argued, if Kennedy had sent US troops in to make a covert operation stick which would otherwise have failed he would be internationally dead. This is an act that is intolerable for a great power. So that in releasing the operation, but holding the line on the use of US forces, Myrdal argued that Kennedy preserved the possibility of going on and becoming a great American President. And that was the best he could do with the situation he inherited.

I myself have never formed a judgment on the Bay of Pigs. I have never taken the time to study the whole record. I still recall the shock of discovering that morning that only 1200 men were involved, and that they hadn't been really trained for guerrilla warfare, or for getting off the beaches into the hills if necessary. From that day to this I just do not understand how grown men could have done the operation. And these were grown men whom I know and like. I've often wondered if I could have been more helpful than the others who advised the President between January and April. Some part of my knowledge and experience were relevant. But on the whole I don't really suppose I could have found a better path out of the dilemma. But still, I do not really understand it.

Now the third item I wanted to recall - about Berlin. I remember exactly where it took place - we were walking along by the side of the swimming pool coming from the Mansion to his office. This was a week or ten days before the Wall. The President suddenly said - the Russians are going to block off access to West Berlin from the East. And there is not a damn thing we can do about it.

We will

We will have to take it. Kennedy then went on to explain that Khrushchev was in the process of losing not only East Germany but Eastern Europe, if the drain to the West did not stop. This is a vital interest for him. And we can't go to war about it. The Allies will take a war - maybe - to defend West Berlin; but they won't go to war to keep East Germany bleeding to death. That is what is happening. And that Khrushchev must stop.

When the Wall went up we asked for suggestions from the Germans - including Bonn and Berlin. Nobody had a punishment that fitted the crime. What people proposed was too much or too little. Nobody wanted to go to war, in fact, to prevent the Wall. And the other things that people proposed were too trivial.

My point here is, simply, that Kennedy knew this was coming down the pike. I don't know if there is any other evidence that he knew; but I know for certain that he knew it.

Neustadt: Let me ask you a hard question. By what mental process and study process did he know things like this?

Rostow: I think it arose from the way he looked at people. He had an enormous sense of the position of other human beings and a gift for projecting himself into their circumstances. You saw this when he was jockeying for the Democratic nomination. He knew the exact situation of all his rivals. He could project himself and do it with sympathy. He did it constantly with the people around him. He would sense that a man might not be getting enough work, not getting enough access to him. He would think of something he could do, some act of reassurance. He did exactly the same thing with his opponents on major issues - including Khrushchev.

I remember at first, when I came to know Kennedy and would talk to people about him before he was President (or even when he was President) and they didn't know him -

I would

I would say this is a most compassionate man. People generally did not believe it or understand what I meant. And perhaps compassion isn't quite the right word - although it's almost right. But he did have an extraordinary ability to see inside the mind of another man; and see his mind and situation not only with objectivity but with real sympathy.

This, of course, was one of the strands which makes him a Lincolnesque figure - the other being his combination of humor and sense of the possibility of tragedy.

But my point here is that he understood Khrushchev's position over Berlin. He knew that the drain could not continue; that something like the Wall would be built; and he would have to sit still for it.

Neustadt: I ask this for two reasons. One is that I am curious to get your views about his learning and anticipation processes. Now clearly this has probably uncovered a real important clue here because he could look ahead in terms of the Russians--because he could think about what would I be thinking if I were Khrushchev. Now one of the things I have never been clear about and I would like your thoughts - he did not take the Cuban confrontation nearly as I can tell as the Walter Lippmanns take it - as now let us put aside the threat of confrontations. Above all he was deeply concerned about the possibilities of miscalculation, mutual miscalculation. I don't think he thought he had seen the end of this.

Rostow: That is what he talked about with Mikoyan when he came to Washington after the crisis. Kennedy focused the conversation on exactly that point. He said, in effect: look, this is an awfully dangerous world. I didn't think you would do this; and you obviously didn't think I would react as I did. This is too dangerous a way for us to go on.

Neustadt: Well, my question is do you have any notion of what he was looking ahead towards in terms of the next moments of difficulties with the Soviets, what he foresaw. He foresaw the Wall all right - now what was he foreseeing in November of 1963?

Rostow: That is a good question and I don't think I can answer it. I think he knew that obviously his next big one was Southeast Asia and China. He always regarded the Chicom nuclear explosion as likely to be historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960's. And Saigon had gone bad between June and November 1963 - and he knew it. He had silted it up some from the end of 1961 to June 1963; but it was coming unstuck. That was perfectly obvious after the Buddhist affair, and what followed.

Whether he foresaw that pressures would arise for German unity, whether his speech at the Free University in Berlin reflected such an anxiety - whether there was something in that area, I don't know. I think there is no doubt that round about the end of 1961 he began to cheer up a little about things. Of course, he never gave himself the breaks; he was never overoptimistic in terms of the rhythm of his Administration. But in 1962 in the Berkeley speech one could see the first public reflection of a sense that we had ceased to slip back. Arthur Schlesinger called me up before that speech. He said the President wants to talk about the need for enlarged European contributions to aid. I said that is not a good enough subject for the occasion. Why doesn't he talk about the slow, favorable turn in the tide. Arthur asked for a draft. The President later approved the theme and used it. The preface to his 1962 papers places that year as a turning point. The missile crisis was, of course, the centerpiece. But the change in mood came earlier. He cheered up some. I have the feeling that, after the Cuba missile crisis, some of the dark, dark

feeling

feeling he had on the nuclear business began to lift a little. All through 1961, right down to the Cuba missile crisis, he had to bear the inhuman burden of making deterrence stick. He knew the only way you could make it stick was to face - literally face - the possibility of nuclear war. You had to take steps which actually could take you there: on Berlin; in the Cuba missile crisis; and, more obliquely, over Laos in 1961. And I had the feeling sometimes, as he sat there in the Cabinet Room listening to us talk of moves that could lead to nuclear war, he was haunted a little by the possibility that the good Lord had put him on earth to destroy it. I talked shortly after his death one night with Mrs. Shriver. The burden of nuclear responsibility came up. I asked her whether she had the feeling that the President's life was shadowed by this burden. She said he did fear he was going to be the instrument for doing this horrible thing. There is little doubt in my mind that this was, for him, a real and deeply personal anxiety. But, in the period after the Cuba missile crisis, this cloud lifted somewhat. It didn't go away, but it lifted.

Neustadt: But he didn't share this Lippmannian ebullience until it was all over?

Rostow: No. Because he knew what he had done. He had set Khrushchev on his behind. The only way that Khrushchev became a nice, clean-cut kid - interested in the test ban - was by making it clear to him that nuclear blackmail wouldn't work. That is what Kennedy did. But he knew that Khrushchev was capable of taking the world that close to nuclear war, and he - or his successors - might do it again. That is why he said what he did to Mikoyan. Then he waited his moment to make his American University speech.

Neustadt: Well, the other reason for raising this point now is what kind of anticipatory mechanism - is something very close to your heart. BNSP - my perception is that he was never going to sign that BNSP. He never

wanted

wanted to have a BNSP. He was temperamentally against nailing down where history was going until he could see it bit by bit - he just shrank. He was too fond of you and had too much respect for you to say to you take it away and don't bring it back. He just wasn't going to do it. This is curious.

Rostow: I don't think it is so curious.

Neustadt: Well it is not curious but it is important to get your assessment of the mental processes behind it.

Rostow: There are two different matters here. So far as the main directions of policy are concerned, he had those all in his head. He didn't need a BNSP to tell him what his basic stance in military policy was or towards the Atlantic partnership or the Russians. All the main lines of his policy were formed in his mind by the time The Strategy for Peace was published. So he didn't need a BNSP for himself. Second, he didn't want the bureaucracy to nail him down with promissory notes. He wanted to handle the tactics of moving forward on all of this with the greatest freedom of action.

So, on the one hand, he didn't need it; and, on the other hand, he didn't want the bureaucracy to use the document to lock him in.

He was conscious that the bureaucracy might have, so to speak, a policy of its own. I remember very early in the Administration - I forget what the issue was - he said: "You've got to say it three times around here before they believe you mean it." And he may have come to a perception as to why this was so - that the bureaucracy may, in some fields, be on a long track which transcends any one President. In any case he wanted to have minimum hostages to fortune. The case for the BNSP was, of course, to give the Indians down the line authoritative guidance. I felt we could make the BNSP work for him rather than against him. Perhaps he didn't

understand

understand the importance for the bureaucracy of such Presidential guidance - or perhaps he discounted it...

Neustadt: Well this is the next thing I wanted to ask you.

Rostow: I never resented this. It was my duty as a planner to put the matter to him in the form of a draft. That's all. There was some amiable interplay over the first draft. Elspeth, who became very fond of the President, suddenly picked up the phone, after he had made a speech, and called him up - just to tell him that she liked it. I don't think she did it before or again; but they chatted quite a long time. She reported that Kennedy had said he was spending the weekend reading Walt's latest book - a draft of the BNSP. And when Dirksen and company took after me in the summer of 1962, and I was going up on the Hill, he read that draft very carefully. Incidentally, he was sure that the Air Force had leaked the draft. He knew they were out to get McNamara and damage him. He said: I have read every word of that draft. No one in good faith could have portrayed the policies in that paper as they did in the Chicago Tribune.

I rather doubt that Eisenhower ever read the BNSP papers on which he signed off as carefully as Kennedy read every draft. But he didn't want to get nailed down. And so I kept it current.

I never regarded the BNSP as a critical aspect of the planning process. We used it as a basis for speeches. The drafts had a certain oblique effect on the bureaucracy But the main use we made of it was as a way of setting out some objectives so that we could define the gaps between objectives and performance. From scrutiny of these gaps - in field after field - we built the BNSP planning tasks early in 1962. The whole bone structure of planning in this town in 1962-1964 came from defining the gaps between rhetoric and performance. So the BNSP served some purpose. But you are right - he never would have signed it.... except, maybe, in a second term when he might have become interested in nailing the bureaucracy

down

down a little beyond his time.

Neustadt: Well now let me take another step. I think you and I see his reasoning about the same, yet from the bureaucratic point of view their needs are different than his - a great price is paid for not having guidelines. And he pays part of that price. He saves the price of having hunting licenses out that come back to haunt him as promissory notes but he pays the price of people not really being able to do their work as effectively as if they had guidelines. I want to know if you think he came to see that he was paying a price for flexibility or not - or did this lesson still lay ahead of him?

Rostow: Well, you know, I can't really answer that question. When I came over to the State Department I saw him, of course, much less often. When I did see him these were damned good meetings. We always got some business done. For example, the July 4, 1962, Interdependence speech came out of one of those sessions. But I just don't know enough about the kinds of things you feel if you saw him once or twice a day to answer that for you. I know the SKYBOLT-Nassau affair shook him. And I believe I know how he came to ask you to write the SKYBOLT book. After a year over here I took stock of the planning process and came over to discuss a more systematic relationship between the White House and the planning business. I brought over, among other things - and had him read - a definition of planning of Eugene Black - which defined planning as the triangular process of linking those who bear political responsibility, operational policy, and those who reflect-to permit one to understand the consequences of action before decisions are taken. He read over this Black quotation, then walked out to Mrs. Lincoln and said: Get that memo of Walt's that he sent over just before Nassau - a memo in which I warned of the gap between the view of the most thoughtful members of the bureaucracy and what they were about to do, proposing an alternative to the Nassau deal. Mac then came in; and we talked about

how

how SKYBOLT went wrong. I think, but I am not sure, that this occasion was the origin of his impulse to have you do the study. You can check out the dates. Aside from the Bay of Pigs, I think Nassau troubled him most in retrospect. (It was, incidentally, as typical as anything I know of him that he took the occasion of a general observation to get at a specific problem and to act on it.) But, after all, things went well, by and large, and from the Cuba missile crisis forward. And I don't think he had any reason to have high on his agenda the notion that he needed a BNSP to get things in order. I don't think he gave much mind to it. The problem of getting the bureaucracy to be responsive -- especially to get the State Department to be a vital, creative instrument -- never left him. He had a different set of problems and anxieties about the military. But I don't think that was a big problem, once McNamara took hold.

Neustadt: Tell me one other incidental thing before we turn back to our major policy strands. I had a perception in the course of reading stuff on the SKYBOLT study that he and the Secretary of Defense were rather widely apart on the notion of what the real problem of conventional forces in Europe amounted to. The President's perception was related to these mutual miscalculations and possibilities and he only saw one place where the danger was real and that was Berlin. All this business about the flanks he had a real suspicion was baloney because he couldn't see that he and Moscow could get mutually terribly entangled by accident. And if there were a Berlin settlement the need for American forces in Europe would turn over like that. This was a sort of running, musing in various memcons. He would muse about this -- the Secretary of Defense would state the case the other way. It is clear that the President would never be convinced, it was also clear that since it wasn't operational at the moment, there was no Berlin settlement. But you could see that it was someday to get operation. Have you got any perceptions about this?

Rostow:

Rostow: There is no doubt in my mind that the problem for Kennedy - and for us all - of the role of conventional forces in Europe was a real problem - in fact there was a serious recent exchange between the Pentagon and State on it. The conventional force doctrine was originally built up around the notion that the Russians might consciously make a limited probe, because they felt that we had no capabilities between surrender and nuclear war and we would accept a limited setback rather than nuclear war. You had to cover that gap in the spectrum in Europe. And that means conventional forces. The President's view was political. He felt you could get into some limited shooting by miscalculation; and I think he was convinced that Berlin was the only serious place for this. (Others among us felt it could come about via an East German revolt, as well.) There was, of course, another anxiety that he had during the Cuba missile crisis; that is, the Russians might try to seize Thrace or a piece of Turkey as a hostage for something that we were doing, and in a part of the world where we didn't have an adequate conventional capability on the spot. But the theme that Berlin was the overwhelming reason for our conventional forces in Europe was recurrent; and it differs from the conventional theology developed by the strategic pundits - which was more abstract and general. I think we come much closer to the President's view in a recent State Department paper in which we react against the notion that you push tactical nucs very far forward and almost commit yourself to use them before the event - even if the event is minor, unpremeditated, or based on miscalculation. There is quite a lot of thrust for dispositions with too much automaticity built into them. Mr. Rusk is lucid and strong on this. We feel that one of the biggest dangers is of accidental, unintended contact where it would be contrary to our interests and everybody else's to have automaticity in the use of nuclear weapons. We have got to maintain tight control over tactical nucs. And this is close to the President's view.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: This raises two things. The President made a conscious effort in the early days of the Administration to smother the Vice President with kindness, it was conscious I am sure, and also to avoid the kind of gap that existed between Roosevelt and Truman. In the case of Cuba of all the testimony about the impacts of everything on everybody I have never heard any on the impact of this whole thing on the present President.

Rostow: He spoke about it the other day.

Neustadt: Did he?

Rostow: Yes.

Neustadt: He was a spectator sportsman through this.

Rostow: Well, he came out of it with long thoughts. I can tell you something interesting about that. President Johnson, before his first State of the Union message, had a session over there to which I was invited. It was a fascinating occasion. There were McNamara, Rusk, Taylor, and the old gang: Ted Sorensen, Mac Bundy, myself, etc. There was the new staff - Valenti, Moyers, etc. And there also brought to the Cabinet table were three of his old pals outside the government - Clark Clifford, Jim Rowe and Abe Fortas. There we all were, like geological layers out of his life. President Johnson did something I thought was admirable. He talked from simple notes for damned near two hours about the things that were deep in him, how he looked at the world; how he looked at the United States; what he wanted to do. I have notes on it and I am glad; because it was a great occasion. At the end he said: now it it up to you fellows to write it down; but this is what I stand for. At one point he said: Now there are a lot of you fellows around the table who shared in the Cuba missile crisis. Some of you didn't. But I want to tell you that one of the deepest things in me is the memory of going to bed

at night

at night and not knowing whether there was going to be a nuclear war or not. This is no way for the world to be run. My first ambition is to preserve civilization and that is my first duty. We have to have military strength. But we have it and shall keep it. But that alone won't preserve civilization. He went back directly to the anxiety that everybody could remember - the experience in which a nuclear war was thoroughly possible. He said: I want to go for peace and I want to stay with it. I want to follow through on what Kennedy did and really mean it. I want to get some things done to follow on from the test ban. This was one of the three or four most fundamental things on Johnson's mind. One of them was the possibility of destroying civilization by nuclear war; the next was the depth of his feeling about poverty. You can, of course, say that he regards peace and being against poverty as a good political kick. And, of course, he is a politician. But that's superficial. You couldn't listen to him for two hours without knowing this is exactly how he felt.

Neustadt: My question really is whether Kennedy succeeded in transmitting to him by this spectator opportunity which he was so careful to provide his own sense of the possibilities of mutual human insufficiency and therefore miscalculation.

Rostow: I feel that the process of sitting in there all through that period did the job - because Cuba wasn't the only tough nut.

Neustadt: Well, he had him sit in on everything.

Rostow: I remember one day - it was vivid to me because I knew of Nixon's remote position in the White House during Eisenhower's time - we had a meeting at about 2:30. The President looked across and said where is the Vice President. Well, the weather was bad and he was circling the National Airport - he was

coming

coming back from some place. I don't remember the item on the agenda; but the President said: Well, let's go on to another item here that is not so important. We will meet again at 4:30. He wanted the Vice President present. I heard Nixon describe his remoteness in August 1958 - the Friday before Eisenhower gave his Lebanon-Jordan speech I helped draft. I was up in the Senate for an hour and a half at lunch time with him and C. D. Jackson. He said: You are the first fellows to ask me my opinion on a serious question in two years. He said the only contact I have with the White House is occasionally through Milton Eisenhower. The White House fellows don't like me. I never forgot this moment with Nixon who had to build his whole political position on an alleged tie to the NSC; but he knew in his heart he had been screened out of nearly everything.

Neustadt: Of course Kennedy's White House fellows didn't like Johnson either.

Rostow: That may well be correct. But he did keep Johnson close. He insisted that he be there; and he saw the Vice President bilaterally often. I remember one of the last times I saw the President. Jackie was still away in Greece. It was a Friday night. We had an appointment and the Vice President was there and we chatted. We were both waiting outside his office. He saw the Vice President for quite a long time, and he came out and said, sorry, Walt, it is too late now - can you come back tomorrow morning? And I did see him on the Saturday morning. He was scrupulous about this, and I am sure it paid off.

Neustadt: Well, you know I don't want to press this here but it seems to me that one of the things Kennedy may have a claim in history for is the learning process he offered his successor.

Rostow:

Rostow: That's right. No doubt. He really insisted on it, you know.

