

**McGeorge Bundy, Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 1/12/1972**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** McGeorge Bundy

**Interviewer:** William W. Moss

**Date of Interview:** January 12, 1972

**Location of Interview:** New York, New York

**Length:** 19 pages

**Biographical Note**

Bundy, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (1961 - 1966); President, Ford Foundation (1966 - 1979); History Professor, New York University (1979 - 1989), discusses RFK's work in the John F. Kennedy Administration and problems switching over to the Lyndon B. Johnson Administration, among other issues.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

Copyright of these materials have passed to the United States Government upon the death of the interviewee. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

McGeorge Bundy, recorded interview by William W. Moss, January 12, 1972, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library.

Oral History Interview

Of

McGeorge Bundy

Although a legal agreement was not signed during the lifetime of McGeorge Bundy, upon his death, ownership of the recording and transcript of his interview for the Oral History Program passed to the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

The following terms and conditions apply:

1. The transcript is available for use by researchers.
2. The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- 3; Copyright to the interview transcript and tape is assigned to the United States Government.
4. Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request for a fee.
5. Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

## McGeorge Bundy – RFK #1

### Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) involvement in the Bay of Pigs
3	RFK's development over the course of the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Administration
5	RFK's role as JFK's brother
6	Misconceptions of RFK as Attorney General
7	Communications with Georgi Bolshakov and Anatoly Fedorovich Dobrynin
8	RFK's work immediately after JFK's assassination
9	Planning for the JFK Presidential Library and the JFK School of Government and Institute of Politics at Harvard
10	Issues of loyalty while switching to the Johnson Administration
12	Running for the Vice President candidacy
13	RFK's role in Latin American affairs in 1965
15	RFK's change in beliefs about international politics
17	Rebuilding Bedford-Stuyvesant
19	Bundy's final impressions on RFK

Oral History Interview

with

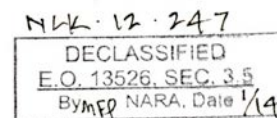
McGeorge Bundy

January 12, 1972  
New York, New York

By William W. Moss

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program  
of the Kennedy Library

- MOSS: Let me begin by asking if you can remember the first occasion on which you met Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] and the first occasion, perhaps, on which you had any substantive association with him.
- BUNDY: No, I can't pinpoint that. I can't even tell you whether I had met him before 1961. I'm sure that my first substantive business with him was not before then. I would guess that my first real business with him was in the context of meetings on matters like Laos and Cuba in the early part of '61.
- MOSS: Do you recall the way he was handling himself in those earlier meetings, particular say on the Bay of Pigs issue?
- BUNDY: My recollections are not precise by my impression would be that in the case of Bay of Pigs, his serious involvement before the operation was, as



far as I would know, bilateral—mainly in private conversations with his brother [John F. Kennedy]. I don't recall that he was an active element in the group discussions on it.

MOSS: This is something I get from other people. I get it from reading the minutes of say the Standing Group [National Security Council Standing Group], ExComm [Executive Community of the National Security Council], and whatnot. He really didn't have much of an influence in the group discussions; he spoke rarely. Is this your memory of the thing?

BUNDY: I would certainly not disagree with that. And what,

[ -1 - ]

of course, we do not have is any record of what I would guess to have been the quite continuous or quite frequent, although not necessarily systematic, process of communication between the brothers.

MOSS: There's talk of his role as being a close one and his appearing to be, say, the senior person present at the ExComm and Standing Group meetings and so on, without having to push it.

BUNDY: That would not be true in early '61.

MOSS: Not in early '61.

BUNDY: In the first place there were very few meetings in that period in the White House that were not chaired by the President. There were very few meetings in other departments on these subjects, to which Bob Kennedy would have gone in that early phase. The matter obviously changes in the special case of the Missile Crisis, which is very familiar. And there is also his role in the Special Group for Counterinsurgency.

MOSS: Right. When did that begin to involve him? Was he involved in it right from the beginning? Our records on that particular group, like on the 5412 group [Special Group (5412)] and so on, are very, very sketchy.

BUNDY: Are they? I can't remember whether he was the, whether it was with Max Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] as chairman and Bob simply an active member, or did Bob become chairman when Max went to the...

MOSS: Harriman [William Averell Harriman] became chairman.

BUNDY: Harriman became chairman. Bob was a very active member again on a more case-by-case and meeting-by-meeting than on a sustained basis. But he would come and when he was deeply engaged in a subject he would become, if not the dominant, certainly one of the dominant figures in the meeting.