Neustadt: All that learning came somehow out of the Bay of Pigs and the Berlin crisis which any other President would have to get for himself. It may be that Johnson has some of it - I don't know. If he does it is Kennedy who did it.

Rostow: There is no doubt. You know Johnson's initial stance on some of these issues was a rather conventional toughness. When I say conventional I mean without really seeing all the complications and what it takes to be really tough amid all the complexities and dangers. But by the end of his time - and certainly as President - he had exactly the same kind of caution in dealing with this inflammable world as Kennedy did. I think any responsible President would after a while. But he walked right into it. There is true continuity out of this common experience.

Neustadt: I am glad we got that down because --

Rostow: That is an interesting point. But if they want a document, historians should go back and get that remarkable two hour statement of his mind and heart that President Johnson gave us before we drafted the first State of the Union message.

Neustadt: Yes, the whole thing is hot on his head. Now the other incidental point just to end this tape is out of what experiences do you perceive that Kennedy got the sensitivities he exercised in the second Cuban crisis - the Cuban confrontation. Let me tell you exactly why I ask this question. I had rather assumed that it was a trauma of the Bay of Pigs that sensitized him to mutual miscalculation. I am inclined to think I am wrong about that. That it is a whole series of things which perhaps starts with Vienna and go through the summer of 1961 - anyway I pose it.

Rostow:

Rostow: I think it came out of the perception of this man in Vienna who tried to snow him. It was a man who was confident, pretty confident that he was going somewhere in the face of Kennedy. He knew that Khrushchev was putting on a big act; but he also knew he had some conviction and ambition and drive behind him. Now it was obvious in a number of ways Kennedy had taken him down a peg over the year and a half that followed between Vienna and the Cuba missile crisis - year and three or four months. What Kennedy had in mind was that this fellow was intent on maintaining his power and status - and unwilling to take defeat from Kennedy. He interpreted his willingness to do this quite wild and improbable thing of putting the missiles in Cuba as a sign of the desperation of this man as he saw his position sagging away. He had a sense that a guy in that position - taking a desperate unexpected act to retrieve a waning situation - was a fellow you had to deal with damned carefully or he might explode.

Neustadt: This goes back to your other comment.

Rostow: He met this fellow and he had been wrestling with him from the time he had said in Vienna it is going to be a cold winter. He explained to him that he, Kennedy, could not take a shift in the balance of power. Well, here was this fellow willing to try to produce a shift in the balance of power, despite what Kennedy told him. Now a guy who would do that was in fact taking high risks; and Kennedy's job was to defeat him - but to defeat him in ways that minimized the chances that, in the course of his defeat, he would do something even wilder.

Neustadt: Well, now did Kennedy's terribly careful effort to retain his own control over his own machine just grow out of his sense of Khrushchev's position or does this relate to another kind of perception?

Rostow:

Rostow: I think it was a fellow in a time of desperate crisis reverting to his most natural style. He ran that show just the way he ran the campaign of 1960 or he ran his PT-boat headquarters.

Neustadt: Or the 72 hours against Roger Blough.

Rostow: Exactly. He just took it into his hands, like a small unit commander, going back to Elspeth's comment about our all being junior officers of the Second World War.

The style in which the Cuba missile crisis was organized is worth a lot of attention. It was like nothing else I had ever seen in this town. It exactly fitted Kennedy's instinctive style which was one of personal and intimate command. It was quite unlike the organization of a supreme headquarters in war. It was like the organization of a small military unit in operations. The town was never so light on its feet before or since. The President used his key Cabinet members and advisers as a personal staff. The whole town collapsed into two levels. You had the men around the Cabinet table; and the rest. I was one of the links between the two as chairman of the Planning subcommittee of the NSC Executive Committee.

Neustadt: Well one of the things that fascinates me about this is it had a precursor in Truman's consultations from June 25-28, 1950 in which the principals were used as their own staff. It didn't last long - it wasn't as tightly organized and I cannot sort out in my head how much of this is simply Kennedy's instinct for small unit operations and how much of it is inherent in the supreme situations. The way he handled these two - and in the clutch the President grabs for the men with operation responsibility and authority and they do their own staff work and the rest of the town sits. It is extraordinary.

Rostow: That's right.

Neustadt: And yet I am sure you right there were obviously no conscious relationships - and this is pure Kennedy.

Rostow: Yes. It was pure Kennedy.

Neustadt: Well now let's go back to the early part of 1961 - dealing with the spring and summer - to those two intertwined issues in Southeast Asia - Laos and Viet Nam. And two tapes ago you had laid out your own sense of deep concern and had spoken of the first time you laid the Vietnamese situation before the President and his saying to you this is the worst one we got. Now at that beginning period he had threatened firm action in Laos, and then found that his resources and the balance of advice was dead against going through. Yet he did not as far as the external record shows, any moment think of applying a Laos solution or the one he finally adopted to Viet Nam.

Rostow: That is correct. A different war.

Neustadt: He always saw it as a different war.

Rostow: He saw the connection all right between the infiltration through Laos and the war in Viet Nam. And he saw, of course, the connection in Hanoi's intent to take over the whole peninsula. But it was a different situation; and the essence of the difference was reflected in the 1954 Accords; namely, two northern provinces, to which, in effect, we had no logistical access, were given to the Communists. Logistics, geography, and prior diplomacy had diluted Laos, but not South Viet Nam. In 1962 the best you could seek in Laos was to get the Vietminh out of those two provinces and see if you couldn't make something like a neutral country, with the local left wing, the neutralists, and the right making a coalition. We strove to negotiate that; and, in fact, did negotiate it on paper at Geneva in 1962. But going back I would like to make a point here. It is often misinterpreted. It concerns the President's press

conference

conference on Laos where he talked from maps. That press conference was designed to suggest why we could not afford to lose Laos. It was not a commitment to go in and conquer all of Laos. I don't think the President had any other objective -nor was there any other objective seriously considered in the Government - than to force an attempt in 1962 to get a neutral solution but with the intent to get Ho Chi Minh's men out of there. The Pathet Lao, it was hoped, would be manageable without Viet Minh stiffening. The operating objective was to get a situation in which the war would stop; and the Communists who then had the Plaine de Jarres would cease moving down into the Mekong Valley. Now a lot of us felt for some time, including myself, that our bargaining position at a conference would be better if we had some troops in the Mekong Valley. We could hold against anything they had, if they chose to fight; and, if that proved unnecessary, we could then negotiate them out. Ultimately, Averell Harriman and Lemnitzer, when they were out in the area during the crisis, recommended that, too. That was, by and large, the bureaucracy's view. Then the President found that Eisenhower, MacArthur, and the Congressional leadership except Bridges were against him. So he tried to get the operational result he was after - namely, a ceasefire without actually putting the troops in, and he pulled it off. He loaded the Marines. The record of the Vienna conference should be studied by historians. As I recall the record, the one anxiety Khrushchev showed centered on Laos. In general he spent his time posturing tough - scratching the hair on his chest. But several times he said, as I recall; 'You were going into Laos, weren't you?' Khrushchev was conscious that the Marines, in fact, were loaded - the 10,000 Marines on Okinawa. I don't know how far advanced the operation had moved before the Russians indicated to the British that they would accept a ceasefire. But it worked. And as I said earlier today, my conviction is that despite Eisenhower, MacArthur, the Congressional leadership, and the general post-Bay of Pigs dishevelment, the President would have fought in Laos to hold the Mekong Valley.

He couldn't

He couldn't take a conference like 1954 - with a war going on and a Dienbienphu as the delegates arrived in Geneva. He couldn't take a conference with a war still going on and those fellows nibbling their way into the valley. Laos was no longer a French responsibility. It was his responsibility. But he wanted desperately to avoid having to fight in the Mekong Valley; and he did. I am sure this was the beginning of the turnaround in the relation between Khrushchev and Kennedy - the loading of the Marines from Okinawa. I think that was the beginning of the turning point. I think that Khrushchev realized that Kennedy would not take the loss of the Mekong Valley. I think he was right, despite what appeared to be bluff. I think Kennedy would have fought if they had continued on into the valley.

Neustadt: Did Kennedy really experience the constraints that have been publicly ascribed to him - mainly if he used those 10,000 troops in the Mekong he would be pinched all over the place.

Rostow: No. The 10,000 troops were out there. We would have been in a bind if we got into a substantial war in Southeast Asia and had to fight it with a lot more troops. Then we would have put our reserve divisions in the United States earmarked for Berlin into question. It wasn't the 10,000. There were more than that in the area. But we didn't have enough to fight two limited wars or even to deter them persuasively. And the Laos experience really convinced him. At the first opportunity he moved. He used the Berlin crisis to expand the whole ground force establishment and its mobility. But I'm sure in 1961 we had enough to hold the Mekong Valley.

Neustadt: All that strength that we built up so faithfully through an inflation, Korea was being tossed away.

Rostow: That's right. Tossed away. I can attest personally that the phrase "a bigger bang for a buck" was, in fact, used in the White House in 1953.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: I am afraid you are right.

Rostow: I heard it with my own ears in the first Eisenhower year when I was a consultant.

Neustadt: Well now one sees this Laos reasoning, particularly with the constraints of Congressional feeling, and MacArthur, Eisenhower, the elder statesmen generals of the other party and an awful doubt about the chiefs - I take it their staff performance on this issue as well as on the Bay of Pigs was no doubt --

Rostow: It was a dreadful performance. The symbol of the military in that period was the most disheveled meeting on a high level in the US Government I have ever seen. Lemnitzer was away. I think it was Vice President Johnson who had suggested at a previous meeting that the views of the service secretaries and the chiefs of the four services, including the Marines, be solicited in writing. And they came in with those documents. No two were the same. Not even the Marines were willing to go into the Mekong Valley. I remember Bob Kennedy saying: "If the Marines aren't willing to go in, even I'm against it." The President, with his immense self-control, surveyed this disarray. I knew what was going on in his mind - after the Bay of Pigs. It was a mess. And behind this mess was a problem to which I was peculiarly sensitive. It was a question of logistics. I had done a lot of work on logistics in the Second World War because it related to the bombing problem. I had gotten out the maps of the routes into Laos. I discovered the Chiefs of Staff were feeding the President a quite false view of the relative balance of power in the Mekong Valley. They said something like this. We can, in two weeks, put 35,000 troops into the Mekong Valley. The enemy can put in 135,000. That was scary arithmetic. But it was wrong. Quite aside from the fact that the enemy's routes were interdictable - because they ran through ravines and needed bridges - the roads from Hanoi couldn't carry that many fellows down to Vientiane in that time. Moreover, our routes through Thailand were a lot better than the Chiefs had allowed. Even leaving aside what

air supremacy

air supremacy would have given to us, it was a dreadful thing to have done to the President at this stage: to accentuate, by false analysis, his inherent sense of US inadequacy in that critical valley. He studied the region most carefully. He kept coming back to the airfields at Savanaket and Pakse because he knew he would have to try to get some troops in by air. I remember when General Taylor and I went out there at the end of 1961 he still said: 'Don't you two come back without taking a look at the airfield at Savanaket.' This remained on his mind. No one could tell him firmly and lucidly whether it was air worthy or not. And we indeed did divert our plane, in flying from Bangkok to Hong Kong, to come down to look at those air fields - just because it was on the President's mind from the worst days of the Laos crisis. I never saw a President as ill-served as Kennedy was by the military during that period. This was so in a number of ways - but above all, I am convinced, by projecting to him a false and unfavorable sense of the relative balance of power in a critical area. That is one reason why I so greatly admired him for - despite everything and everybody - loading the Marines and forcing a ceasefire.

Neustadt: Now what is the date of this worst moment for him.

Rostow: That is a good question. I think it was May of 1961 - either late April or early May. It was directly in the wake of the Bay of Pigs. The sequence was something like this. The military had said that Phoumi could capture the Plaine de Jarres in three weeks and the three weeks were up about February 28. In fact they never moved off their road junction towards the Plaine de Jarres. And early in March, after a whiff of grapeshot, Phoumi's men bugged out. The acute phase of the 1961 Laos crisis can be dated from the bugout of March 8th (or 5th) down to the firming up of the ceasefire in May. The historians will just have to sort it out.

Neustadt: Well the key on that one is the disarray - reluctance of high Republicans at Senatorial

levels,

levels, the effort to get by without --

Rostow: The only fellow in the Congressional meeting that was willing to face putting troops in Laos was Senator Bridges, if I recall correctly.

Neustadt: Well, that would not inspire confidence.

Rostow: Yet, although people look different --

Neustadt: I know. Yet he was prepared, *in extremis*, not to let the Mekong go.

Rostow: I am absolutely convinced he would have fought in the Mekong if necessary.

Neustadt: All right now, this is one crisis, and the one farthest from reach when he got this other place with a seacoast and a more interesting geography which is evolving connectingly but separately. Ok, let's turn to that. This is the one he told you he thought was the worst we have got.

Rostow: Yes. His attitude towards Viet Nam was colored strongly by his memories of having seen the French in Viet Nam. He visited Viet Nam in 1953, I believe. He kept coming back to the fact that the French put in more than 250,000 good troops, and were run out. Before I went out with General Taylor he spoke to me alone. He wanted my judgment on whether the Viet Cong had nationalism on their side. Did the people of South Viet Nam really want Ho Chi Minh? We can't commit as many troops as the French, the South Vietnamese must fight this themselves - can they? Do they want to see it through? Those were the questions I tried to make sure were answered in our report. He was, of course, anxious not to engage US ground forces in South Viet Nam. I found the situation dangerous not because the Viet Cong were popular, but because there was an open frontier and safe haven and resources for the Viet Cong behind it. I had studied guerrilla warfare problems in the 1950's. We had a project at the MIT Center run by Jim Cross, which I followed closely. And, in general, I was interested in the

pathology

pathology of the underdeveloped areas - their vulnerability to intrusion, subversion and guerrilla warfare. I learned then that the outcome of a guerrilla war hinged mightily on the degree of the external margin - on whether the frontier was open. The Greek affair only folded when Tito defected from Stalin; that frontier was closed; and there was a split in the Greek Communist party. Malaya was manageable - and the Philippines too - because there was no substantial external element. In Viet Nam there was a big external margin. I formed a conviction at that time that we would never win it with an open frontier; that it could not be closed from within South Viet Nam; and we would have to make Hanoi pay enough in the North for it to be worth its while to close the frontier. I talked about the problem with the President early in 1961, even before I went to Saigon. In fact, he permitted me, in a speech I made at Ft. Bragg in June of 1961, to make a historical prediction. I talked about sending arms and men across frontiers in the speech as a form of aggression. I said it was the task of the international community (thinking of the Geneva Conference) to control such movements. But if they were not controlled, men would be inevitably led to seek out the source of the aggression. This was, I believe, the first suggestion that we might have to go north. The Communists, incidentally, immediately reacted to that passage. Within a week a Polish diplomat was sent in my office to ask: "Now what did you have in mind, chum?" But General Taylor's and my report to the President, in its two-page preface personally for the President, said that the things we proposed were sound and should buy us some time; but unless the agreement in Geneva closed down this frontier we would have to confront later the problem of whether we would accept terms of reference which permitted the North Vietnamese to come in or make them pay an appropriate price. I remember after the final meeting in November, 1961, that settled what the President was prepared to do on the basis of the Taylor report - in the form of a NSAM - he said: "If this doesn't work, maybe we will have to take Walt's Plan Six." Now SEATO Plan Five was the military plan for the general defense of Southeast Asia. What

the President called Plan Six was the application of air (and perhaps naval) action against North Viet Nam, to get them to stop infiltration. Of course, he wanted to avoid that, if possible, by diplomacy in Geneva. He wanted to avoid getting US troops in; and he wanted, of course, to avoid the loss of the area.

Now you asked at the beginning what was his view of Southeast Asia. His view of Southeast Asia, in the end, was that we had to hold it; but he once put the question bluntly to me: "Why do we need to hold Southeast Asia? Why can't we get out of there?" That, of course, was his way of piercing through received generalizations and cliches. When all the discussions were over, I believe he concluded that everything down to Djakarta - the whole of Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific including the Australians were involved. Viet Nam really was the hinge to an enormous piece of real estate in the Western Pacific; and for him - given, among other things, his war experiences - the Western Pacific was a classic, direct US interest. He also perceived that the region was the flank of India and Pakistan. And after his work on the Indian Subcontinent in the Senate, he understood and took that linkage seriously. So in the end - reluctantly and painfully - he accepted what I think any American President in this period would have accepted; that, somehow, you had to hold it. But the inhibitions against fighting there and the inhibitions about having to escalate were real; and he struggled to find a way of holding it with minimal use of force.

Neustadt: Well this mature view postdates your and Taylor's trip I take it. When he sent you out had he come to a conviction that he had to hold it?

Rostow: I cannot answer that.

Neustadt: It wasn't imminently gone then.

Rostow: It was pretty close to gone. That was why we were sent. You know, when Taylor came aboard

in May

in May the first thing the President did was to hand him a memo from me suggesting that Gen. Taylor get out and look at Viet Nam on the spot. It was working on Viet Nam from May forward that Gen. Taylor and I got to know one another. We worked closely. I don't think our judgments ever substantially differed in that period on this issue. But Gen. Taylor didn't want to go out immediately. He wished to make sure he had a pretty good - if rough - notion of what he would want to recommend beforehand. He wanted the problem well framed. Some months passed. But finally the President and Gen. Taylor decided it was time; and we went out in October. The main reason we went out then was that in September the Viet Cong successfully attacked a couple of provincial capitals. They opened up the jails and let the prisoners out. They killed officials and a good many civilians. And they disappeared. But it was a tremendous shock to morale out there. It was obvious from the cables that the thing was on the slide. And, indeed, when we got there none of us felt that it could hold for more than three months unless something radical was done. This alarm arose not because the Viet Cong were about to overrun the country as Mao overran China in 1947-49 - with massive armies - in a classic Communist stage three operation. What alarmed us was, simply, that people were disheartened. They were in a tunnel from which they couldn't escape; and there was no light at the end of it. They didn't know what the hell to do; and it was falling apart. So our first duty was to find ways of buying time: by using money; American advisers; choppers; communications; etc., to beef up the war and civilian life - to get some forward movement: to pull out of this slump. We needed time to find ways to close the frontier; and to solve the problem of crystallizing political life around the young modernizing generation which palpably existed in civil as well as military life, which Diem did not understand, trust, or use effectively. I think the President was relieved that we perceived some possibilities here; but in the back of his mind he understood the role of the external margin. He wanted to see what Averell could do in Geneva. And, indeed, we got quite explicit promises from the Russians to stop infiltration via Laos - in the Pushkin-Harriman commitment. Meanwhile our

position

position on the ground was improving modestly all through 1962. Down to the beginning of the Buddhist revolt in June 1963 I think the Viet Nam anxiety lifted somewhat from the President - not finally - but by and large things were getting a lot better, not worse.

Neustadt: A two stage lift - the result of your trip and the fact that it was taking some hold and then the Geneva Accords.

Rostow: That is right. Exactly - those two things: the Taylor program and the Geneva Accords.

Neustadt: And then you get almost a year in which things actually - even though the Geneva Accords aren't really being implemented - things are getting better. So your course looks to you as though --

Rostow: I personally kept pretty much out of Viet Nam in this interval - not wholly; but I intervened sporadically. McNamara took over the Taylor program and elaborated it with vigor. I remained skeptical - while wishing my friends well - because I knew the cheap rate of exchange Ho could use to frustrate progress on our side through infiltration - normally 10-20 to 1. That is the horrible arithmetic of guerrilla warfare, once a quite modest political base is established. I was glad to see things get better; but I never thought you could bring it to an end with the frontier open and this cheap rate of exchange available to Ho. Then came the complicated chemistry of the rise of brother Nhu and the revolt of the establishment of Viet Nam against the family. The Buddhist affair was, in my view, simply a reflection of the widespread unwillingness of everyone - and every group - that mattered to see Nhu succeed Diem. So things fell apart from June of 1963. By that time we had evidence - there was always a time lag in the firm evidence - that Ho Chi Minh was violating the Accords of 1962. The Accords didn't go formally into effect until October of 1962. We didn't get evidence that they were continuing to violate - that is, hard, usable evidence - until the spring of 1963. At just that point the Buddhist ~~crime~~ crisis came. And

down

down to the President's death there never was a political interval in Saigon which offered an opportunity to face up to the violation of the 1962 Accords. In any case this whole northern operation is a tough bullet to bite for a democracy. Unless the Communists give us a good handle - which they are intent on not doing - this would be the first major postwar crisis that we will have to initiate. I have my views on this. And I've had them all through. But I have understood fully why both President Kennedy and President Johnson didn't jump at Plan Six right away quick.

Neustadt: In this time as you relate it Kennedy hardly had time to bite that bullet before his assassination.

Rostow: That is right. He obviously couldn't do it with Diem as a political base after the Buddhist affair. But I did not spend all my time trying to peddle this concept in the Government. But once I did raise it. I raised it hard with the Secretary of State and bucked a copy over to the White House. I thought the President should raise it when Mikoyan was here, in the wake of the Cuba crisis. I wanted the President to say, in effect: "Look, chum, you promised Averell in Geneva that you would stop this infiltration and get Hanoi out of Laos. You are not doing it. They are violating the Agreement. This is very dangerous. We ought to close it out before we have another crisis." Then I raised it again immediately upon Big Minh's coming in during the sequence of military coups. I argued that, for a moment, we had a man in Saigon who is reputable on the world scene: let's move fast to have a showdown with the north from this better base. But then came another coup. As of the time of this interview I have assured that the Northern operation is fully staffed out, by all civil and military hands. Mr. Rusk let me arrange this and get it organized. It is a fairly subtle political-military exercise. I now feel that it is in pretty good shape if the President wants to do it. That is the history of Plan Six as of the moment.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: You have still got the problem of political base which--

Rostow: Well I think it is a reputable political base.

Neustadt: Sure, but in September and October it must have been very tough.

Rostow: Very tough. My hunch is that President Kennedy would be taking much the same position as of this moment that President Johnson has taken, with one exception: having been an elected President, he may have been somewhat more willing than President Johnson to bite this bullet before November.

Neustadt: It is a bad year for biting bullets.

Rostow: I quite agree. But my greatest anxiety has always been that if you wait until an occasion arises, the occasion may take the form not of some overt Communist provocation - we can't always count on them to save our bacon - but a political cave-in in Saigon. It would be hard to mount Plan Six from what looked like a political empty shell in Saigon, even though the creation of that empty shell was due to the desperate human frustrations caused by the continued violations of the 1962 Accords, against the background of the arithmetic of guerrilla warfare. But to come back to President Kennedy's view of Southeast Asia: he felt he had to hold the Mekong; he had to hold South Viet Nam; he wanted to hold them with minimum US military involvement. I think in the back of his mind he knew there would have to be a showdown with the north; although I can't document that. He looked to that showdown to be mainly on the sea side - on the South China sea side, mainly using naval and air power, rather than a Korea-type engagement. Basically, I suspect he felt more comfortable with my Plan Six than with moving troops up through Thailand to the Mekong. But you know Plan Six was not something we looked forward to with relish. And so he wanted to buy time.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: What was his reaction to de Gaulle's initiative, if you call it that.

Rostow: De Gaulle's initiative?

Neustadt: Yes, de Gaulle's interjection of himself into Southeast Asia.

Rostow: That came after the President's death.

Neustadt: I thought it had come just before his death.

Rostow: I think it comes later. It really came after de Gaulle was over here for the President's funeral. Then he was a good boy for a bit; then he let fly again in January. It was in January 1964, if I recall correctly, that he defined with great sharpness his differences with us on Viet Nam.

Neustadt: Now what is the relation between the view on Viet Nam and the view on Sukarno?

Rostow: Viet Nam had its effect on the President's view of the West Irian crisis. I saw it in his interview with Luns. There was Hermann van Roijen, one of the best Ambassadors here - an impeccable, classic diplomat who handled with grace all the tense, unpleasant aspects of this confrontation between the Netherlands and Indonesia with us moving in to push the Dutch to one side. It was unpleasant even though that was precisely what they wanted us to do. Then in comes Luns. And in a little while he was literally pounding on the President's desk - demanding that we bail them out, accusing the President of letting them down; etc. It was the most improper behavior I ever saw in the President's office. And van Roijen knew it. The President's reaction was just what you would expect. He leaned back in his chair. There was a twinkle in his eye. He was rather liking this. You know, he didn't get pompous. Then he explained to Luns quietly, carefully, that he had a couple of wars in Southeast Asia; and West New Guinea was one he would like not to have to fight. He asked

Luns

Luns if the Netherlands were ready to fight a war to hold West Irian. It became quite apparent that what Luns wanted was for the U.S. to deal with Sukarno; but that he, Luns, would not take it on. However, the President was quite conscious that, in the end, Sukarno's real military neighbor was not Communist China but the Seventh Fleet. And in the showdown over West Irian - when Sukarno wanted to have both a diplomatic victory and a military victory - the President told him it wouldn't wash and threw the Seventh Fleet across the strait.

Neustadt: Enough is enough. Yes.

Rostow: And Sukarno backed away. But the major fact was that the President was not prepared to take on a war over West Irian. Laos and Viet Nam were enough. He wasn't looking for another war out there. He despised Sukarno. But he knew the Dutch credentials were ambiguous, after the 1949 negotiation, and, above all, he knew that the military and others in Indonesia who were potentially our friends were all caught up in this passionate obsession about West Irian. In the showdown, he wanted the Dutch - who were unprepared to fight - to disengage. He was quite prepared to take a phase of unpopularity in The Hague. He knew the Dutch politicians would have to blame the U.S. to some degree; and he said - that is just one of those things we have to be prepared for; we will all survive it; and they will be off the hook. But he disliked Sukarno greatly. I think that of the many men on the world scene he had to deal with the two he disliked the most were Diefenbacker and Sukarno.

Neustadt: One is a slob and the other is --

Rostow: They were both men whose word was not good; who had a curious belief in their own magic. They did things which were, in fact, meretricious, but did them in a sort of Elmer Gantry way - as if they were doing something that was right or pretending to do what was right. They lacked that candor with themselves which Kennedy had himself and prized in others. He didn't like men who were kidding themselves, as well as trying to kid him. He didn't like Sukarno but he dealt with him. Above all, he regarded him

as

as reprehensible because he wasn't doing an honest job for his country and his people. He was outraged at Sukarno's frivolous waste of Indonesia's potentiality for development.

Neustadt: The real problem is what else was there - what alternatives were there?

Rostow: In West New Guinea?

Neustadt: In Indonesia.

Rostow: That's right. Kennedy wanted to keep a line of communication going with the military and the others who might be useful after Sukarno left the scene. We couldn't overthrow Sukarno. That had been tried in the 1950's and failed. We were just working our way out of the mess it left - a kind of precursor to the Bay of Pigs. But Kennedy's main focus in Southeast Asia was Laos and South Viet Nam.

Neustadt: Now let me ask you - this is a good moment to take this rather different line. In this work of yours on Southeast Asia you encountered Bob Kennedy rather intimately on a lot of occasions. So you are one of the people whose testimony is valuable on the fascinating, complex relationship between these brothers. And I simply want to open this up for whatever you think it is useful to contribute. My impression of this is that the popular view of this misunderstands both of them.

Rostow: There is no doubt that the President respected Bobby's insight and judgment as well as cherished his total loyalty. But he was quite capable of treating Bobby as one among a number of men whose views he wished to hear before making a decision. The President - above all - kept his channels of communication and of confidence wide open. Especially after the Bay of Pigs he wanted Bobby in on military and foreign policy. He desperately needed someone he could talk to intimately - among other things about the characters involved. I don't know who said it first; but a number of people have reflected

on the

on the Bay of Pigs mess -- that at the time this was still a group of strangers working together. Rusk and McNamara were new to the President, of course Lemnitzer, Dulles, and the other career men - these were people whom he had met but never before in this kind of relationship. And there is no more close or more tense relationship than among men at the highest level of government when things go wrong - even if that closeness is masked - sometimes blessedly masked - by formality. These Bay of Pigs men weren't the same fellows who mounted the West Virginia primary with him. And so the need to get people whom he knew in the midst of military and foreign policy was great: to find out what really was going on; to find out how these people talked when they weren't talking to the President. I'm sure the President listened to Bobby. My guess would be that Bobby conveyed his impressions with candor; but would never try to make a net judgment for the President. On the other hand, the President was interested in his net judgments. I recall, for example, a meeting on Ghana. The President had to decide whether he was going to put a good deal of long-term money into the Volta Dam project. As I recall, it was the first occasion at which John McCone appeared at the Cabinet table as head of CIA. He reported on whether Nkrumah was a Communist or not. He said no: he is not a Communist. He is difficult; perhaps mad; an African radical;but not a Communist. Bobby was sitting right behind the President. He had indicated he was against our putting money into the dam. I remember Mr. Rusk asking if we shouldn't first discuss the issue with the Congressional leadership. The President had, I know, considered the matter carefully before the meeting. He made a quick, interesting response to Rusk. He said: 'No, this is one we have to carry ourselves. We must go ahead because, on balance, we think it is right. They can't share political risks of this kind.' Then, in announcing his final decision to go ahead, he referred lightly and amusingly to Bobby: 'Despite the pressures from behind me here, we are going to go ahead.' He gently overruled Bobby in the presence of all of us in a good-humored way. I don't know what Bobby would say; but I think he would portray his role in foreign affairs as confidant and prober; as the man who helped the

President

President make assessments of people; but not as a private Secretary of State.

Neustadt: No. Bobby was like anybody else in terms of whether you took or didn't take his advice. Except that you could be confident that he had no personal ambitions.

Rostow: Exactly. After the President's death Bobby mentioned once to me that he could no longer pick up the phone and talk to the President. What he evoked was a relationship where he could throw out ideas freely: the President could react positively - or he could say that's damned silly. But the relationship was stable. There were no consequences.

Neustadt: That is very important, as any other official would brood for two weeks.

Rostow: The President knew he would brood for two weeks. People forget how much a President has to worry about all the people around him; how they feel; how their moods and anxieties may limit their effectiveness. And quite aside from that, some of those around the President have some political specific gravity of their own. The President has to spend a good deal of his time persuading and being nice to people. He didn't have to be nice to Bobby; and there was something of that inner mutual confidence between him and all of the old friends. I had a certain amount of that. He didn't have to worry about me. When I proposed something he could just slap back briskly if he disagreed. It was private enough with the old gang just to say: that's wrong. In fact, the last business conversation I had with him was of this kind. Jackie was not yet home from Greece. It was a bright Saturday morning. He was taking Carolyn out to Rattlesnake Mountain, I think, in the chopper. I proposed we do something about the balance of payments - move on a level higher than the Central Bankers to get some rules laid down for the operation of the dollar as a reserve currency - French or no French. He said flatly the fuss the French would make wasn't worth it; and the scheme wouldn't work unless the French gold was in. I told him he

over-estimated

over-estimated the French gold. But the answer was a quick, decisive no; and all was well between us. With Bobby, of course, the link was deeper and covered more ground. I think it was an admirable link for the President to have.

Neustadt: You had been part of the old establishment. Did you understand this from the start? Or did it grow on you gradually?

Rostow: Well, after the election you didn't know how all of the old ties would be transformed. You didn't know how this man would behave as President. All I did know - and I was moved by it - was that he really wanted me in Washington. When I got into this business with Rusk and the Planning Council, I told them both they need not worry about my having a job. I meant it. I'm confident he knew I meant it. But he did appear to want me down there. Once I was down there it was clear that he wanted me to communicate with him freely - when and on what I was moved to communicate. And down to the end he appeared to wish to keep this line open. And I always talked to him as I did from the beginning - as one who knew more professionally about military and foreign policy than he did; who didn't know all the answers, but had a view I was prepared to express and defend; who understood a politician's - and then a President's - calculus was different and more relevant than mine. By and large, I guess my view was one of the views he wished to hear in these matters.

Neustadt: Did you know when you were working with Bobby that Bobby's advice would get treated just like anybody else's?

Rostow: I assumed that. I assumed it because I knew Kennedy as a man whose ear was had by no single person on any single issue. Even on the most technical matters - for example, military affairs - he wasn't going to take the Chiefs of Staff view without cross-check; although later, with the passage of time, he would take McNamara's view on a certain range of

military

military matters - but only after listening to argument including the JCS view. He got deeply enough into issues and acquired enough differing perspectives, to form a highly personal judgment. As a Senator, he did it in the campaign. I was sure he would do it as a President. He did. I would never think of his taking, on a given issue, one man's advice - even a close brother's.

Neustadt: This is very interesting because a lot of the new people - those who came very close to him - it took them years to figure out that Bobby's voice was not an especially privileged one. That was one thing that distinguished the old people from the new people. Distinguishes you from Mac, on a whole variety of relationships.

Rostow: It never occurred to anyone that worked with him for any time that on an issue in which you were advising him he would do anything else but listen with the greatest attention. Now there were some people's views he wanted on certain matters more than others. But you knew you were putting your view into a great computer. If what came out was exactly what you put in - as with the campaign phrase - it was because wha you advised converged with many other elements - not because your influence was unique. With Kennedy you had the privilege - or the right - to advise. But that was the end of it. What came out was a highly personal and subtle weighing and weighting of many elements plus important, incalculable, inarticulate elements of instinct.

Neustadt: One thing about him and Bob is that they are such different personalities. I am curious as to his consciousness of Bobby's personality as a distinct thing.

Rostow: To that I cannot speak. I didn't see them in the family. I would say that in some ways the popular image of the two men probably should be reversed. The image is of John Kennedy the intellectual - the man who is sensitive, maybe somewhat Hamletian - more inclined to the soft than the hard view. Of Bobby, the tough little fellow with a thick skin: a driver; a

gut fighter

gut fighter; etc. In fact, the President was an extraordinarily mature person. He could take the shocks, crises, disappointments, and lacerations of politics very well. He had developed that ultimate toughness that comes with maturity: knowing who you are; your limitations; your objectives; the possibilities of failure and tragedy. The first time I saw Bobby intimately was at the time of the Bay of Pigs. I had what I can only describe as a tender feeling toward him. This was a thin-skinned guy: tremendously focused on his brother. He could be tough about anything concerning his brother, Jack. And he could get hurt worse than Jack if things went badly for Jack, as they had just done. But he wasn't acting for himself. His mature personality has still got to emerge. He is going through that process right now. And it is a torment to go through with dignity in public. Bobby is a sensitive man. Many were skeptical at first that John Kennedy was a real liberal, as liberalism was defined conventionally. Then they came to see he had his heart in things. But many remained sure that Bobby was a kind of tough, conservative thug - all right for chasing Hoffa but no more. And here he is fighting for civil rights and other classic liberal causes with evident passion.

Neustadt: Bob has also been presented as a hard liner - go into guerrilla warfare and lap it up. And yet as nearly as I can tell on the critical issues Bob brought a morality into play which hasn't been attempted since Wilson's time.

Rostow: On the Bay of Pigs - part of his feeling - his activism at the time of the failure - arose from his feeling that our Bay of Pigs behavior might lose our credibility as an ally and as an adversary of Moscow. He is an activist instinctively; but when he sorts out an issue he is extremely sensible. On Berlin, as I recall, there was a consensus - there were no great differences or debates. Like all of us, Bobby looked for appropriate things to do in the face of the wall; but nothing turned up that fitted the

crime.

crime. Then he got into the guerrilla war business. He felt we just hadn't faced up to the problem of dealing with subversion in the underdeveloped areas; and he was right. As you know, I worked on this issue all through 1961, and finished, before going over to State in December, setting up the Taylor Counter-insurgency Committee. Bobby was helpful in all this. In particular, as a gadfly, he put the bureaucracy under pressure to do more abroad about labor unions and students. In traveling - notably in Indonesia and Japan - he was struck with the inadequacy of our communications to these groups. In the Cuba missile crisis he reacted against any Pearl Harbor - any secret attack - and he reacted, as the President did, against the notion of the United States, at the peak of its power, using that power against a small, poor country. There is a sense of noblesse oblige in Bobby.

Neustadt: One other question along this line and then I want to move on. Do you have anything to contribute to the historical circumstances that the elder brother who had such sensitivity about his younger brother - had been a younger brother as he was growing up.

Rostow: Well, the only thing I have to contribute - since I have no evidence at all - is that I am a middle brother. Elting Morison - who is also a middle brother - and I developed a theory about middle brothers. It holds for a couple of cases; but would almost certainly break down under careful examination. But it may have some bearing. The theory is that the eldest brother, in the early days, is the one who carries the strain. He is the first male. He's also the first child and the parents are anxious about him. He must pick up from the father. He has the sense of the continuity of the clan. Then the younger brother comes along. He is the kid brother. The family is more comfortable about him. He has a better time. They don't make such a fuss about him. He can more easily be himself, free of the sense that the family rests on him. In this way the second boy is a privileged character. And from what I know of Jack Kennedy's early days, he did feel very much his own man. Only later -

after

after he was a man - did he assume leadership of the clan in his generation. I've always felt that this relatively unencumbered childhood and youth - with Joe ahead of him - had something to do with his style - and gaiety. But I haven't a scrap of evidence.