MOSS: I had one report of a CI [Special Group for Counterinsurgency] meeting in which he was very, very impatient with what was going on.

BUNDY: That occasionally happened.

MOSS: The person who told it to me said that he really didn't understand the situation. This had to do specifically with a low-power radio transmitter that could penetrate jungle cover.

[-2-]

BUNDY: I don't remember that specific case.

MOSS: And he became incensed that the technology people couldn't, within a week, make substantive advances in the technology on the thing. This was cited as an example of his being overeager and not really understanding what was going on. How would you react to that?

BUNDY: Well, I can't remember that particular case or recite on it, but certainly there were cases where the intensity of his feeling and his eagerness to get the result by discussion in the meeting reproduced something of the image of a harassing interrogator that one associates perhaps a little bit, with the earlier period on the Hill [Capitol Hill]. There were such moments. I wouldn't put too much weight on them, but I don't think one can say they didn't happen.

MOSS: One of the things that we have noticed, particularly in his papers, is that he has a great quantity of materials that were routed to him from CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], from the Defense Department, from State [Department of State] and so on. Do you know anything of the routing of these papers to him? Was there anything formal, for instance through your shop or Bromley Smith [Bromley K. Smith] or somebody like that?

BUNDY: Well, if the Attorney General asked for any given kind of information, he would get it and that could happen either by his asking us to get it for him—which he sometimes did—or I'm sure that, possibly with Dulles [Allen W. Dulles], and certainly with McCone [John A. McCone], he would have felt quite free to ask directly for the information over there. And the same way with McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and the Defense Department. He might have been a shade more reticent with the Department of State.

MOSS: Well, for instance, did you and your staff feel, “Well, here is a thing that the Attorney General is interested in; we better let him see a copy of this?” Was it ever on your initiative rather than on his?

BUNDY: Well...I'm sure there were cases when he would do that, but we were kept awfully busy attending to the immediate needs of the President and I would think that a very high proportion of our effort was directed to the President. Not that we would have any difficulty about meeting a request from Bob Kennedy or indeed from a number of other people that we knew the President trusted.

MOSS: How did you note his development, if you will, over the

[ -3- ]

three years of the administration? Were there changes that were apparent to you or what?

BUNDY: Yes, there were changes but this would necessarily be quite impressionistic. There was an intense period of sort of watching over—or protective watching over—some of the more edgy issues in the immediate aftermath of the Bay of Pigs (correspondingly there was his close involvement in the Missile Crisis), and in the aftermath of that the prisoner-release enterprise, which he really managed.

MOSS: Yes.

BUNDY: Then there was his watching role, though as I say, not one of a sustained executive participation, in counterinsurgency. There was his interest in matters like the more liberal movements in Africa and occasional specific ventures like his visit to Southeast Asia. When was that? About the middle of '61?

MOSS: '61, I believe.

BUNDY: He wasn't so much engaged in defense matters, whether weapons, decisions, or other. He wasn't much concerned, at least I don't recall his having much concern with European matters—though, of course, we all got engaged in tough moments with Berlin. I don't recall him really being much engaged, oddly enough, in the '63 troubles over Vietnam. There were obviously occasional meetings at which he was present, but I don't remember him as having...

MOSS: He attended—I was counting it the other day—somewhere around eighteen out of the twenty-five special meetings on Vietnam. A smaller group in '63.

BUNDY: '63?



MOSS: Right. Seldom spoke though...

BUNDY: I wouldn't have thought there were that many meetings.

MOSS: He only spoke on five occasions.

BUNDY: Yes. Do you have minutes of those meetings?

MOSS: I have minutes at the office. What I do have here is a list of the meetings. These are not ExComm or Standing Group meetings, and those are simply the people who attended. My figures may be a little off on that, but I think it's something like eighteen out of the twenty-five that he attended,

[-4-]

with give or take five.

BUNDY: That just shows you how your memory can play you tricks; I wouldn't have thought we met that often on that subject in that year.

MOSS: And as I say, he spoke rarely. I went through and dug out what he had said, and in no case was it as particularly significant contribution. For example, places where he's say, "This doesn't make sense," or, "We've really got to make sure we'll proceed from reality" or something of this sort, that kind of thing.

BUNDY: Well, I would think that was accurate...

MOSS: "What kind of price are we willing to pay for a coup? What does it really mean?"