Neustadt: Well, let's go back to a totally different subject, which is one that we wanted to get down today. Kennedy's encounter with what used to be called the missile gap - what I am really interested in is your perception of his perception of the disappearance of the thing and your sense of how in his mind that disappearance was perceived at the time. Because everybody in this town has a slightly different awareness span.

Rostow: I was not present at the intelligence briefing which made clear from our new evidence that, in fact, the Russians had fewer ICBMs than had been thought. But as I recall, the official estimate had been dropping over the past year at least. The fear of a Soviet first strike disappeared rather fast in the Kennedy Administration, as access was gained to the intelligence sources. And in fact, as early as August, 1958 I had talked with Kennedy about the need to distinguish their perhaps having more missiles than we had, from a capacity rationally to mount a first strike against us. But the President's pleasure at reassurance about the missile numbers - such as it may have been - was overwhelmed quickly by the studies and reports of the Net Evaluation Subcommittee. These impressed on him that, in a full nuclear exchange, casualties in the US would be so high as to make nuclear war a truly monstrous event in the US - let alone in world history. So the fear of a first strike - and I'm not sure Kennedy had it in January 1961 - was superseded by a knowledge of what a nuclear war would bring to Western Europe - which is virtual incineration - to Russia and to the US. The end of the missile gap didn't mean that we had the capacity whenever we wished to to take out Russia without cost or anything like without cost. The likely casualties on both sides were a very somber piece of furniture for a responsible man to carry in his head.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: Of course he made this very clear in his December televised news conference without actually using the figures.

Rostow: Aside from the casualty estimates - and the fact of personal nuclear responsibility - he was plunged into a group of concurrent and searching crises - Cuba, Laos, Congo, Viet Nam, Berlin. So I don't think he got much pleasure out of the fact that it was irrational for the Russians to try to take us out. But I will admit that when crises were tense, the favorable balance of the numbers - no matter how ambiguous their real meaning - was a comfort. And in fact we moved on to accelerate the Polaris and Minute Man programs - our second strike capability - just as we said we would in the campaign - just as I told them in Moscow we would in December 1960. And so, perhaps, the nature of the President's nuclear anxiety shifted; but it didn't really lift much burden from his shoulders.

Neustadt: Now there was a period, I suspect between August-September, 1961, when the estimates went down even again to practically zero, and the late spring of 1962 when the hardening of sites was manifested. In the Pentagon there was a sort of licking of chops about the reverse gap situation - what we could do if we wanted. I take it this was never - I take it you understand--

Rostow: I understand what you mean, yes.

Neustadt: I take it this was never shared in your perception of the President.

Rostow: No. I don't think the President ever contemplated initiating nuclear war. The estimates may have contributed to the notion that, in extremis, we could face a nuclear war at this stage and survive as a society. But, as I just indicated, I would put it simply as giving a small margin of comfort when crises were tense.

Neustadt: That is different than the sense that was going on over there.

Rostow:

Rostow: Indeed. Even when the missile numbers were favorable to us - and even if you assumed we struck first, the US casualties were calculated to be horrendous - quite aside from losing Western Europe to the 700 missiles in Western Russia; because we couldn't count on taking out enough of these before they fired. Right through these calculations, as the President looked down the nuclear gun barrel which he had to do - because he couldn't make deterrence credible unless he did - was a sense of horror, even though, perhaps, in extremis, the US could survive. There was no licking of chops at the thought of nuclear war or of annihilating Russia. Nor was there any backing away from the imperatives of deterrence - or any dramatization of his responsibility or self-pity.

Neustadt: Relief in the short run that it wasn't as disastrous as he thought, but plenty disastrous.

Rostow: That's right.

Neustadt: Now in the spring of 1962 the Secretary of Defense running on to his own evaluation comes out with his secret May presentation at Athens, the predecessor of Ann Arbor, between the first and second bout of the debate about aiding the French. And one of the odd and interesting refrains in McNamara's public presentations every time he has rethought the situation of the year is its disastrous effects on Europeans. Now Kennedy, I know, was engaged in the policy lines that McNamara set forth in various -- do you have any sense of his perception of the consequences of an annual thinking aloud that he engaged in in those three years - always on changed premises?

Rostow: I don't really know. I can't answer that question. That was a line of business in the White House that I followed, but Mac handled. I think the President approved the direction in which our military policy was going. He was quite disabused about the possibility of getting the Europeans to put up conventional forces. He always felt on the hook. Because of Berlin he saw why we had to keep those six

divisions

divisions there; but it irked him that they were flanked by relatively empty divisions that couldn't fight 90 days as ours were equipped to do. Above all he felt impaled on our balance of payments deficit - next to the nuclear problem the balance of payments, I think, worried him more than anything.

Neustadt: It also humiliated him.

Rostow: It did. He hated de Gaulle's having a whip hand over him - getting our protection free; hurting us wherever he could; and piling up a gold surplus at our expense, via our NATO outlays in France. And he grossly overrated de Gaulle's gold. You know, if de Gaulle wanted to pull his gold out, we could have handled it easily, in fact. But this fellow whom we were protecting being able to lecture us and to exploit us, cut him. This sense of weakness in dealing with a nation we were protecting, violated something personal in the President. It also violated something deep in a serious politician - you don't like to get yourself into that kind of vulnerable position with another politician. We talked a lot about this. My work with Kennedy on the balance of payments went back to the 1950's. One day he said: "Why is de Gaulle screwing us? What does he want?" I said: "He wants to run the Continent of Western Europe without our participation, while keeping fully our protection." He said: "But he can't get that." I said: "He probably knows that; but if he can't get what he wants, he at least wants to make Britain and us feel his cutting edge." He said: "That's cheap." In the face of all this Kennedy's instinct was to try to solve our balance of payments problem by our own action, not by negotiation in the Alliance. But he also drew back from trying to solve it in ways that would collapse the Alliance. He gave the closest personal attention to the whole array of measures designed to get our balance of payments into better shape on our own: through the export drive and all the rest down to the interest equalization tax. As I said the other day to Mr. Rusk, when we got the first quarter's balance of payments figures which showed us to be about in balance: "Jack Kennedy would

have

have been pleased." It would have meant more to him than a lot of things. We had begun to get ourselves off the hook.

Neustadt: I had got a feeling that it had put him on the hook not just to de Gaulle but to the Secretary of the Treasury, to Wall Street, to the Swiss bankers, to all kinds.

Rostow: That's right. It also hit him in his efforts to expand the domestic economy. Every way he turned he was cut by the razor blades that resulted from that deficit; and he hated it. It sounds silly but, as I say, next to his nuclear responsibility, the balance of payments deficit hurt him most. He would come back to it time and time again - the image of de Gaulle sitting there sassing him from his little pile of gold. He would really have enjoyed these last months when things moved into better shape - mainly as a result of his policies.

Neustadt: One other question on this European side of -- I recognize that you weren't seeing him daily on these areas. That is the Skybolt question; the Skybolt-Nassau question which you and I have been over too much before. One of the things I discovered toward the end of my study but never checked out with him because we were going to go over the report was that the Washington Post editorial which was a blast at Rusk but really a blast at him, just before Nassau, accompanied by some personal table pounding by the publisher, represented for the President an incipient revolt by the bipartisan Eastern internationalist establishment - if he was caught being beastly to the British on something that his predecessors had begun the establishment would interpret it to mean and that this took on his mind as best I can fathom a political significance quite separate from his sort of British orientation - enormously complicated by the fact that Skybolt was a field laid by Ike and he went to Nassau with a sense that he could be extermely vulnerable in those circles which were personally important to him as well as politically. Did you get anything at any point from him with respect to this?

Rostow:

Rostow: Not personally. But I sensed that he did feel vulnerable about the British. He was Joe Kennedy's son. They could turn ugly on that memory. But this is a question only he could have answered; and I am sure he would have answered it candidly. I think the critical issue at Nassau - when he was President of the United States and a mature President - was this political relation to Macmillan. After Macmillan's act at Nassau - when, like an Edwardian Shakespearian actor overplaying the drama of poor old Harold at the end of the road - put Kennedy in an impossible position, as it was designed to do. There were two reasons: first, Ike's commitment of 1958; second, Kennedy's guilt about the leak on Skybolt. Going back to my memo to Kennedy on the eve of Nassau, I think he was wrong in letting these factors govern. By Nassau the shock of Skybolt was lessening and the British Establishment was beginning to face the nuclear issue honestly. I perceived this reading the Sunday newspapers coming back from the Paris NATO meeting. They included some of the best things in Britain that were ever published about the nuclear problem. Their tone was: "Let's not kid ourselves. We don't have a national capability; and we are not going to have it." I recently talked to Michael Cary who was acting Secretary to the Cabinet at the time. He said the Cabinet members who stayed in London were really surprised that old Harold had pulled it off; and some were not all that pleased.

Neustadt: Harold was surprised.

Rostow: It was a tragic victory in my view. I really do not believe that Harold Macmillan would have fallen on his sword if we told him: "To hell with the Polaris bilateral. We are not going to let you kill yourself and your relationship with the Continent."

Neustadt: I don't believe it either.

Rostow: There was no thoroughgoing analysis of the British political situation available to him.

A shadow

A shadow of it was suggested in my memo. I urged him to check it out at Nassau, if he couldn't force the British in the right direction. But once Macmillan took his dramatic stance there wasn't the solid conviction on the US side to face him down. The President didn't really put our alternative proposals to the test. He did make available our cables from Europe. He said, in effect: 'We think you are wrecking your position on the Continent. We don't think you should go for the bilateral Polaris deal.' Then Harold made his big play. And we didn't test him. There wasn't time. And then we went into the compromise MLF, plus the bilateral. But to come back to your question, I can't give you an answer.

Neustadt: It is the domestic establishment I hadn't been aware of, which wouldn't have perceived the British establishment's real feelings anyhow. The other thing in this connection is that I am strongly inclined to believe that he never, right up to the end, was sold on MLF. I am sure he went through phases on it.

Rostow: He went through phases on it. I had a lot of talk with him about it. He kept coming back to ask my view - a sign not that he necessarily agreed, but that he was turning it over in his mind. There is a memorandum I did after a trip to Europe in October 1963, which explained what the MLF looked like in Europe and ends up saying: it's important, but it won't cure the common cold. He liked it. But he went back and forth on the MLF.

Neustadt: Now let me check out a point. My feeling about his going back and forth was that if this was the way that history could go he would be glad to be aboard it. He didn't want to be on a horse that wasn't going to be in the race.

Rostow: That's right. And he could put it over.

Neustadt: Right. And every time it looked as though he could he was glad to climb aboard, but he

always

always had his foot in the stirrups ready to jump off. His fundamental unease was "I don't want to be licked."

Rostow: Behind that was an honest question: "Why do the Germans want it? I am not giving them the finger on the trigger. I can't do that. Why should they be willing to put up money for this?" Gradually, I think, he began to perceive what real values there were in it for the Germans other than the right to fire strategic nuclear weapons. I think he began to develop a conviction that, maybe, the Germans want it for decent reasons: to fend off nuclear nationalism; to tie the US tighter to the defense of Germany; to bind up the Alliance. I think he began to warm to it as a way of outflanking de Gaulle. One piece of evidence for this was his idea for a mixed-manned demonstration ship - as nearly as I know, one of the only two policy ideas ever directly originated by a President of the US. (The other was Ike's putting in American mail boxes at the Brussels World's Fair.) Kennedy looked on the demonstration ship as a way of buying time for the MLF until the British and we had our elections. He once called Harry Rowen at the Pentagon and asked how it was getting on. Harry said: "We aren't doing much with it. It's just a State Department idea." The President said: "The hell it is. It is my idea and I want it to go." It was, so far as I know, a completely personal idea. I think he looked upon the period after the 1964 election as the time to come to a crunch on this. In any case, I know Kennedy regarded Nassau as a major mistake - perhaps second only to the Bay of Pigs. Out of our discussion of it came his request that you write your history of the Skybolt-Nassau crisis. By the way, did I ever tell you how it came about that, in the last year, I relied almost exclusively on contact with the President via Mrs. Lincoln?

Neustadt: No.

Rostow: I never explained it to Mac; but he could only do once what he did in the Cuba missile crisis. He didn't forward to the President the

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planning

planning papers. We had a good interdepartmental planning operation that presented a perspective each day on the crisis and set in motion short and longer-run planning. After the Cuba missile crisis, he asked me one day when I was over there: "What were you doing during the Cuba crisis?" I was damned sore and told him. In fact, I gather the papers were quite effective, and had some impact on the Vice President, Bobby, Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, and Dillon - as well as on the big bureaucracies. But the President was never given them. Mac decided that the things he was focusing on were happening from hour to hour; and that we should not confuse the President with these papers. And there may have been another reason. Mac and I had a big fight during the crisis about the Turkish bases. Mac was willing to trade them, I think. My view was colored by the judgment I had developed in the previous summer and presented at the War College in August 1962 - under the title "Khrushchev at Bay." The view was that Khrushchev was losing the post-Sputnik offensive; that he knew it; but that he was a man who would not go out with a whimper, but with a bang. And we had to expect the biggest act of risk-taking since the war, but if we saw it through things would be easier. We had a Secretary's planning meeting on that paper, of which there is a record. We discussed three things Khrushchev might do -- Berlin; Cuba; and, maybe, a weapon in space -- to recapture an image of forward motion in the nuclear balance. That was all thrashed out in August-September of 1962 in the planning community. Our view of the Cuba missile crisis was, therefore, that Khrushchev was operating from a position of weakness, trying cheaply to get the brass ring and retrieve a waning situation. But there was no weight or vital commitment behind his wild thrust. Against this background it looked like a desperate but shallow gamble; and I didn't think we had to give away anything in order to get the missiles out. Towards the end of the second week of the crisis - say, about October 25th or 26th - Mac and I had the toughest fight we ever had over the Turkish missiles. Whether it was this difference

or

or something new (which our planning papers incorporated) or, simply, a judgment that the President's time should not be encumbered with the planning papers, I do not know. Mac was present when the President asked me what I had been planning; and he promptly took responsibility for holding the papers. I don't think the President was pleased. He asked for the file and I sent them over. And, as I say, I never again relied wholly on that channel to get things to the President. The President knew this.

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Neustadt: Let's come back to the Turkish bases because historically - given a lot of views in the Pentagon which were given in the historical record - it is important to all of us for a few minutes. The President had earlier on ordered that the Jupiters be taken out of there - apparently out of a perception that they could complicate his life - on this miscalculation business. It was something else to have to think about.

Rostow: That, plus the pressure from the Hill. There was the survey of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee. It was properly anxious about the looseness of control around those bases which, by 1962, contained obsolescent weapons. The President ordered the Pentagon to get the Thors and Jupiters out of Britain, Italy, and Turkey. We moved with the British; but neither the Pentagon nor the State Department had gotten on with the diplomacy of getting them out of Turkey and Italy. It was a combination of inertia in the face of an awkward task and one of those occasions when the bureaucracy thought it was wiser than the President. And when he found himself in the missile crisis he feared the Russians would attack those bases and he would have to respond on an issue where he could not act with great conviction, given the history of the affair. He had a sense of conscience about this. He really wanted to get them out. But when the crunch came, at the end of the week, he firmly excluded using the Turkish bases for bargaining. And he was right; because, whatever the history, the use of our allies' weapons as bargaining counters -

to reduce

to reduce the weight on us during a crisis - would have terribly damaged the Alliance. I worked hard to help mobilize this view. Mac and I debated it once in his office. He said: "Why don't you stop trying to be the President of the United States and do staff work." I said: "I will do staff work; but until I am told to the contrary, I am going to put my views to the President. And my view is that our bargaining position in this crisis is such that we do not have to sell out the Turkish bases or take any other costs in the Alliance. That is my view; and that is what I am going to say." Mac's reference to staff work was, incidentally, to a request from the White House for a diplomatic scenario to effect the withdrawal of the Turkish missiles. The paper was done; and it was done on time. It should be understood that Mac was truly worried. He felt this was the biggest crisis since the war - one of the greatest crises in history; that we were in bad trouble and had to pay a price to avoid nuclear war. I simply did not believe we were in that bad trouble. It all went back to judgment about Khrushchev's basic position and posture made in the summer - whether he was thrusting forward with determination or seeing whether he could cheaply retrieve a waning position. It was an issue worth debating. Finally we won, in the sense that the President did insist that the missiles be gotten out - but he cleanly separated the issue from the missile crisis.

Neustadt: If the crisis had lasted another week - he was making his insistence immediate as I understand - by the Saturday.

Rostow: By Saturday, however, we were within hours of going in and taking out the missiles from the air.

Neustadt: That's right.

Rostow: If they attacked the Turkish bases I don't know what we would have done; but we would have already dismantled the Cuba missiles with air power. It was dangerous at the end of the week. Khrushchev held out to see if he could still bargain for something.

It

It produced the third crisis of the week. The first centered on the ship-turnaround; the second, on stopping construction; and the third, on dismantling the missiles. We got home almost free: almost because some Europeans still had the notion that we had some sort of implicit deal with the Russians. But, in fact, we did separate the tracks. And we substituted more nuclear power in the Mediterranean than we removed. But the President said, in effect: "God damn it, never again, never again; I won't be pinned down by these dangerous, obsolescent bases."

Neustadt: I think his concern was, if they clobber these, I have to do something. It reduces my freedom of action.

Rostow: That is right. But what really reduced our freedom of action was not the Turkish bases - it was that we lead an Alliance. And my guess is that his anger arose from the fact that his order had not been executed. In a difficult moment he had an unnecessary complication.

Neustadt: But what I can't separate, you see, in all of this is Mac's perception of the motivations and what his own what have been. I am not sure they were exactly identical.

Rostow: Mac was quite explicit. He felt that we might not be able to get the missiles out of Cuba without either a war or without bargaining explicitly in the way that Walter Lippman wanted. I spoke to Mac at length because Alex Johnson and Tyler urged me to do something. I also did a memo for Mr. Rusk. They understood well what the cost would be to the whole Alliance in the future if we bargained the Turkish missiles with the Russians. Now Mac, I am sure, reflected anxiety and annoyance on the part of the President about the Turkish missiles. But I never believed Kennedy would negotiate them with the Russians or fail to reply if they were attacked. What I was trying to get through to the President that week - and did get through to others - was the conviction,

staffed

staffed out and tested by prediction, that Khrushchev was trying a cheap, quick fix; but he wasn't going to risk the Soviet Union; and he would take his defeat if we stayed steady on course.