BUNDY: Yeah. I don't recall him as having the kind of close engagement in that problem that he clearly did have in the Missile Crisis, which is almost a unique event in its importance and also its framework in the administration. I would not guess that there were very intense separate meetings in which Bob Kennedy and the President would have been talking extensively about Southeast Asia. I think that most of the substance of policy was in fact hammered out in groups like this, with supplementary discussions in which the President would have been talking with Rusk [Dean Rusk] and McNamara to decide who specifically would do what next. These large meetings would be his most serious, substantive discussion meetings on Vietnam policy, I would guess.

MOSS: Yes. Back on the Missile Crisis thing for one moment. Robert Kennedy is credited with the remark of "We can't have a Pearl Harbor." Do you recall that remark?

BUNDY: I sure do.

MOSS: It is an accurate quote of what he said?

BUNDY: I think he said it much more than once because the argument took place at different levels and different times and this was the simple summary of his reason of why there ought not to be an air strike, a surprise air strike.

MOSS: All right. Were there times when you had one-on-one conversations with him? Do you recall the kinds of things?

[ -5 - ]

BUNDY: Yes, but not a great many. They would be more on the order of briefing information on particular needs that he would have for a trip, say, that he was going on or for a speech that he was going to make or a comment that he would make about some particular problem that he didn't quite want to engage the President in, but had we looked at thus and such a question or what could I tell him about the report that the Department of State was taking this or that position or whatever it might be. They would be mostly—what'll I say?—that he was extremely careful not to use his role as the President's brother in any but an informational and cooperative sense with the President's immediate staff.

MOSS: There was no peremptoriness about it.

BUNDY: We never felt, I never felt any of the peremptoriness that you occasionally encounter in accounts of meetings with the special group or somebody else.

MOSS: Because we have on a couple of occasions had people say that they never quite knew whether Robert Kennedy was speaking for himself or for his brother. Sometimes they would go on the wrong assumption and find they were wrong.

BUNDY: Well, I think when he had a mission and a sense that, you know, his brother was looking to him to help move a thing along, like the counterinsurgency group, that Bob would occasionally say things that he certainly hadn't been told by his brother to say. Take this particular case (which I don't have any judgment on) of a particular kind of electronic equipment. He didn't obviously have a mission from John F. Kennedy to be impatient with that; this was his reaction to what appeared to be a case of bureaucratic stalling. Bureaucratic stalling was something he was relatively prompt to see, perhaps sometimes overprompt.

MOSS: Well, let me go....Let me ask you, first of all, can you recall anything else from the administration about Robert Kennedy that you think is significant that perhaps hasn't been touched on in the literature? It's been done quite extensively. Is there anything that stands out? Sort of a general impression?

BUNDY: Well, I think the point I would make, that would develop a little bit from what I've just been saying, is that the image of the Attorney General as a man, that you sometimes get, of a man sort of intruding where not wanted and leaning over breathing down the necks of people in some way that was really hampering to them, is I think myself overdrawn.

[-6-]

There were people who felt that way when really that wasn't the situation.

Let me give you an example that I couldn't prove because I'm only going on the flavor I got from the parties involved. I think that when there was a shake-up at one stage in the State Department and William Orrick [William H. Orrick, Jr.] went in as, what, Deputy Under Secretary of Administration, I think some pretty senior people, possibly even the Secretary, felt that that was a kind of an infiltration from the Justice Department, when it really wasn't. I don't think Bill Orrick went in there as Bob Kennedy's agent or acted in any way as Bob Kennedy's agent or reported back in any inappropriate way to the Attorney General. I think he tried very hard to do an energetic job of administrative staff work, but I don't think that he had the necessary sort of confidence from his superiors in the Department. I think they erroneously perceived this as a brotherly power play when it was nothing of the sort.

MOSS: Well, let me make the image a little softer and put it in terms of another member of the administration looking on him as the alter ego of the President, a presumptive kind of thing.

BUNDY: Well, I think that that occurs in very specialized situations. I don't regard it as at all characteristic of, or an accurate description of, his role in international affairs or national security affairs. As I say, those of us who were in constant touch with the President, and whom he knew to be in constant touch with the President, were never in any doubt.

MOSS: Do you recall anything of Robert Kennedy's meetings with Georgi Bolshakov [Georgi Bolshikov]?

BUNDY: Yes. I don't think I ever took him very seriously, the Bolshakov meetings. His relationship with Dobrynin [Anatoly Fedorovich Dobrynin] was something else again. That was a quite serious instrument of personal communication.

MOSS: In what ways can you think of it...

BUNDY: Well, for example, it was critical, of course, on the last Saturday of the Missile Crisis. But there are other instances where the President makes sure that his message is getting through, earlier in the Cuban affair and on some other matters, he asked Bob to say it to Dobrynin. In those cases I would often have again a one-on-one relation with him because although he would report the matter obviously immediately on the telephone to his brother, he would very often

[-7-]

make sure that I got it straight so that the appropriate amount of it could get communicated to the Department of State.

MOSS: Yes. How would you then communicate this to State?

BUNDY: Well, either by talking to Thompson [Llewellyn E. Thompson, Jr.] or by memorandum, probably more often orally. He used me in those very special, but not very frequent occasions as a kind of auxiliary staff officer.

MOSS: Would State know that this had come from Robert Kennedy?

BUNDY: One or two people would.

MOSS: Would Rusk know?

BUNDY: Oh, yes. The relationship between Bob and the Secretary was not a close one, but there was no episode of the President using Bob Kennedy diplomatically that I know of that Rusk didn't know of.

MOSS: And fully approve of?

BUNDY: The President wouldn't always wait and say to Rusk, "Do you think I should send Bob?" Sometimes he would, but he wouldn't always. In other words it wasn't always a matter cleared by the Secretary of State. It would be a matter requested by the President and then the Secretary of State would be informed. I don't recall any case where Bob was asked to say anything that the Secretary wouldn't have wanted him to say, quite the reverse. The particular case of his important communication with Dobrynin at the end of the Missile Crisis was worked out in a meeting, which I do vividly remember, in which the principal adviser to the President was very much the Secretary of State.

MOSS: Could you describe that meeting?

BUNDY: Not any better than Bob does in the *Thirteen Days*.

MOSS: Let me move from the administration itself to the period immediately after the assassination which would have at least a popular picture of Robert Kennedy deep in grief for a period of time and not being very effective and not doing anything. Did you see anything of him in this time?

BUNDY: Well, it's a hard thing to describe, and I'm not sure I fully understand it either. He was not so deep in grief he was unable to act, because he acted with great resource and energy on matters that he felt were of top

[-8-]

priority, which were: first, of course, the funeral services; and second, the care of Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline B. Kennedy Onassis]; and third, the appropriate arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of the President's papers. This last is less important than the first two, but he had it right on his mind. But he was certainly not in the mood for the ready transaction of the Cabinet business of the Johnson Administration [Lyndon B. Johnson] for the next few weeks and it is hard to see how he could have been.

MOSS: Let me ask you about his ideas for the Presidents' papers and the library and so on. In a number of these meetings you and Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and Neustadt [Richard E. Neustadt] and some others...

BUNDY: Well, a lot of us were involved in that and there were a lot of discussions, often in larger groups with Mrs. Kennedy and sometimes in smaller groups. Probably my own most important involvement was as the initial link between Bob Kennedy and Nate Pusey [Nathan Marsh Pusey], because it was their rapid agreement that the way to do this was for the Kennedys to trust Harvard [Harvard University] and for Harvard to proceed. That was decisive in the way the thing finally came out. I'm not talking about the papers because from the first that was obviously a presidential archive. But whether there would be a separate organization or whether the Kennedy, the memorial part, the Kennedy institute and all, what later became the School of Government and the Institute of Politics [John F. Kennedy School of Government and Institute of Politics], whether that would be a separate thing or a Harvard thing was very much an open question. Most I think of President Kennedy's former advisers took the view—as I did myself initially—that a separate or intermediately organized institution would be better. And it was Bob really who decided that what he had better do was talk it out with Nate Pusey, and then he decided plunk, that it would go that way.

MOSS: You don't know anything of the rationale involved in it?

BUNDY: Oh, yes. I think it was really as simple as something he once said, that he wasn't quite sure what the President's great grandchildren would be like, but he had a reasonably good guess that Harvard would be not too different a hundred years from now. I mean it really was his view that you could expect more from institutional continuity than one could expect to get from family continuity.

MOSS: Yeah. So he was in a way entrusting Harvard with the...

BUNDY: An act of trust, yes, a belief that the institutional continuity was worth the loss of personal or family

[-9-]

control. I don't think he ever wavered on that.

MOSS: Did he ever regard the National Archives [National Archives and Records Administration] as the institution for...