Neustadt: Now tell me something else on another area. We talked before about what you learned in Moscow - it was perfectly clear that the President hoped at the beginning for a test ban agreement. He hoped in 1961 for the beginning of a sequence like the one that began in the summer of 1963.

Rostow: That is exactly right.

Neustadt: Now he was quickly disabused, but what happened? He never gave up - because 1963 is really playing almost exactly the scenario that he had in mind.

Rostow: Yes. I went over this morning the aide memoire I gave to him and to Mr. Rusk in December 1960; and it does read much as 1963 began to work out. What happened in 1961 was that the President quickly perceived one of the facts that memo underlined - namely, that the Russians were not going to give us any let-up in the underdeveloped areas. And also, of course, they were still pressing Berlin against the background of the ultimatum of 1958. In the underdeveloped areas - Southeast Asia, Congo, Cuba, the President was on the defensive right from the beginning. I tried to explain in Moscow that a two-track policy for a democracy is almost impossible. You can't fight Communists in Southeast Asia and make serious or deep agreements in Europe or in arms control. But in 1961 the Russian position was that they would proceed to take us to the cleaners in the underdeveloped areas, while we made disarmament deals. In addition, they decided in 1961 - as things were going relatively well for them, and relatively badly for us - they decided to test our nerve and will on Berlin. Somewhere along in the early months of 1961 there was a definite decision to see if they could crack Kennedy. No doubt. I am personally confident that this had nothing to do with the Bay of Pigs. They were committed to test the method of nuclear blackmail on Berlin; and nothing we could have done would have

prevented

prevented that test. They had invested great resources, thought, and prestige on the notion that the nuclear capacity they had developed in the 1950's represented a shift in the balance of power we had to recognize in Berlin - and elsewhere. And a new US President wasn't the kind of fact which would change their dispositions - only the defeat of the policy. You must remember that the fellows I talked to in Moscow were high officials in the Foreign Office, scientists, etc.; but they were not Khrushchev. I cannot tell you what they were thinking about in 1960 beyond Kuznetsov's candor about the continued pressure we could expect in underdeveloped areas. He said, in effect: 'Do not expect us to give you anything but hell in the underdeveloped areas.' I tried to explain that they would then have to forget about a _detente_. But when they decided overtly to increase the pressure on Berlin and to crack Kennedy and the Alliance, in continuity with the post-Sputnik offensive, and put us to the full test, I simply don't know. I think it probable that Khrushchev understood better than the men I talked to that if he was going to exploit Laos, Viet Nam, the Congo, Cuba, this was no time to move seriously on disarmament; but it was the time to put the maximum pressure on us in Berlin. At the highest level my guess is that the Russians, at the time I was in Moscow, were in a hopeful, assertive phase of the cold war, not in a mood for _detente_. Historians will, I am sure, try to sort out whether our Bay of Pigs performance did or did not affect their calculations. My own feeling is: probably not significantly. We have plenty of evidence of a confident, assertive Communist policy all across the board before the Bay of Pigs. Then their anxieties began to build: Kennedy's firmness on the Mekong; the big military build-up after Vienna, which, I am sure, they understood as a serious move; the absolute quality of the President's commitment on Berlin; and so on. They began to get silted up, then, in the summer of 1961. Their forward momentum was slowed. But their policy dispositions made after Sputnik had to run their course.

Neustadt: Now what is interesting about this is that if this parallelism is this sharp it is almost the

only

only situation in which we are going to have a record in which Kennedy had a coherent set of notions in his mind about a range of plays he wanted to make. He has to drop it, and he waits until he gets the chance and then he - no - he acts upon it. And it is the action in 1963 and like the formulation in 1961 there is a certain coherence and consistency here of which there are no other examples because history didn't last long enough.

Rostow: No, what characterized Kennedy in foreign policy was that all across the board he knew where he wanted to go. He was lucid from the first day: in Atlantic policy; Aid policy; Latin America and the Alliance for Progress; how to get the Japanese out on the world scene as a partner of the West; how to deepen our contacts in Japanese society; and, also, of course, the test ban and other arms control moves. All of the major constructive ventures he launched - even though they didn't get very far down the track - were present in his mind and actually were all launched in one way or another in 1961 in the midst of all these crises - and he notched each of them forward as opportunity offered. Now with the Russians, no serious opportunity emerged until he defeated the nuclear blackmail strategy in Berlin and Cuba.

Neustadt: You misunderstand me. All I am saying is that this is the one where you have a chance of fruition or the beginning of that first step. What this suggests to me is that the notion in his mind of the Atlantic sort of thing that he would have pursued - that the pragmatism wasn't as scattered as it seemed. When the opportunity came he would have made a move.

Rostow: I am sure this is so. We talked earlier about the fact that Kennedy had a rather fully formed strategy in almost every dimension in 1961. But it is one thing to have a strategy - and even the notion of stages in it - but it is another to make it come to life. That is long, slow, uphill work. Kennedy understood this; and that is why he encouraged me to publish the thesis that the task of the 1960's was to move

toward

toward great goals, by small increments, over substantial periods of time. And that is the way it has been with everything in foreign policy and much of domestic policy. Arms control was delayed by Khrushchev's ambitions as of 1961; but Kennedy nevertheless set up ACDA. And serious staff work on arms control and disarmament went forward in 1961 and 1962.

Neustadt: His persistence is suggestive about some of these other things - like Europe. There is a relentlessness: you stick to your agenda.

Rostow: This is right. He was in an operating, tactical situation. All kinds of considerations converge to make it tough to move. They may even knock you off the track. But he kept his sense of direction and generally didn't get diverted. And he remembered constantly his view of crises: the Chinese characters mean both danger and opportunity. He used his crises well. Nassau was an exception - I think the biggest exception. His sense of strategic direction was extraordinarily steady. He tried to keep the options open and to maintain tactical flexibility. For example, he explored the French option, to see if anything could come of dealing with de Gaulle; but his basic stance had great continuity from beginning to end. By beginning I mean the positions he began to take towards the end of the 1950's when he became a candidate and his foreign and military policy views crystallized along a broad front.

Neustadt: This is a very different perspective than a lot of people are going to have in which it is all going to seem to be improvisation from day to day.

Rostow: Well the more I think about it the clearer it is that towards the end of the 1950's he came to be the repository for all of the combined staff work - military and civil - of that decade: the staff work in the universities; in RAND; in the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panels; in the government itself; all the things that Eisenhower wouldn't do at home and abroad. These were thought through and crystallized.

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They can be seen in *A Strategy for Peace*. Doing them as President was another matter. They took time. They moved slowly. But these were the directions in which he sought to move - and did move: whether you take military policy; aid policy; Latin America; Europe; Africa; the Indian Subcontinent; arms control - or the various dimensions of domestic policy.

This is the third interview.

Neustadt: This morning, Walt, suppose we begin with your efforts on the planning process. Beginning at the post-inaugural beginnings. I gather that more of an effort was made earlier than anybody was aware of. I think we ought to get at that.

Rostow: When Kennedy brought me to the White House, he conceived of me there as a planner. What we did was to sit down early in the first weeks and make up a list of planning tasks. The first list is dated February 17, 1961 and entitled "An Illustrative List of National Security Planning Problems which May Justify Urgent Attention." We excluded three major crisis areas (Laos, Congo, and Cuba); and we excluded special task forces that were working on U.S. foreign assistance programs; Latin America; and NATO. The planning headings were: problems of military force and policy in urgent situations - Berlin; German negotiations; South Viet Nam; West Irian. Then - foreseeable problems in which planning and action should begin now in order to exploit the presentl available but narrowing range of choice. Then a heading on which the President insisted - potential points of strength where purposeful action now might be effective in consolidating or even improving our position. Finally - areas relating to possible future negotiations with the USSR. After I talked with him at length we made assignments/around the town on February 24, 1961 - to the Secretaries of State, Defense and Central Intelligence. The planning business is not likely to be of much interest to historians; but the exercise underlines a characteristic of Kennedy's first year which might easily be forgotten. Although confronted with a set of urgent and dangerous crises he insured immediately that the longer-run aspects of

policy

policy and the more constructive possibilities were gripped; that contingencies other than those pressing in on him would be looked at. There was, beneath the surface, from beginning to end, much more steady planning - more strategic bone structure - to his thought and action than his personal and pragmatic style of operations suggested. But it couldn't be done effectively from the White House. Serious planning must be embedded deeply in the bureaucracies and well upward. The White House staff must be essentially fire-fighters, tied to today's business of the President. Some time before the December 1961 shuffle he told me he would like me to move over to State. And just before the move he called to make sure I was willing to do it. He said I didn't have to do it; he would be pleased to have me stay; but he had concluded that the place to make planning effective in the town was via State. The planning process had to be deeply embedded in the bureaucracy; by the time it gets up here to the White House we have a narrow range of choice. I said that I agreed and would go; but I wanted to be sure that Mr. Rusk really wanted me.

Neustadt: Because you had had experience which you have recounted.

Rostow: That is right. I then had a good and candid discussion with Mr. Rusk, with whom I have come to be a friend. Out of the problems on which we worked together, when I was on the White House staff, I saw a good deal of him. I believe he came to the view that I would be a viable bureaucrat in the State Department setting. And I concluded that he really wanted me; and so I came over.

Once at State we took steps to keep the lines to the President open through three channels: Bundy's shop; the sending of planning papers to the President for weekend reading; and direct personal communications. In some cases he would follow the evolution of a planning paper through several drafts; for example, the pre-explosion Chinese Communist nuclear paper, a paper on the Arab-Israeli arms race. Because of his voracious

reading

reading habits, he was able to follow the evolution of a major planning paper all the way through. In addition, I would send over memoranda to him directly. I would see him at intervals on specific problems. I would never ask to see him unless there was something quite serious to communicate. It would be fixed via Kenny O'Donnell or Mrs. Lincoln. I would go over and have anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour, depending on his time.

The underlying situation was one in which he had such an independent and firm grasp on the long-run bone structure of what he was trying to do that an awful lot of what would normally pass for planning material was unnecessary. It was only marginally that he needed to be informed about ideas that were emerging. From my point of view the arrangement worked tolerably well. With any other President than Kennedy I would probably advocate a more formal Presidential relationship to the planning process - but not the bureaucratic ritual dances of the Eisenhower period. My main point here is simply to record the early stages of Kennedy's personal involvement in the planning process - that is, the emergence of new policy ideas.

Neustadt: Let me check one point with you. The early identification of areas for planning - going back to February - the indications of the Department's - these were on a planning list did not automatically get you very much from the Department - you got something moving but - you were faced, if I remember correctly, when you got over here, with the need to develop the machinery that could build something underneath that kind of injunction.

Rostow: Some of them moved tolerably well. Others were pretty much paper exercises. Some - for example the reappraisal of our relations with Nasser, which was on the first planning list - took personal driving by the President and by myself under his direction - to move. And the President did create a new if fragile relation to Nasser, out of his letters to Nasser, and,

then,

then, an expansion in agricultural assistance. But I don't think the President was confident that, until I got over here, the planning business as a whole in the State Department had the drive to get what he wanted - a regular process of innovation built into the day-to-day working life of the bureaucracy.

Neustadt: As time went on when you were over here, and you were working to create that drive over here involving him in some of the drafts, but otherwise with an informality which you wouldn't advocate for anybody else. How often did you get an indication that his curiosities were focusing on the effort to create a planning process? Or did he just sort of put that out of his mind?

Rostow: He was interested in the issues - the process of bureaucracy he left up to others. When you came to him with a new proposition he would grab it if it interested him and if he saw a practical way of moving it a notch forward. He knew in fairly precise terms where he wanted to go. He had his private BNSP. But I don't think bureaucratic process interested him outside the range of his wheel. With respect to a formal BNSP he never took seriously the one element in it that I took seriously; that is the need in this monumental bureaucracy for authoritative Presidential guidance. I don't know whether he envisaged in operational terms the need for broad Presidential guidance. He was unique, in my experience, in communicating a sense of identification and participation to the bureaucracy. But he didn't understand the number of unpredictable, uncontrollable decisions that could be shaped through Presidential guidanc He counted on his impact on the Secretary of State, Secreta of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others whose faces and names he knew to make sure what was in his mind was translated into action. Now this has got to be tempered a little. One of the best speeches I ever heard him make was to members of the State Department. He evoked the grandeur of their job. He evoked their miseries in the face of public opinion and the Congress. He put the question to them: you must wonder whether our country will ever recognize its debt to you who wrestle on its

behalf

behalf with a dangerous, complex world. You must ask if we can ever get to a position where the State Department is recognized with sympathy by public opinion and in the Congress. Are we really doomed to be misunderstood? He said the answer is - we are doomed. We deal, on behalf of our country, with highly sophisticated dangers in a complex world which simply cannot be explained. Then he said you must remember that in the Congress you are dealing with men who take great risks. They must get themselves elected. In Congress they lay the continuity of their professional and family life on the line every two years. They cannot be expected to get far out in front of what the traffic will bear on election day. So we are doomed to deal with these problems, on behalf of the country, without ever really being understood. That is the situation. We have to accept it; but this is the most glorious time in the history of the State Department - the true golden age. It was a remarkable speech; but my point is he communicated to these folk and credibly related their jobs to his. He had the small unit commander's gift of establishing that kind of direct communication - direct, human, personal leadership.

Neustadt: I have a feeling though that if it came to who should feel pain, the bureaucrats because they couldn't get guidance, or he, because his options might be narrowed if he issued guidance, his instinct was always to come down on the side of let them suffer - without quite making the connection that in their suffering he also suffered.

Rostow: It is a curious thing - I think he had a sense of the transciency of his own Presidency. His job was to do what he could do in that time. Bureaucracy is a living, continuous part of American life. It has to look after itself.

Neustadt: That's important, Walt. I am glad you said that.

Rostow: I think it is true. On the other hand, he meant it - and acted on it - when he said he wanted a bureaucracy where men would feel that, in his time in

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the Presidency, it was right to stick your neck out and push hard your ideas. And, indeed, that got through. I had the privilege of seeing something of the bureaucracy in Eisenhower's time. It is a marvelous thing that this massive machine does sensitively reflect the personality and style of the President. But I was truly moved - having known the town some in the 1950's - to see the new vitality stirred by President Kennedy's presence in the White House among the same human beings. There was also an identification of the younger people of the bureaucracy with him I had never seen before. This was something new. I had seen bureaucracy a bit under Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower. For the first time the younger people felt this was their President. The older people, of course, were baffled and sometimes bedeviled by the way he operated: the unexpected and unpredictable intrusions of the White House; the firm, but sporadic grip the White House would take on issues they thought they were handling; etc. It had its costs. And I think President Kennedy probably knew it in a part of his mind; but it was one too many things to worry about.

Now I think that is about enough about planning. If anyone is interested in planning he can track it through papers - that is one of the characteristics of planning.

Neustadt: You had wanted to talk about the evolution of his own views on prices, wages, and productivity. This, I think, is terribly important to stop over because I entertain the view that Yale commencement speech reflected a deep feeling that developed before 1962 that there is a much more important strand or element in his thinking than the surface may show. I wish you would take these three related issues which really boil down to one sphere of policy and talk about what you know about the evolution of action and follow along that line.

Rostow: Obviously, not having been involved systematically and professionally in domestic affairs my knowledge in detail of how these things unfolded is trivial compared to that of Dillon, Heller, and Goldberg.

But

But I think I know something of the heart of the matter. It begins with the conversation I had with him just before he became President, when he came up to the last meeting of the Harvard overseers. I've described that breakfast conversation earlier.

Neustadt: Yes, I remember that. We were talking about it in the context of your job.

Rostow: I began the conversation in the Beacon Hill breakfast nook by saying - look before we get to the trivial matter of my job let me say the last serious thing I want to say before you are President. Your most fundamental problem in the 1960's is going to be to maintain the U.S. balance of payments position on the world scene. We can't continue to be a great power if things go on the way they are. A great power has to have a substantial current account surplus. Nor can we do at home what we plan to do. Full employment and rapid growth will be whipsawed by the balance of payments. The balance of payments problem demands work at three levels. One level is economizing in outlays abroad where you can. Second, you have got to hold wages and prices. Third, you have to stimulate the modernization of our capital stock which is ageing relative to Europe and Japan and bring research and development to bear on the old industries in our economy which still use up vast resources but are really very oldfashioned - notably transport and housing.

Now some of these ideas I had talked about with him before - and even raised them in the campaign. But we went over in this heightened setting the foundation for what he was going to try to do - abroad and at home - in the 1960's. I ended by saying this was the problem that destroyed the British empire; and we had better pay a lot of attention to it. Once in the White House this was the one range of domestic issues with which I continued to maintain a connection. In particular, I urged that we had to get some wage discipline - in effect, to persuade the unions to take out the improvement in the condition of the working force via higher levels of employment and to stay within the average level of increase in productivity in the economy in

their

their real wage increases. I knew just enough to say the heart of the negotiating problem was the relationship between Reuther and McDonald - and then the steel price. If both of them would accept it, each could live with it, because of their intense competition; but then the steel industry would have to deny itself the exploitation of the Reuther-McDonald deal. The President sent me over to talk with Arthur Goldberg very early in the Administration. I had lunch at Arthur Goldberg's office and described the problem of talking our way into this kind of social discipline. Arthur's view was that we had to try but he didn't believe it possible. He judged it beyond the capacity of our society to do it without legislation. It was asking too much of the men involved given the state of intra-labor and labor-industry relations. I said: you have spent your whole life in these matters - with these men. My observation is that we have lately become more of a kind of continental small town than is apparent. There really is emerging an inner club. The labor leaders are part of that club - and so, of course, are the industrial leaders. I think you can talk your way into this. But at least we have to try, because there are tremendous stakes. Arthur agreed that, whatever his skepticism, we had to try. I reported to the President. Somewhere along the line this policy was accepted; and we began. It turned out more successful than we thought; although we had to clobber Roger Blough along the way. He could have blown the wage guidelines with a steel price increase. It would have wrecked the precarious tripartite understanding between Kennedy, Reuther, and McDonald. To this day I don't fully understand why it worked. With his great knowledge Arthur Goldberg had put his finger at lunch on the critical technical weakness - the anarchy of the building and construction unions. What would happen to Reuther and McDonald if they continued making wage deals beyond the productivity guidelines? I've been so busy on other matters I've never discovered why this weakness didn't prevent success. On the other side of the balance of payments equation I pressed the Treasury - but they didn't take much pressing. Doug Dillon was on to it on his town - to begin to move towards a tax structure and guidelines that would make the modernization of our industrial capital stock attractive. I also helped press for a research and development assistant secretary

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in the Department of Commerce; and I pressed Jerry Weisner to interest himself in the civil side of the application of modern science - I played some role in each of these enterprises - how much I certainly can't say. And in each case there were others. What I am sure about is this: President Kennedy was so convinced that these deeper dimensions of the balance of payments problem bore on his two greatest issues - one was our world position; the other was the level of domestic employment and our rate of growth. The balance of payments deficit limited his ability to expand the economy and it limited his ability to operate abroad. He had to live constantly aware of this two-edged razor blade. Anything that would widen his options here, whether through holding prices and wages down; cutting expenditures abroad; getting our capital stock more modern so we could compete better - was not simply of interest in terms of economic policy - it went to the heart of his two great political problems as President. He saw these measures as a package. He saw them more vividly as a package, I think, than some people around town. As I think I said earlier, next to his nuclear responsibilities the balance of payments deficit was the most painful problem he faced - excepting, perhaps, the race problem in the last year. What I have to add to the available written record are, simply, two elements. First, such knowledge as I have of the early days of the President's thought and policy. Second, a retrospective judgment. In general, it is one of the more remarkable aspects of the Kennedy Administration that a great many things we did had a long tradition in the Democratic Party and a great deal of staff work done in universities and elsewhere. This was so in race policy; full employment; education, health; in military policy; in policy towards underdeveloped areas; even in NATO. One area in which he had to be intellectual as well as policy pathfinder was in balance of payments policy in the wide sense in which I've used it. Kennedy had to bring to this country things that were somewhat unexpected at the time and which may, in retrospect, turn out to be monumentally important - the notion of wage guidelines, for example, and the perception that public policy - balance of payments policy - must act on the age of our

capital

capital stock. We had always assumed it was more modern than anyone else's and would remain so by natural law. For example, the fact that we had to think consciously about getting R&D into sectors of the economy other than those where it was applied out of the nature of the process itself; plus military and space requirements; i.e., sectors other than chemicals, electronics, and the aero-space complex. I suspect this acceptance of balance of payments discipline is going to be one of the truly important innovations of the Kennedy period; and one of the least prepared innovations. It cut across the familiar left-right, liberal-conservative concepts of political life; and it cut across sectors of economic thought that economists tend to let go their separate ways.

Neustadt: Did he pick up ever your suggested comment about the British empire?

Rostow: I never remember --- Wait a minute. Once - I think when we were talking about de Gaulle - he didn't want to have de Gaulle pull our position apart the way the British position was pulled apart between the wars - something like that. He was conscious of the British decline and sensitive to possible analogies. In some of his speeches as a Senator in the 1950's - when he felt we were on the defensive in the missile gap - he went back to British policy in history and in the war years, when they were on the defensive. He was always more depressed and anxious about the balance of payments than I was. I knew it was a damn big problem; and we had to do a lot of things about it; but I think he really feared we might be in a secular decline like the British; whereas I had the feeling that if we did some tolerably sensible things we could have a situation where balance of payments surpluses and deficits would oscillate around a basic U.S. equilibrium; because - compared to others, and this is strictly a comparative game - we still command an awful lot of natural advantages.

Neustadt: Was there a personal element too, Walt? This thing was limiting him personally in a particularly sharp way.

Rostow:

Rostow: I think Mac and I were in there together one day. He came back to the old question: "Why is de Gaulle trying to screw us?" We would explain it; but he would shake his head. He understood that de Gaulle could only make himself big at the expense of the U.S. - lacking a capacity to make a dent on our common enemies except as member of the Western club. But it worried him; and I think the part of it which worried him most was the part that technically he had least reason to worry about - that is, the possibilities of serious French pressure on our balance of payments.

Neustadt: What you are suggesting is that from the very beginning he did see the connection - he saw the context.

Rostow: I am sure he saw all the elements of the balance of payments problem in context. The papers will show that I even raised the problem in the campaign, suggesting price and wage discipline; but Archie Cox, in a letter in the file, explains that labor wouldn't accept. Perhaps they wouldn't in a campaign. Then, I ran into the same sort of skepticism from Goldberg; but Goldberg was a good soldier. He said: "I'll try before we go for legislation." He pulled it off. As I suggested earlier what Goldberg and I were worried about was the construction trade. We agreed that construction would be the leading sector in U.S. growth in the 1960's: urban reconstruction; roads; schools; and all the rest. We feared these irresponsible, fragmented, undisciplined, Republican unions might get out of hand and wreck what we could do in steel and automobiles as the pacesetters. But we tried; and it is a much greater achievement as of 1964 than most people realize. The point here is that the package was perfectly clear in Kennedy's head. He knew how all the components linked. Bob McNamara would chip away at it in terms of net military expense; we would tie and save a bit on foreign aid; get wage discipline within the guidelines; get taxes which would make it profitable to improve our capital stock and carry forward the momentum started by the depreciation guidelines; get R&D built into the Department of Commerce to help spread it beyond chemicals, electronics, and aero-space; get Jerry Weisner working on things like suburban transport

and

and desalination. The President knew it was a single package. And he knew that on it hinged the ability of this society both to sustain its world position and to get moving towards full employment under balance of payments strain. He was clear as a bell on all of that.

Neustadt: Good. I am glad to have it. Now let's turn to your forage into guerrilla warfare. You have already recorded your interest and his but there was what might be called an institutional effort.

Rostow: One of the first planning tasks we set out on February 17 was the deterrence of guerrilla warfare. How could we organize our military and civil assets - including covert assets - to make guerrilla operations unattractive or to deal with them if they start? What doctrine should we develop? How should we organize the government for the task? We assigned the planning paper to Dick Bissell. And we set up a team under him. The staff work of that group was, of course, interrupted a little by the Bay of Pigs. But Dick recovered from that enough to finish the job. I encouraged him to go on and complete the planning paper. The last major thing I did before leaving the White House for State and the last major thing he did before leaving the CIA was to get the President to set up the Taylor group - the Counterinsurgency Committee - to institutionaliz the teamwork needed to cope with the task. I had real anxieties about one aspect of this; namely it might develop into an OCB empire. Starting with counter-insurgency, it might make itself a general interdepartmental planning operation. Further, given my basic view of the State Department mission of interdepartmental leadership I shared Alex Johnson's worry about the structure and location of the committee. But Alex and I agreed all rules must have exceptions and we agreed only with General Taylor's leadership and prestige could we get this moving fast.

Neustadt: This was the counterinsurgency group?

Rostow: Correct. We felt in this pioneering effort we needed the White House base and General Taylor's leadership plus his understanding of the civil dimensions

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of the problem. And so we went ahead and put the recommendation into Bissell's paper for the President. I tried hard to keep it Bissell's paper to the end; because this was his last major creative act in the Government. And he was a great soldier through these post-Bay of Pigs days as well as a beloved friend. General Taylor backed it. The State Department backed it. The President thought it right. And we got it going.

Then we set up the interdepartmental counter-insurgency course, which we now call the country team seminar, to get the concept built into the town pretty well. The rest of the story of Kennedy's guerrilla revolution is on paper. But institutionally it flowed from one of the items on the first planning list, formulated as early as early February.

Neustadt: If I am correct in things you have said in earlier tapes, Bob Kennedy's interest in this began with his Bay of Pigs inquest.

Rostow: I believe that is correct. Bob Kennedy got into it out of the Bay of Pigs' inquest and stayed with it. He was reinforced out of his trip to Indonesia, whenever that was. The point is that all of us agreed that the problem of insurgency required a high proportion of creative as well as some police, military, and counter-intelligence action. Bob just sat on this town until it took two dimensions of the problem seriously - one was the labor unions and the other, the students. He rode the town hard - and to good effect. All the manuals of instruction underlined the importance of these two groups in developing societies and the fact was that the Embassies, with few exceptions, tended to concentrate excessively on their proper but not total business of dealing with the diplomatic corps and government officials. The President immediately and wholeheartedly seized this and made it his personal business. There were only a handful of people - and the President was certainly among them - who understood not only the importance of the problem but the fact that it required a kind of day-to-day concert between the civil and the military

which

which had never before been believed. And he used his influence to get the town to work on the insurgency problem seriously, systematically.

Neustadt: There must have been a period of peak utility from the Taylor group. When would that have been? When did the thing begin to slide back?

Rostow: Well, it still rocks along as a useful piece of bureaucracy as of 1964. But I suppose in 1962 before General Taylor went over to the Pentagon it did its most creative work. In bureaucracy that tends to come at an early stage in the life of an institution. But I still regard it as a useful part of the bureaucracy. It forces men and institutions to focus on a range of questions and problems it would be easier to set aside until they reach crisis proportions. The level and quality of the men going to the meetings remains high. On balance it is a good show.

Neustadt: Well that is the tip-off. We mentioned a little bit ago the Bay of Pigs - we talked about it before. We talked somewhat before about the President's own internal shake-up. Can you tell me a little about your impression of restabilization? I wouldn't like to leave this - there was a recovery process that needs to be talked about.

Rostow: Yes. I did quote earlier his statement about Britain being 7% of the free world; and we, 70%. We couldn't afford a Suez. Did I put that in?

Neustadt: Yes you did.

Rostow: He struggled right through those miserable days with the obsession that he had to hold himself and the country stable as it absorbed the shock of flat failure on a sensitive issue. He had to take the rap himself. He had to hold his official family stable. After all they were shaken men who felt they had failed their President. Mr. Rusk has referred to this experience of having failed Kennedy as something he will never quite get over. Mac Bundy wrote a really marvelous mature paper as to why it happened. That paper is a

tribute

tribute to some of the great qualities of character in Mac.

Neustadt: And I doubt if it will be improved on later.

Rostow: It is a mature and graceful acceptance of responsibility, and an attempt, without self-pity, to understand the failure so that the machine could be put together in better shape. The President made it easy for everyone by taking so much on himself. But it was no good his being compassionate about everybody unless he could hold the show together as an operating administration and get it going again. The thing that gave him a breather was the ceasefire in Laos. That was important. It set a floor to the descent in our fortunes. The ceasefire in Laos meant that he got what he needed without doing something that I believe he would have done but which he passionately didn't want to do; that is, after the Bay of Pigs, to put troops in an area half way round the world where everyone he talked to felt sick about putting American troops. I don't believe it would have been nearly as bad as he thought; but that didn't make it any easier for him, or at least not much easier.

Neustadt: But there is also the domestic dimension - you won't put them into Cuba so you throw them away into the jungles.

Rostow: Precisely.

Neustadt: Wow.

Rostow: The first thing that gave him a lift, then, was that those Marines could get off the ships and go back to Okinawa. He could unleash Averell Harriman in Geneva and fuss around there. That was easier than Marines in the short run and bought time that gave him a breather. Then came the trip to Canada. But be clear - in the midst of all this he did some constructive and important things. For example, he signed off on the India-Pakistan consortium figures. We put up a lot of money in order to get more money out of the Germans,

British,

British, etc. Only those who knew him before 1961 knew how much that meant to him. He had begun that as a Senator. It pleased him to see that consortium come to life and, as President, to be able to put it into motion in a big, solid way. I haven't checked my dates; but I am quite sure that you will find that somewhere in the midst of the Bay of Pigs mop-up he had to sign off on the Consortium. And he had Sukarno over here in the worst of it. That wasn't much fun. He handled all that - and other visitors - with extraordinary grace. He knew they were asking: How could he get into such a mess? How will he take it? What can I get out of him? But guts, good manners, and a wry sense of humor saw him through. But recovery came first via the Laos ceasefire; second via the success of the Canadian trip which was a first exercise in going abroad. By mid-summer he had seen Khrushchev and - like Dr. Johnson's sight of the gallows - everybody's mind was marvelously clarified on Berlin. He went to work on Berlin and the military build-up; and then he took the shock of the wall tolerably well. As a matter of record that passage in Lyndon Johnson's speech evolving the phrases from the Declaration of Independence - which some of the pundits around town criticized - I drafted that. Did I describe how we did that speech for Lyndon?

Neustadt: No.

Rostow: I was going away on leave. I had taken no leave that year - in fact since 1959. We were over the Bay of Pigs. I agreed to go to Aspen. The last day before I left we were preparing for the Vice President's Berlin trip. Mac said: "I have to write a letter to Willy Brandt - you had better write a speech for Lyndon in Berlin." So I pulled out a yellow pad and almost literally, without raising my pencil, I wrote the whole thing out. A bit was added on the plane, but the script stuck as few others I've written.

We then went up to the Mansion and met with Lucius Clay, the Vice President, Mr. Rusk, the President. The President went over it line by line, and cleared it.

The

The reason he cleared the language about 'lives, fortunes, and sacred honor' - and the reason I put it in - was that we were conscious that what the Russians were counting on in the Berlin crisis was that the Allies would cave in - that none of them really believed in clinging to Berlin, that Berlin was not worth the risk of a nuclear war. Menshikov had made it bluntly clear to me that this is what Moscow was counting on. So the President had to convert this confrontation from being a European, or German or Berlin issue to being a U.S.-USSR issue - an issue of the kind he had posed at Vienna with Khrushchev when he said he - Kennedy - could take no shift in the balance of power. Our stance in that period had to be: 'Look, we don't care what people think about Germany or Berlin. This is a matter of power and prestige. This means the U.S.A. is not moving.' The President had to wrap the American flag around Berlin. That was the only way to break up Khrushchev's nuclear blackmail technique. No one else had the nuclear power credibly to face Moscow down. That is why an ultimate American commitment was needed. In any case that's why I drafted it. And I think that is why the President accepted it in the Vice President's speech. Only we could hold Berlin; and we could only hold it without war if Moscow was convinced we were ultimately committed. What I knew at the time was that no one in Europe, including Adenauer, had the slightest stomach for war to save Berlin.

<u>Neustadt</u>: One of the things that occurred during the fall of that year was a great deal of talk all over town of all sorts, types and sizes about various kinds of settlements which upset Dean Acheson terribly if you recall - it upset Joe Alsop - Joe once wrote a column on the President listening to too many people getting too much advice. My impression is that all that listening and stir-up was rather deliberate. But I would like your appreciation of it.

<u>Rostow</u>: You know we weren't in the nuclear confrontation business for kicks. Of course, we looked for diplomatic formulae; but I, at least, always felt the problem wasn't Berlin, it was Nikita's feeling that

all

all those Soviet bombs and all those hardened Bolshevik iron nerves and all those money-grubbing bourgeoisie made an equation on which he ought to be able to cash in. Nevertheless, we worked out in the Quadripartite Group formulae for guaranteed access against some changes in the situation short of the Soviet formula for making it a free city. We were willing to consider a great many things so long as they didn't involve the withdrawal of the U.S. flag from Berlin. We knew perfectly well it was only the U.S. flag and our nuclear capability and the President's stiff back that was holding Berlin. There was nothing else - excepting, of course, the sang-froid and vitality of the Berliners. There was a great deal of thoroughly legitimate fussing around to see what formulae might work within those rather sharp limitations. There was much talk in the alliance about these things. But whatever was said outside, we stuck to Secretary Rusk's formulation of our three vital interests - freedom of the people, access, and the presence of the U.S. forces. But the Russians weren't interested in institutionalizing this de facto stalemate. They left it as it was in 1961. Then they tried the air corridor game early in 1962. And when that didn't work they went away and tried the missiles in Cuba. And when that didn't work nuclear blackmail and the Berlin ultimatum of 1958 were finished - at least for a time - and the Berliners were the first to know. They knew it was all right from the night of the President's speech - October 22. They didn't have to wait for the ships to turn around. Nevertheless, while Khrushchev had set us a problem in rather brutal blackmail - rather than diplomacy - it was serious staff work we did on the various Berlin alternatives.

Neustadt: Did you see him when he first came back from Vienna? Do you have any recollections of his stance in that period?

Rostow: I don't remember. He may have gone off to rest his back. He may have gone off to Cape Cod. I don't recall seeing him promptly after he returned.

Neustadt: Right. Now I want to skip a whole bit

from

from 1961 into 1962 - the story of the interdependence speech.

Rostow: Oh, yes. This is for fun. I did a memo which I have here in my hand - to use immortal words: June 14, 1962 on the relation between domestic and foreign economic policy. I sent it over to the President. It has in it a paragraph 3 on page 5. It proposed a concerted effort to get the Europeans to accept enlarged responsibilities. It argued the occasion of this concerted effort is also the appropriate moment to press the Europeans hard in three directions designed to ease our immediate balance of payments problems: (a) with respect to aid to the underdeveloped areas; (b) to widen European capital markets to take some of the heat off the New York market; (c) to increase and systematize their foreign exchange contribution to compensate for U.S. military outlays undertaken in the common interest of the Atlantic alliance. These moves would fit naturally an enlarged nuclear role for Europe.

I saw the President, I believe, on the day after he came back from Mexico. The date was July 2. And we went over this memo and we talked about the shape of the problem. He said these are the things we want them to do. But what is our leverage to get them to move? The only leverage we really have is our nuclear knowledge and capability. In the 1950's they spent their time making money: we spent our time making bombs. A partnership, in the end, is going to involve an exchange between their money and our bombs. But, he said, how can we do this? And then he said something that he later said in almost the same way at a press conference. I would have no trouble transferring the special nuclear relationship from Britain to a Europe; but, he said, I am the President of the U.S.; but who is the President of Europe? I can't go into the business of selling or trading bombs to a lot of individual countries. I then said that if the partnership was to come about it would be by a process over a period of time. The partnership would gradually engage them in the nuclear business; simultaneously some nuclear responsibility, the passage of

time

time, and the use of their wealth could lead them to assume increased global responsibility; meanwhile, hopefully, they would move towards unity. In short, our job was to lead them in a process looking towards partnership rather than to strike a quick deal.

Now there are several things about this conversation which were interesting. One was how far down the line he had looked on the nuclear question. Everyone around town was speculating on what the President's views were on the nuclear issue: would he envisage any kind of nuclear aid to Europe and under what conditions. But he was quite lucid and far ahead of thought in the bureaucracy. He said it was perfectly viable in the Congress - if the British were to get out and the French were to get out - for me to make a special nuclear relationship with a Europe - if that unified Europe were really to share some of the economic, political, and military burdens around the world. He said that is a politically viable deal. But I can't do it without their carrying more of the burden; and I can't sell bombs to individual countries.

As we talked he obviously became engaged in this pattern of interconnections. Then he said: I have to give a speech on Wednesday. It's July 4. I don't want to talk about our Revolution much. Would you go back and draft up something and get it over to Ted Sorensen today along the lines we've been talking.