BUNDY: I never heard him say anything plus or minus on the Archives. As far as I know he behaved...

MOSS: Okay. What else do you remember from this period of the way he was perhaps coming out of it? Did you see much of him, other than library business?

BUNDY: Yes, I saw him on a number of kinds of business. I was involved because he talked to me about things like his candidacy for the vice presidency. He took a trip to Indonesia which I was strongly in favor of and, I think, President Johnson really, as it turned out, wasn't much in favor of and felt that he had been sort of maneuvered into approving by staff people who weren't thinking about the Johnson interest.

MOSS: Was he right?

BUNDY: I don't think so. It just seemed to us all like a damned good idea from the point of view of foreign policy. And what we had not then learned was the degree to which—I'm sorry to say on both sides—these two remarkable men were capable of mistrusting each other.

MOSS: There were people who stayed and people who left rather quickly and there were some hard feelings and have been, I think, hanging on. I've talked to one or two people about this. I talked to Lee White [Lee C. White] about it a bit. He stayed on for a good while. What did you see of this?

BUNDY: Well, I heard more about it sort of indirectly than I saw of it face to face because I guess I was one of the people that some were critical of. In my own view, there was no other choice to stay on at least through the election of '64. After that one could have made a break if one hadn't wanted to go on. I actually did want to go on. I changed my mind later that year, but that had nothing to do with Bob Kennedy.

The real divergence was a little bit different. It was, I think, that many of the people who were very close to Bob Kennedy and whose sense of succession was from the fallen President to Bob Kennedy felt that it was wrong to stay in the

[-10-]

administration if you were going to give full allegiance to the new President and I saw no way to stay in the administration without doing that. And I think that I had an argument with Bob on exactly that topic at one point. He really felt that—how will I put it?—that if you had been, if you were fully in the Kennedy Administration you had a continuing allegiance that should, in certain circumstances, be more important to you than your allegiance to the existing President. And I couldn't feel that way.

MOSS: This is very Catholic in a way. [Laughter]

BUNDY: Obviously there were kinds of things in which one felt that way. For example I felt that I could never criticize John Kennedy to Lyndon Johnson. And there were other kinds of things that one could not undertake because you just didn't feel that way. It never occurred to me that it was an appropriate function for me to frustrate the good idea of the trip by the Attorney General to deal with this complicated character Sukarno [Achmed Sukarno] with whom he happened to have accumulated a reservoir of goodwill deriving from the West New Guinea business. That kind of choosing up sides I never did or wanted to do, but I got in trouble with both of them for not doing it.

MOSS: Yes, would you talk about that particular incident?

BUNDY: Well, one that caused pain, I think, was that after the President told Bob he was not going to be on the ticket, he asked me to suggest to him the advantages for all concerned of Bob's withdrawing from the race on his own steam. Now, that may have been a very naïve thing for me to think was a good idea, but I did think it was a good idea. I thought that, in fact, it would be more sensible for the Attorney General—wiser for the long pull—for him to commence the decision. This very frequently happens in politics when somebody tells you, "I'm not going to be able to appoint you. Why don't you withdraw your name?" It happens all the time. But it didn't strike him that way. It struck him as an outrageous suggestion that would involve him in blatant disloyalty to a lot of people and he was going to pin that rose on Lyndon Johnson. Well, I thought that was not right and still think so. What I thought was still more surprising was that he got personally angry over it because there really was a darn good case for doing that. That's my viewpoint.

MOSS: Yes. We have one source who says that Robert Kennedy had talked to you about the vice presidency previous to this July 29<sup>th</sup> episode with Johnson.

[-11-]

BUNDY: Oh, sure.

MOSS: Do you recall his talking about that? What was he thinking? What was his...

BUNDY: Well, he wanted to run, and I wanted him to. He was my preferred candidate, not that I had any real role in this matter. But I did talk a good deal with President Johnson about it through the winter, and a number of times urged the desirability on the general grounds of reconciliation and overall ticket strength and everything else of Bob Kennedy as the vice presidential candidate. Well, there was no sale there; as we now know very clearly, the President just wasn't going to do that. And then at a quite late stage in the game I did get into a difficulty which illustrates this point. I knew that President Johnson was going to tell the Attorney General he wasn't going to have him on the ticket, at a time when Bob Kennedy didn't know that. And I had a very difficult evening up here in New York with Bob Kennedy and Mrs. John Kennedy in which—what in effect I'm afraid they wanted me to do was tell them more than I was free to tell them about President Johnson's then views. I couldn't, you know, tip his hand because if that led to an immediate announcement of active candidacy I would be...

MOSS: Yes.

BUNDY: So there were things I knew about the family that I never told the President and things I knew about the President that I never told the family because it seemed to me that in that complicated situation that was what those obligations dictated. There were moments during the winter when both the Attorney General and Mrs. John Kennedy were saying things privately about the Johnson Administration which just would have served no useful purpose to peddle back to the President.

MOSS: Would it serve a useful purpose for the historian later on?

BUNDY: Well, very, very far on, in my view. What people say after three drinks in a time of great sorrow is peddled much too rapidly most of the time.

MOSS: I think that it is peddled much too rapidly too soon. I would hope that it could be somewhere for somebody fifty years from now, something like that.

BUNDY: Well, it doesn't strike me as a very high priority matter.



MOSS: Let me turn to the Latin American trip he took in 1965—and I get this from the vanden Heuvel-Gwartzman [William J. vanden Heuvel and Milton S. Gwartzman] book [*On His Own*]: that he went down to be briefed by the State Department and was annoyed with the way that the Alliance [Alliance for Progress] was being abused to protect U.S. interests, business interests primarily, in Latin America; that he then went to you and talked to you about it and you put him off saying that this was Tom Mann's [Thomas Clifton Mann] bailiwick and that if Robert Kennedy started making a stink about it it would just make things worse. Do you recall this?

BUNDY: I don't recall it, but it has a certain plausibility about it. By then it was awfully clear the way the President viewed Senator Kennedy, and it was equally clear that the President had put his principal confidence in Latin American affair in the hands of Tom Mann, who did have a pretty cold view of the Alliance as originally conceived and a very business oriented view of what the real American interest was in Latin America. And I don't know that I would have put Bob off so much as have said to him simply that, I can hear myself, I can imagine myself saying, "Look, granting that everything you say is right, where will it help to have you make a speech about it?" And I guess my answer would have been, no, and would be, no, today, which is a pity. It's like the current situation in the subcontinent. There's a great deal that's wrong about American policy toward Pakistan and India, but there's almost no way a Senator can make it better by making a speech about it. [Interruption] The only time I saw Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] during the Kennedy years in Washington was at a dinner given by the Pakistani Embassy.

MOSS: Was it? Oh, that's curious. Curiouser and curiouser. Oh, one other thing I ran across is that Bhutto [Zulfikar Ali Bhutto] was supposedly the architect of the snuggling up to the Chinese. And that makes it very interesting now.

BUNDY: Yeah. Well, Bhutto was not the favorite figure of the Kennedy Administration. I guess he was ranked with Krishna Menon [Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon] in the popularity content.

MOSS: Okay. Let's see. I had a couple more trips I wanted to ask you about, particularly the Polish trip. I think we have more than we want on that one really but I'd like to go...

BUNDY: All I really remember about that is Bob Kennedy dancing up and down on the roof of Jack Cabot's [John Moors Cabot] car. If you want to get comic relief into your story, you better go and interview Ambassador Cabot.

[-13-]

MOSS: I did, I did. He was very polite about the whole thing.

BUNDY: Oh, well, then, you didn't get what you had a right to hope for.

MOSS: And let's see. We hit the Indonesia trip. Oh, I guess, the trip to Japan. Let me ask you about the South Africa trip.

BUNDY: When was that?

MOSS: Well, that was in '66, I believe.

BUNDY: Well, I wasn't...

MOSS: You were gone by that time.

BUNDY: I was gone by then.

MOSS: Do you have any recollections of it that's...

BUNDY: No.

MOSS: For instance, did he come by and see you beforehand or anything of this sort?

BUNDY: Not on that one. Oh, we had quite a lot....He was deeply interested, of course, in Africa earlier on, and in particular he had a real personal relationship with—what was the fellow's name? Mondlane [Eduardo Mondlane]. There was some business there that is worth studying that I don't have that much recollection about. I would guess that Wayne Fredericks [Wayne J. Fredericks] would be very well informed on that.

MOSS: I hope to see him. I've got, I tried to get an appointment with him.

BUNDY: He and I were locked up in this meeting today.

MOSS: Okay. I have one quote that comes from the Jean Stein book *American Journey*, not a quote of yours, but a quote of a Dr. Leonard Duhl [Leonard J. Duhl], D-U-H-L.