It was a morning to remember. He was cheerful about the Mexican trip. As we talked Caroline was going up and down the lawn on her pony. His engagements didn't seem tight. There was a leisurely quality to the talk - one of the best conversations I had with him as President. He was almost playful in sharpening up the links between bombs, widened European responsibility and European unity. And so I went back and got Henry Owen and we drafted something. Henry cleared it with EUR; and we got it over to Ted at the White House on Monday afternoon. I had to leave on Tuesday for Paris. On Wednesday he gave the speech. It is, perhaps, worth underlining what was

typically

typically Kennedy about this. There were no big NSC meetings. There was no formal staff work, no papers except mine as an oblique trigger. It might look as if this were something that he had thrown together in a hurry. In fact, he had been brooding about this - and all the hard subsidiary questions posed by the concept of interdependence and Atlantic Partnership. He had been asking: where is the leverage to get these things done. He articulated long and lucid lines of thought - about each critical element. That is why we didn't need much of the conventional planning process with Kennedy. He was always ahead of us. I am sure a lot of people were surprised by that speech. And they would have been even more surprised if they knew how much hard thought lay beneath the rhetoric. It accurately reflected the direction in which he wanted to go. He didn't need a lot of people to tell him or a committee meeting. There was some talk between us on that Monday; and, of course, his talk with many other people on other occasions about Europe and the Atlantic. But I was merely surfacing ideas he had formed; he just decided now is the time to say something - to hold up this issue - this process to be looked at - and for me to commit myself to it. It was a vision more lucid, looking longer down the track than anything we could have ever gotten cleared on an inter-departmental basis in this town.

Neustadt: Now with this vision, why, in the period between July and beginning of October - 14th of October, did nothing happen at all - as far as I know externally - by way of playing the leverages - let's see, we stayed with our stance on an MLF in which --

Rostow: The MLF was low key in those days. We were on a nice pre-Nassau long slow track with the MLF. We had the Smith-Lee mission. We were getting these concepts known and explored at working diplomatic and military levels. Our policy was grossly out of balance; but I couldn't do much about it. Monnet, Ball, Mac, EUR, the whole Atlantic Establishment took the view: first get the British into the Common Market; then political union; then the nuclear question. It is a

major

major regret of mine that Monnet came so late to understand the critical power and influence of the nuclear question. In the State Department I was alone in my dissidence. I argued as an economist that you just don't get, in the present world, the kind of big political results they were assuming through a tariff negotiation. Britain's political relation to Europe and the shape of Europe itself would not be determined by tariffs but by the solution to the nuclear question. I wrote several memoranda in this vein; and I also talked to some British friends along these lines - that if I were in the British government I would be moving simultaneously on a nuclear track as the Brussels negotiation proceeded. I couldn't see a Common Market settlement while the UK remained a national nuclear power, specially linked to the U.S. I remember Mac warning that I should not talk in this vein because it was not policy. And the general reaction among my friends was: down, Buster. But I wrote several memoranda on this distortion in the British approach to the Continent. But EUR and everyone else was against it. They said let's first do Brussels, then politics, then the nuclear business. Meanwhile we carry forward the MLF at very low pitch. But the answer to your question about the post-July 4, 1962, atmosphere is the obsession with the Monnet sequence, because Jean and Max Konstamm never took the nuclear issue seriously up to Nassau and the subsequent explosions.

Neustadt: I remember this - I talked to them that summer too.

Rostow: It was only after Nassau that they began to realize that the heart of the matter might not be tariff negotiations but in nuclear relations.

Neustadt: If they were worrying in the summer they didn't feel it was their pigeon and they didn't quite --

Rostow: That's right. They were watching anxiously. It was some time in that summer that Adenauer and de Gaulle met - didn't they?

Neustadt:

Neustadt: It was September.

Rostow: That's right. They went on the tour of the churches. When did de Gaulle make his tour of Germany?

Neustadt: No, I am sorry - you mean his tour of Germany in September - but that was earlier - first you have the Chartres meeting in June - then Adenauer came to Paris.

Rostow: I think you will find that about the time of the interdependence speech that Adenauer was touring France.

Neustadt: You are just probably right. Just about then.

Rostow: I am not sure. But, in any case, I saw Monnet in early July. He was, figuratively, examining the entrails of birds to figure out whether the two old men were cooking up to bring the British in or keep them out. It was hard to see - looked at coldly - that those two men, left to their own devices - would end up doing other than damage to British interests; but Monnet was tolerably hopeful in July. Again, the point is this was the time of the Brussels negotiation - our influence was dilute and highly marginal - the nuclear issue appeared to be in abeyance.

Neustadt: Well the thing that interests me historicall is we know now that Thorneycroft was trying to get the British to make an Anglo-French nuclear play with our assent as a trade for assured entry and the Cabinet wouldn't go along. We know that the President was in June asking those eight questions. We know that he himself, as you say, was way beyond everybody else in seeing that if he could get a politician called Europe or a political entity or a political establishment or something to deal with ....

Rostow: He said in a press conference once that if Europe were willing to make de Gaulle or Macmillan their executive agent he could deal with them.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: And this is before the time when Adenauer gets terribly anxious - before Der Spiegel - it is before Macmillan has seen the slip; and it is before de Gaulle has his mandate. There was a great moment missed I think.

Rostow: I think there was too. How you would play it though --

Neustadt: Ya - I don't know.

Rostow: Because the gut problem would remain the Germans. If the British and the French got together loosely in nuclear matters - a la Concorde - how were you going to give the Germans equality without, in effect giving them the same kind of equality? I wouldn't have minded this - I would have floated my bread on the waters, and taken the risks to get the British in; then you could work further towards an integrated solution. But people were thinking in terms of an impossible sequence rather than a conceivable deal.

Neustadt: I am sure your explanation is right. The President took a great initiative on July 4: the reason that it wasn't translated into anything specific is the whole town was in a particular stance.

Rostow: In one sense the speech had potential practical effect - by making European unity part of a larger vision which included the Atlantic Partnership it simultaneously gave Heath and Monnet support. But it didn't grip the problem of de Gaulle which had not defined itself in its post-French election (1962) virulent form. But there is another side to a speech of that kind. It has its own persistent life and importance, if, in fact, it enunciates a policy which fits abiding interests and trends - as I believe that speech did. It led directly to the Frankfurt speech of June 1963. Both have helped shape LBJ's policy. But it still remains open as to whether we should have done more to relate the nuclear and Brussels tracks after the speech. The parochial Rostow answer is: yes. But objectively, I must say there was every reason to let the Monnet-Heath sequence work its way out, notably since de Gaulle's real objectives did not become clear to us and perhaps not even clear

to himself

to himself - until after his re-election - and perhaps not until Kennedy defeated Khrushchev in October - making de Gaulle's inherently dangerous game seem somewhat less dangerous to him. I do not rule out that the old boy was capable of letting such elements of responsibility play a role despite his pathological egocentrism. Nevertheless, the one hope of saving Heath at Brussels in 1962, except a de Gaulle defeat, was to grip France in some way on the nuclear question.

Neustadt: That had been reviewed in that eight questions exercise before, and the decision had been to leave things alone. You don't reopen such a decision. Macmillan had decided to let things play their course.

Rostow: But I still think something was missing in the thought of that period.

Neustadt: There is, of course, the added matter that on July 4 people were still assuming that before bank holiday the Brussels negotiations would come to a crunch.

Rostow: I think that is right.

Neustadt: So that everybody would have told you to shut up. The timing was just off.

Rostow: By definition, a planner's thoughts are always off - he's dealing with forces current policy doesn't embrace. The art is, in the end, to get the timing right for the operational proposals arising from such inherently off-beat thought. We weren't even permitted to do any planning on paper for a breakdown of the Brussels negotiation.

Neustadt: I heard about that.

Rostow: I was forbidden to do anything on paper by George Ball. I did it anyway, without generating bureaucratic paper. My reflections came to this: if Brussels didn't work we'd have to reverse the old Monnet sequence, start with the nuclear affair, where, unlike Brussels, we would be participants. But it was, in the summer of 1962, a double or nothing problem, without the second element in play.

It

It might not have worked with that element but it certainly couldn't work without it.

Neustadt: Well it is easy to be wise after the event. You had a story you wanted to add and I think there is just room on this tape for the origins of the New Frontier. This is a classic phrase.

Rostow: The answer to that question is: I don't know for sure. The story is as follows: David Wise ran a story in the Herald Tribune early in 1961 saying that I was the originator of the phrase New Frontier. I had met him socially. He is related to Munia Postan, the Cambridge economic historian. I called him up and I said: "You are a pretty good reporter - why do you publish things as silly as that. For what it is worth I was responsible for the phrase 'let's get this country moving again;' but to my certain knowledge I had nothing to do with the phrase New Frontier." He said: "Don't be so damned sure. First, the President of the United States says that you are the originator of the phrase the New Frontier. Second, I saw a draft of a speech you wrote which had the phrase in it. Third, I tracked back the phrase to the following page in The Stages of Economic Growth." I said: "Well, that is interesting. It just showshow little I know. Sorry." I then gave him a somewhat pious but basically true lecture on the fact that only politicians who actually take the risk of using such phrases should be regarded as authors - that there was something wrong about making much of the staff work paternity. And I have never found the draft of the speech which he claims exists - a draft of the Inaugural - with the phrase New Frontier in it. I have found the passage in The Stages of Economic Growth which uses the phrase. I think David Wise discovered that Max Freedman also had put in a draft of the Inaugural with the phrase New Frontier. But what I am recording is that I do not know, in fact, how Kennedy got the phrase and decided to adopt it; nor do I have a clear and confident sense of paternity about it. I do believe - for some reason - the President connected me with it. I don't regard it as an important matter.

Neustadt: Now I want to turn to a last line of questioning and we are going to turn over the tape in

order

order to do so - so this is the last item on this side of the tape - turn over for the balance.

This is the second side of tape on the third interview with Walt Rostow by Richard Neustadt.

Walt, there are two kinds of things I would like to ask you to talk about. You can do it in either order. I would like to get your summation of impressions of this man's impact of personality on the town and then I would like to get you to talk a little bit about the qualities of the town in Kennedy's time. These were remarkably different than Truman's town or Eisenhower's - to say nothing of Roosevelt's - you had seen the others which is an advantage some of your colleagues haven't had. So it is personality and town both I am interested in and start with whatever is most suggestive to you and I'll ask you questions.

Rostow: Let me talk a little about his personality. For the record I should, perhaps, say that I had planned to get some things straightened out in my mind at this stage of the interview in a more formal way. But, in fact, all I have is a small pad with a couple of hasty notes I had made just before our first interview. To try to sum up a man's personality, when you have known him rather well, is a difficult and artificial thing.

Neustadt: Don't be shy.

Rostow: There are two central paradoxes in his personality. The first is the counterpoint between his love of life and sense that tragedy was possible. There was this voracious love of life; this recurrent return to the Greek concept that a man's duty was to express his qualities - by maximum striving - against the canons of excellence;all this tied up with a kind of love of people, especially people of first rate talent who were also straining out to express themselves - whether it was Belafonte or Schlesinger. You know, there was, behind a style of self-discipline and reticence, a great striving - an enjoyment of life in all dimensions, especially when people were doing their best, and not

settling

settling for mediocre standards or performance. Set against this was a sense of the possibility of failure and tragedy which never left him. Everything he had done had been done with thin margins: his survival in the war; survival from his operation; his election was vindication of this theme in his life - that you, John Kennedy, are awfully close to failure all the time. The Bay of Pigs was another reminder of it. The closeness of the Laos affair in 1961 which could have gone the other way. And the missile crisis itself. He accepted and lived with the fact that the margin between success and failure, life and death, was paper thin. There wasn't an ounce of cheap optimism in him. How lucky he felt - chastened and grateful, without hubris - when he came through close. Also he had seen his brother killed; he had seen others killed in the war. He had almost died. Tragedy was something real to him. And so there was a counterpoint at the center of him - highly controlled - between a voracious enjoyment of life and people set off against this sense of the possibility of failure and tragedy.

Then there is a second part of him. The attitude of people towards him. John Steinbeck interviewed me, for some project of Jackie's. He asked: Did Kennedy generate love around him? I replied that he generated what I would call a repressed but powerful affection. The whole atmosphere in the White House and in his entourage was one of unspoken but very powerful affection - going both ways - always under control. John McCone at the funeral looked over the dining room at the crowd of people assembled to go to the church and the cemetery; and he made a remark worth recording from a hard bitten, objective Republican. He said: "Never in my time in public life have I ever known a man who drew so much affection from those with whom he closely dealt."

What I would now add is that, in his way, he gave as much affection as he got. His relations with people were, of course, all in the style of his generation - of a junior officer of the Second World War. It was all amusing and dry and understated. But the whole damn relationship with him was filled with this unspoken, unbackslapping, unarticulated affection both ways. It

was

was not people enjoying company and affection for their own sake. It was the affection of men who were fond of one another, respectful of one another, but doing a job bigger than themselves, as in war. It was much the kind of spirit and feeling that grows in a first rate, small military unit that has been through a lot. That was the atmosphere.

So the first thing I would say about him was the counterpoint between his full pursuit of life combined with a continuing sense of the possibility of failure and tragedy - a consciousness of the thinness of the margins everywhere in his life - but on balance he was tilted to go forward. One consequence of this special balance was that humor was the normal coin of his discourse. Serious issues were talked about in a humorous self-deprecating way. Remember his warning after the Cuba missile crisis - don't gloat; in a week everyone will be back to normal petty standards and we won't look nine feet tall. It is no accident that, since Lincoln, Kennedy was the President who most combined again a sense of tragedy and the possibility of tragedy and a style which had wit and humor built into it. But there was another counterpoint in him: the idealism in his stance, the pressing way out for great goals, and his thorough hard-bitten professionalism as a politician. He did commit himself to strain to produce the grandest results he could as President. He set his goals as high as he could. But he was also awfully conscious of the other side of it; which was the long, difficult, grubby, painstaking, frustrating business it would be to bring the grand objectives to life. This paradox or duality relates to the way he used ideas. Kennedy was not an intellectual in the sense that he was interested in ideas for their own sake - a concept of the intellectual that can easily slide over to dilettantism. It is true, ideas interested him some - as he might be interested in good dancing, good athletic performance, or something else excellent. But that was at the periphery of his life. But ideas were of critical importance to him as tools - as a politician who wanted to be a great politician. He absorbed ideas as he absorbed a column of figures. They were working tools, not things that he would elaborate

or play

or play the changes on because it was fun to be interested in ideas or in the world of ideas. They were the essential tools of a serious working politician.

Neustadt: That I take it is why with some ideas his interest was intense and with others his hearing aid would go off.

Rostow: That is correct.

Neustadt: If he couldn't use them, the hell with them.

Rostow: That's right.

Neustadt: But he was certainly an intellectual - well that is a terribly funny word - his mind was capable of grasping any idea.

Rostow: As I say, he could grasp an idea as fast as he could deal with figures - that is to say, he could get an almost instant and permanent grasp on it. He absorbed ideas voraciously - and, as I say, permanently. One of the few signs of irritation that he would ever permit himself was when somebody would try to spell out an idea at great length. If it was new he would get it quickly. If it wasn't new he had long since packed it away as a thoroughly workable tool. And people plodding along trying to explain something which he already knew would irritate him. Being a well-bred young man, he wouldn't do anything about it but fuss with his tie or hair or something; but if you knew him well you knew that this was a terrible bore to have to listen to somebody spell out something he already knew or grasped right from the first sentence. And that is why it was so necessary for him to have fellows around the White House who could toss these things back and forth, and knew how much he knew. We could talk in shorthand. Otherwise, you would just bore him to death.

His most typical statement to one of us was: "All right, I've got the idea. But what do you want me to do about it today?" If there was nothing you wanted him to

do

do about it today, his attitude was: "Fine, pack it away; and come back to me when you want me to do something about it."

The third thing I would say about him is that it mustn't be forgotten that this was a romantic Irish-American politician - a very gifted politician. Somewhere in him he had the mysterious gift for communicating with masses of people; absorbing within himself the pressures and impulses that came from a whole political body of people; of communicating back; and of finding the right balances. A politician is a communicating instrument both ways. He receives and he sends communications, words, images, actions. Kennedy was awfully good at it. Those of us who only worked closely with him in the Executive Branch saw him only up to the point when he walked out to deal with a crowd. We went through the process of political communication mainly in contributing to the ideas and texture of a speech. And you could easily forget, because he was so good at our business of staff work, that this was also a fellow who had walked out and moved a million people (or whatever it was) in order to get himself elected in very tricky circumstances, because he was a great politician. And a romantic, because he had this extra transcendent dimension - the roots of which he never articulated. He would just do it. I mean his performance in that first debate with Nixon. It was the turning point in the campaign. Or the big Irish grin with which he responded to Nixon when he was going to clobber him on Quemoy-Matsu and soft on Communism. Remember that grin?

Neustadt: Yes. Incredulous.

Rostow: It just made the whole attack die; the quiet humility with which he accepted victory in the Cuba missile crisis and went on to find the moment for the American University speech; his performance during the Bay of Pigs recovery; Ich bin ein Berliner; or the low key grace with which he danced through Ireland. These were transcendent things for which he had a romantic projective quality combined with Hemingway's grace under pressure. I don't know how to talk or write about this

kind

kind of transcendent quality. But it was there; and it was a kind of extra dimension. People talk about his style. They talk about it as if it were independent of all this. I think his style was a quite accurate reflection of these deeper qualities which people sensed. I don't know how historians are going to sort it out; but the reaction to his death I saw months later in Andean villages or heard in talking with General Pakravan, head of the security services in Iran, or in talking to people from all over the world. They all say the same thing. They don't understand how individuals and families were so moved by a politician and his death. I suspect people simply realized that this was an extraordinary combination of qualities to be President of the United States at this time when the United States so matters. You can make it rational as Monnet did talking with me on the slow long trip to the cemetery - by saying that he reestablished the credibility of American strength and vitality after the Eisenhower years - and then showed in 1963 he would use that power compassionately, and for peace. These matters, Monnet said, touched the life of every family in France and the prospects for the children, given the power of the United States. That is why his death produced so deep and universal a reaction - to which de Gaulle had to respond.

Neustadt: That is much too rational for most of us.

Rostow: But there was a mixture of elements that - together - hit every household.

Neustadt: He was everybody's dreamboat.

Rostow: Yes. That is right, and ----

Neustadt: In that mixture, was, somehow, what everybody wanted.

Rostow: Whether you accept Monnet or not - and whether you introduce, as I would, the irreducible human, non-political aspects of the man and his loss - Monnet still has a point. Kennedy had become what everyone

wanted

wanted for the President of the United States - the leader of the world - to be - at this moment in history. That is why - quite aside from personal loss - there has remained in all of us the sense of a truly diminished world. Well, as for the town.

Neustadt: One more thing before you come to the town. Now one fascinating thing is his relation to Congress which you didn't talk about. Your cold professionalism comes in here. He never expected much - if he had expected more he might have gotten a little more.

Rostow: Yes.

Neustadt: He confronted them at once with a highly professional operation in which the Mafia was dealing with them coldly; on the other hand they knew perfectly well he was bored by them.

Rostow: The first thing that happened, you must remember, was not only that he was elected by a very thin margin but that simultaneously the Congress slid the other way - to the right. He had to start with a deal not to raise the budget except for security purposes. This was the setting - of increased conservatism - in which he had to launch his domestic and foreign crusades. This was the setting in which he fought his foreign aid battle. People forget that he got in 1961 a real lift on foreign aid - more than we had ever had before - it had been chipped away. He got what he needed on the military side. He was confident, I'm sure, that he would have gotten in 1964 both his tax bill (which nobody could have prevented given the forces then behind it); and his civil rights bill. I suspect - but don't know - that he looked to a larger majority in 1964 to give him the Congress he needed. But it's with the numbers that any serious talk about Congress must begin.

His dealings with Congress, looked at from a distance (because I was not personally involved), were partly derived from a sense of respect for their prerogatives - a sense of the President's limits in forcing the pace, derived, perhaps, from his own experience in the Congress. A judgment that he simply did not have

the leverage to wring their arms - and wouldn't until he was re-elected by a big majority in 1964. On the other hand he worked hard and personally on the Congress. The President's phone was used in a quite different way than in Eisenhower's time. And he got a lot out of the Congress that he wanted. Whether he could have gotten more - that will be for others to judge. I don't know enough about the operation itself. You really must check it out bill by bill.

Neustadt: I was not suggesting that he did badly with Congress. I think he did fairly well.

Rostow: I think Kennedy's performance with the Congress will be one of the issues that people will debate in the future. But I would have to have a lot more systematic knowledge - bill by bill - before I could make a judgment.

Neustadt: The only thing I wanted to check you on was my sense that apart from the tactics of performance that he was not a Congressional politician. He understood Congress. Congressional country was not his native country.

Rostow: I suppose that's right. But I'm not sure that is how it will be looked at in the future.

Neustadt: That is how he felt about it and they knew he felt that way about it.

Rostow: I guess that is correct. But you could come to quite different judgments about Kennedy and the Congress if you assume that he was sure he couldn't get much out of them except essentials until 1964; but he was pretty confident of winning big in 1964 and having the requisite base for leadership and action. The judgment will also look different if he calculated that the right and most effective long-run - that is, eight year - Presidential relation with the Congress is one of mutual respect - with limited arm-wringing and a lot of persistent persuasion, backed by a landslide entrance into a second term.

There is

There is another thing about this relation which begins to bring me to the town. Historically, the characteristics of the town in the Kennedy era was one of slight discomfort for the entrenched establishment. It is a tremendously institutionalized town which likes to operate on seniority. There are all sorts of fellows around here, you know, who are part of the establishment. They watch Presidents come and go. This is a company town; and you're supposed to march forward in regular step, in line astern. Now, in doing in, successively, Sam Rayburn and his candidate; Truman and his candidate; Mrs. Roosevelt and her candidate; Eisenhower and his candidate, Kennedy had committed a bit of patricide around here. Then he compounded the felony by bringing into the White House a whole lot of fellows of his generation without much seniority in the establishment. There were a lot of old Fair Dealers around who thought it was their turn - and understandably. We came to responsibility a bit prematurely by standards of this old traditional town. And you can see it slip back a notch when you get President Johnson, who represents a slightly older generation. The nine years or so between Kennedy and Johnson are important years in a seniority-conscious, rank-conscious town.

Neustadt: These are critical years.

Rostow: Kennedy's is the World War II gang. Johnson and his friends are rooted in the New Deal. We are respectful of that crew, but it's distinct in memory and attitude. Now the same thing is true in the Congress. From its point of view Kennedy's election was a slightly unnatural act. To have this highly seniority-conscious body with a President who had been relatively junior there - and when the fellows he sent up to talk to them were a little young - all that was an aberration in the natural state of things in the tribe. I remember once saying - and it's a sadness to recall - it was one of those late afternoons in his office when you had the impression there were more doors to the President's office than there are - when people kept coming in from all sides - Mrs. Lincoln's office, the corridor, or from Kenny O'Donnell's office - sometimes from the Rose Garden, too - people would come in, join the conversation, and go away - in any case I said this: "I think you're

fated to do in the whole older generation: you had Eisenhower, and his boy, Nixon; Mrs. Roosevelt, and her boy, Stevenson; Sam Rayburn and Johnson; Truman and Symington: and now you've got Khrushchev, de Gaulle and Mao to go. Well, Kennedy left the last two for Johnson. But this generational irregularity colored a lot of relationships - perhaps including that with Congress. In terms of the town, we had come to responsibility before our time.

Aside from that you have this change from abnormal passivity to abnormal activity. It couldn't have been much more dramatic, when Franklin Roosevelt took over after Hoover; but - except for that turnover, and, perhaps, McKinley to Teddy Roosevelt - you don't get switches that dramatic. I don't know what it was like from Woodrow Wilson to Harding - that must have been quite a turn too - although Wilson's illness made a transition.

Neustadt: It was still a sleepy town through Hoover.

Rostow: You can have quite a lot of fun with this sociological approach to Kennedy and the Congress - the generations and all that. But my hunch is that it is the numbers that count in the end. Kennedy got about as much as was gettable in his three years; he would have gotten the tax bill and Civil Rights in 1964; and he was counting on a big victory and a better Congress - by the numbers - in January 1965. Nevertheless in January 1961 - conservative Congress or no - this was a new cast of characters and a surge of activism - whereas the Eisenhower period had been tolerably passive, but with some interesting sub-surface movements in the last couple of years. I might say a word about those years. There were two characteristics with Dulles gone. You had less strength in the State Department, but I think, in justice to Herter and others - and as a clue to historians - it can also be said that a lot of things we picked up and moved on were started in those last two years: for example, the Alliance for Progress via the Bogota Agreement; the MLF; the Dillon Round. The liberal Republicans did begin to get some things moving. And Gates began mildly to fore-

shadow

shadow some of the things McNamara would really do.

Neustadt: Enthoven went in in 1959.

Rostow: You have got to remember - to return to an earlier theme - Kennedy in many ways was executor and repository of all the accumulated wisdom and reflection of this society in the 1950's about the things that were not being done that ought to be done. Look back to Stevenson's early campaigns and the directions in which he thrust; look at the Killian report; at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panels; at RAND; at the work we did up in CENIS at MIT - all of this was absorbed in a rather shapely way by Kennedy in the last two years, before he became President, on almost every front. The two missing but needed elements - least well articulated before the event - were the full balance of payments package and the guerrilla warfare problem. But you can take any major direction in which Kennedy thrust - excepting these two - and there was great depth behind it. And some of this thought - some of this response to real problems - began to come through in the last two years of the Eisenhower administration. But Kennedy was the repository for all this. And his men were not only young and vigorous. They incorporated pieces of the new operational doctrines and policies. Rusk, for example, is a relatively young man; and despite his quiet style he had been in at the center of a lot of this reflective thought in the 1950's - both at the Rockefeller Foundation and as chairman of one of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panels. And this was widely true. Walter Heller, Dave Bell, Mac - these were people who, contrary to a superficial impression, were not simply men from the universities. Almost without exception, we had done tours in the government before. But, more important, many of us were deeply and professionally involved in the 1950's in one way or another, in governmental problems, looking for solutions to problems Eisenhower didn't see or swept under the rug. Dave Bell was in Pakistan, for example, pioneering future patterns of foreign aid. So that Kennedy was able to collect a gang of young fellows who knew pretty well the directions in which they wanted to go and had had some practical experience of government. We all had a lot of frustration and difficulty to face and much to learn

in translating

in translating our ideas into action. But it was a crew with a common sense of direction, not excessively naive, bred in the protracted period when a lot of fellows had time to brood about where public policy should go, as opposed to where it was under Eisenhower. Moreover we had pretty good access to information. We were consultants to the Killian committee; or preparing papers for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and there were men in the administration who shared in that process - Doug Dillon; Herter; a fellow like Henry Owen; Jim Grant; Bob Komer and others at CIA. The way we put together the proposal for the DLF and for the India-Pakistan consortium wouldn't make sense in any other country but the U.S. It was a triangle between certain people in the Administration; certain people on the Hill; and certain outsiders. We were young; but we had a doctrine, we had a BNSP built into us out of the cumulative staff work of the whole society in both parties done in the 1950's. And the question was: could we make it stick? There were plenty of surprises. The convergence of immediate short-run crises in Southeast Asia, Cuba, Congo, and Berlin was a tough way to begin. The question was whether we could both start in on our grand long-run enterprises at home and abroad and also cope with these crises. As of 1964, I think that Kennedy managed to do it. If there is anything I would like to caution historians about it is to avoid being taken in by the notion Kennedy was simply a pragmatist. Of course he was that. All Presidents must be problem-solvers. But it will be important also to understand that he came in as the repository of a doctrine which stuck. If you knew the doctrine you could predict quite accurately where he would fetch up on a given problem. He wanted wide options; he wanted freedom to move tactically; but there were powerful directions built into him by the time he became President. You could see this, incidentally, after the de Gaulle Press Conference. (You have seen the documents that David Bruce did?)

Neustadt: Yes.

Rostow: Most people would have thought that given the way he appeared to wobble before on the French relation - and explored that avenue quietly - he would have said:

now

now is the time to change. After all, he had been misled about the British getting into the Common Market. But because he had a sense of the really long-term objectives he opted quickly for the approach in the Bruce report and then went on to the Frankfurt speech.

More generally, the fact that he did, in the midst of these pressing initial crises, start all the big enterprises right away is, I think, one of the fundamental things to be noted about Kennedy and his Administration. Simultaneously you had the crises and the beginnings of long, slow tracks of creative work.

Now to get at the town more narrowly. You had, of course, the Pentagon shook up by the appearance of this mild dynamo, McNamara, who just blandly assumed that he was in charge and made it stick. That was one shock the town had to live with. In the State Department there was uneasiness about all this vitality over in the White House. Occasionally, when they were brought into it, they were quite excited about it. Then there was the chronic nostalgia: wouldn't it be better if we had a Secretary of State who was powerful enough in relationship to the President to do what Acheson and Foster Dulles did in their time. The State Department suffered a mild but chronic vertigo throughout the Kennedy era, partly being excited by the drive of the President, but simultaneously being upset by the depth and detail of his personal involvement - his willingness to cut through and establish personal contact with the working levels of the Department. It was a new experience for them; and, as an institution, a disturbing experience.

Neustadt: What I have never fully understood is that while he did that, of course, on particular issues - when it wasn't his business he offered the Department - he and Mac did this very early - to take the institutional side of the ball and run with it.

Rostow: He offered the Department even more if they were willing to seize leadership and responsibility. They could have dominated the interdepartmental staff work as it came up to him.

Neustadt:

Neustadt: Yes. He was perfectly willing to have that.

Rostow: If the Department ran well and dealt with the problem.

Neustadt: Rusk never changed his style. He never appeared to understand the task and the opportunity the President offered him and the Department of State as an institution. I don't know whether this was temperament; or whether Rusk didn't perceive what he was being offered; or what.

Rostow: I think Rusk perceived what he was being offered; but he had to make a judgment as to what he spent his time on. He starts with minimal claims on his time which are perhaps 30 to 40% on the Hill; 15% at international meetings; 30% over at the White House. You damn near get over 100% of overhead laid on the Secretary of State. If he had a different style of operation he could have had an Under Secretary who would have organized the State Department as the leader of the town. Before November I'm going to write down my recommendations and sit down and talk about it with him. It is a thoroughly possible thing for the State Department to lead this town. I know precisely what it takes in microcosm because, more or less, I have done it in the planning business. What you need is a frame of mind that doesn't instinctively exist in the Department. The Department is torn. On the one hand it can exploit its great asset, which is that, from day to day, it handles communications to and from Ambassadors. That means it can go a long way down a track without getting the Pentagon, the White House, the Department of Agriculture, the Treasury into its business. And interdepartmental leadership, to a man working hard in the State Department, means: 'I've got to complicate my life to square what I am doing with a lot of other people who don't know the score.' That is one side of it. The other side is, of course, that unless they are squared you can't handle the big problems. When a big problem comes along you haven't really got a foundation of understanding in the town - a working consensus. Then the issues bounce out of the bureaus up to the seventh

floor

floor, over to the White House, to the Pentagon, so that ---

Neustadt: You haven't given them a stake in playing with you.

Rostow: That's right. And you can't work ahead on a big problem; because now no big problem can be solved without the military; without AID; without CIA; without the White House. As between playing for leadership on this longer run basis, bearing the cross and burden of interdepartmental leadership - and trying to find ways to minimize them, playing it close to your chest in the short run - and even after seeing the ball bounce away from you when the issue gets big - most of the Department has chosen the latter course. I think that is the heart of it. I think Rusk should have forced things the other way. But he didn't. When you get organized as we did after the Taylor mission - with a Viet Nam task force set up under Cottrell we had the right structure. Cottrell is a good workmanlike Foreign Service Officer who understood military problems and dealt with the military with poise, without taking nonsense, etc. He had that thing rolling. It was a great mistake to do what the bureaus instinctively do; which was to break up these task forces because they take a piece of business out of the normal routine. Then we had to recreate it again under Sullivan when Viet Nam fell apart. But there are enough cases that we have operated over here where it works - where the State Department does exert leadership to prove it can manage the town; and it can manage the town in ways that hold up when the issue gets hot, so that leadership is never lost. I am sure that it is perfectly possible to make the State Department an effective leader in the town. But you need a Secretary of State who really believes that this is what he wants done and takes that part of his job seriously, who makes sure it happens at every level, who forces the choice between short run convenience and long run leadership. I don't know what you concluded about SKYBOLT; but I have the feeling that the fact that EUR played the whole nuclear problem too close to its chest on the political side and tried to avoid a confrontation in the town had heavy costs. I think Mac, looking back,

thinks

thinks it was skillful to have had these views kicking around and never to have had them out. I believe, in retrospect, it would have been much better to have had them out. They weren't all that fierce. I know Paul Nitze's frustration was that he just wanted to get the issue looked at. EUR regarded him as a monster to be kept out of the business. We would have been forced to ask more systematically what is the political stake in Britain; what is the political stake in France; what is the political stake in Germany. These matters are not too deep for tears. We were talking about them all the time inside the Department. And when the issue came up at Nassau the boys in the State Department lost.

I think we are ending here with a whimper rather than a bang; but are there any other questions you want to ask?

Neustadt: Just one more. One thing happened in this town during the Kennedy period - so far as I know it never really happened before in modern times - there were certain members who got the favor of the Department on their side or the favor of some of the Departments, and this gave the whole thing a very special flavor. Now does this rouse any comment from you?

Rostow: Well, Kennedy and the press. The basis for his relation to the press was the basis for his relation with everybody - which was great openness. He ran an open shop with the press as a candidate. And there is no doubt that, in a marginal victory, he could look back and say the support of the working press was important to me. But I had the feeling that as President he suffered from having lived too long in Washington. He was too long a Georgetown resident. He took the New York Times and the Washington Post too seriously. He was too much concerned with what Scotty Reston said, or Joe Alsop or Phil Graham. After all, in the country as a whole, awfully few people read this stuff. He also, of course, used to read in the White House The Chicago Tribune and the other regional papers. He absorbed them all. But I think the little world of pundits he had to win over - he took too seriously. I don't know

whether

whether I reported that Scotty Reston came up to MIT for lunch with me one day in 1959; and his question was: "I hear you are close to Kennedy. Do you really believe that man can be President of the United States?" It was a wholly new idea to Scotty Reston. I had lunch with Walter Lippmann at the Metropolitan Club on the same theme at about the same time. They were more senior in their part of the Washington establishment than he was in his - the Senate.

Neustadt: This goes back to your earlier observation.

Rostow: I think he overrated these fellows - not that they aren't all nice, clean-cut kids and doing worthy things in our society; but I always thought he took them too seriously.

There is another side of him in which I think he was wholly correct. He realized that he had come to the Presidency with a small margin. He realized - just as Lyndon Johnson did when he became President - that he had to establish a distinctive image of himself as President right away. And while we were busy with these crises and starting our constructive long-run enterprises of substance, he also launched a skillful press campaign. It was typical of him, because it was candid. He let everybody in to see how he was running the White House. He generated, in those early months, a picture of a fellow hard at work in a rather attractive way - and it stuck. It stuck because that's the way it really was. And he quickly became in the public mind a hardworking, vital President of the United States. His statistics of public support went quickly up to where Eisenhower's figures were; and they stayed there - right to the end - even despite the civil rights pressures.

I wasn't close enough to the White House day-to-day in 1962 and 1963; but I have the feeling that he was getting less anxious about the press.

Going back to those early days, I remember once Mac and I came in with serious business at the end of

the day;

the day; and there was a TV team taking pictures of his business as it unfolded. For a while the whole joint was jumping with TV cameras. He opened up the White House and showed how he did his job. It was a good show; and it played a part in his moving up and holding a 70% popular judgment that he was doing a good job.

What is your impression? Didn't you get the feeling that he got a little less jumpy about the press towards the end?

Neustadt: Yes, in these terms. I am not sure, I wasn't close enough to be sure that the Georgetown connections - so far as they were press connections - that those were so built in ---

Rostow: There is another dimension that may have borne on his attitude towards the press. You must remember he was a Democrat. He had lived through a number of campaigns in which he saw as a working fact that a Democratic politician on a national basis was working with 80% of the press against him. He had achieved a tour de force in 1960. On balance, he had the press with him. He even managed half to seduce Henry Luce and others who normally dig in hard against the Democratic candidate every four years. I remember in one of my letters during the campaign, I reported that my political scientist-pollster friends were amazed that Kennedy was doing better than 50-50 on the press. That was an asset for a fellow who had watched Stevenson, Truman, and Roosevelt would wish to preserve.

Neustadt: You are right. So he was thinking, like everyone else, of 1964.

Rostow: He wanted to hold it. He wanted to build on that 1960 advantage; so there was a rational basis for his concern with the press. But still I think he took the New York Times and Washington Post too seriously.

Neustadt: Well, thank you very much Walt. You are a patient man. That exhausts the questions I have got. You look as though you had had it.

Rostow:

<u>Rostow</u>: No, I'm fine.

<u>Neustadt</u>: This concludes this tape.