BUNDY: Ah, yes. A psychiatrist, NIH [National Institutes of Health] man.

MOSS: He says, "At the point when the President died and Bobby went into his own private grief world, the intriguing thing to me is that he shifted course and,

instead of moving in the direction that the President was moving—the McNamara-Bundy approach—he went toward the Hackett-Boone-Walinsky-Edelman” [David L. Hackett, Richard W. Boone, Adam Walinsky, Peter B. Edelman] team. “Suddenly he was in touch, through these guys, with the poor and the black, the kids, and the music,” et cetera. How do you react to the type of the Bundy-McNamara view as compared to the other and so on, and does this hold up?

BUNDY: A good hard question, and I think probably characteristically phrased more on psychological than in political terms. I think that what happened to Bob Kennedy in those years is a very important and very difficult subject. I’m the last person to judge whether there is such a thing as a “McNamara-Bundy” view. I’ve never been able to sort of clearly in my mind what President Kennedy himself would have done with respect to Southeast Asia which is the only substantive issue on which Bob McNamara or I ever had an important difference with Bob Kennedy. It is true, I think, that he came, by ’68 certainly, to a view of that particular case and in an associated sense, to a view of international politics that was sharply different. It was not mine or President Kennedy’s and also very sharply different from his own as it had been four or five years ago. Part of that—and—I think this is true of many of us—was a legitimate modification deriving from a change in the world scene. Part of it was the enormous frustration and cost of the war. Part of it was living in the environment of New York politics. But I would want to be careful about how far that went because one should remember that right up to the end, if you were looking for people who were closet to Bob Kennedy operationally, you would still be talking about middle-aged figures like Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorenson] or O’Brien [Lawrence F. O’Brien].

MOSS: There’s much made of this, that they were being supplanted by the Walinsky-Edelman group and that Bob Kennedy was listening more and more to the younger crowd.

BUNDY: I was not nearly close enough to be a judge on that.

MOSS: Okay. There was one point at which—I suppose it’s the first open breach on the Vietnam question in 1966 when Robert Kennedy talks about the NLF [National Liberation Front] and the....

BUNDY: Well, that was an unfortunate affair, and if I had it to do over again I would do it differently. I daresay that if he had it to do over again he would do it differently; in fact he really backed away from the explicit business of coalition which wasn’t in his prepared statement. Every previous statement of his on that particular

[-15-]

difficult subject, we had talked about beforehand even after he left the government. This time we didn’t. Walinsky was, oddly enough, the man who came up and showed speeches to me

for clearance earlier times. This time Bob went out on his own. And by an unfortunate accident, I was on a farewell program—one of the quiz programs the next day—and I had to say something, and instead of saying that I didn't know, I said what I honestly thought, which was it just wouldn't work, coalition. And I quoted—this was what really bothered him—I quoted President Kennedy on that, having initially—and this I did cut out, this is something interesting—I had initially thought of quoting Bob Kennedy himself.

I mentioned that to Lyndon Johnson, President Johnson. He said, "Well this is a friendship that matters a great deal to you, and you never quote a man against himself in politics that you want to do business with later on." He said, "Don't do that," and if I had been thoughtful enough I would have understood that Bob Kennedy regarded his brother's opinion as his property and I would have been more careful.

MOSS: Yes.

BUNDY: But, you know, he had no right to do that really, but he did do it. He thought that way, that nobody was allowed to use President Kennedy for his arguments if they bothered any other Kennedy, and quite likely the President would be thinking that, too, wherever he was watching the scene—President Kennedy, I mean. So he got very angry about that and we had quite a brisk phone conversation about it: "If you're going to say things about me, why didn't you talk to me before?" And I said, "Well, Bob, if you were going to say things about the administration, why didn't you talk to us beforehand?" And that was a standoff which led to a coolness, and we never really talked that particular issue again. We talked a lot about Bedford-Stuyvesant [Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn] and about the library and about those kinds of things but not about foreign politics.

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

MOSS: You find him in '68 resisting the coalition idea?

BUNDY: Yes. You know, it wasn't something we needed to have a wrangle over.

MOSS: Yes. You did come somewhat, or it seems that you came somewhat closer together on the Vietnam thing in '68. Or at least Johnson, in his book talks about your

[-16-]

speed about disengagement and so on as bothering the allies in Saigon...

BUNDY: Well, there's no doubt that President Johnson took the dimmest possible view of my remarks at DePauw [DePauw University], that is true. Of course, by then Bob Kennedy was gone.

MOSS: Yes.

BUNDY: That's a separate story. It relates really to the Johnson Administration. But I reached the conclusion...

MOSS: It was the May 25<sup>th</sup> meeting at which you and Acheson [Dean G. Acheson] and the other...

BUNDY: March.

MOSS: March. I'm sorry.

BUNDY: But I reached the conclusion, sort of in the aftermath of the Tet [The Tet Offensive], that the bombing had outlived its usefulness. I'd had the view for more than a year that all forms of escalation were now not only not going to produce the results that were sought for them, but were counterproductive. We didn't use the word Vietnamization then, but the idea of trying to transfer the responsibility and the weight of the effort to the Vietnamese themselves—which after all goes clear back to 1956-54—was very strongly in my mind from 1967 onward. What I didn't think—and this is where I still have a disagreement with Averell Harriman and many others—was that there was a real compromise negotiation available. And the premise that there was one of the, I think, false premises of the opposition to the war that argued that we were doing too much, as I think we were, or that we shouldn't have gotten that far in in the first place, that we ought to cut our losses or limit our engagement or somehow begin to practice disengagement. But you could not argue, at least not persuasively, that there was a compromise peace settlement available. The more we've seen of the events since the bombing stopped, the more that proposition is validated. You don't get much argument now that there was a good chance of a negotiated compromise. People will throw that into the tail end of their editorial as if it were a real option, but that's ritualistic I think.

MOSS: You mentioned Bedford-Stuyvesant. Could you say something to that point about his interest in that and your connection with it?

BUNDY: It's really not a very complicated story, but it's a very remarkable achievement and was an excellent

[-17-]

small example—in relative terms, small—of his capacity to put together an enterprise that required effective and persuasive dealings with all kinds of people. He did a great job, I think. And of course, if you're interviewing, you'll probably find yourself talking to some of the different kinds of people, and I'll be very surprised if you don't hear them all saying the same thing.

MOSS: We get a very mixed reaction.

BUNDY: Really? In what way?

MOSS: Well, in some thinking that he was doing this as almost a toy, something to play with. This comes particularly from the black side, that he really didn't understand what was going on.

BUNDY: I don't believe you'd get that from the people directly involved like Frank Thomas [Franklin A. Thomas], and I don't think it's so. I think he really felt that it was terribly important to find a place and a set of people who could demonstrate something serious in what we now call community development corporations. And I think he has produced—without him we wouldn't have it—the best such enterprise. Our own view at the Foundation [Ford Foundation] at the moment is that these kinds of enterprises are absolutely critical to durable reversal of the cycle of degradation in the city, although they're not sufficient without kinds of resource allocation not in prospect in our current political climate. But they are, I think, indispensable, and I think he did a great service.

Now, you get another kind of criticism which is that the amount of the input, in terms of the management skill and the effort and labor and entrepreneurial energy is very, very high for the amount of concrete output, and I think there's something truth in that.

MOSS: Could you do it any other way?

BUNDY: Exactly the point. If things are in fact indispensable, if at some point there is going to be the will and decision to make the resource allocations that can help turn it around, then that becomes a very farsighted kind of venture capital, even if there is no payoff in the first ten years. And after all it's not Bob Kennedy's fault that the fiscal climate and expectations of the mid-sixties have been disappointed by the results of the early seventies, have not been carried through, let's put it that way. And I don't know, I would hazard a guess that blacks who say he didn't

[-18-]

understand what he was doing aren't themselves very close to what he was trying to do.

MOSS: Did you see much of him as a politician?

BUNDY: No, very little. I wasn't involved in that. I asked his advice on one or two things where we got involved, and I probably would have been well advised to ask his advice more on the one that I got most entangled with, which was school decentralization. But he gave us some good advice on particular enterprises. There's a little thing nearby here called United Nations Development Corporation which still hasn't fulfilled its promise but on which he helped us a little.

MOSS: Is there anything else you'd like to add? I think that about wraps up what I had.

BUNDY: Well, there's a great deal to be said about Bob, you know, that we haven't covered. He was really quite a wonderful and extraordinary human being and I think he was remarkable for that great capacity to grow. And in particular I think it's important to say, and I believe, that the things people disliked him for most from earlier years—occasional cases of personal arrogance or impatience, throwing his weight around in ways that were graceless or unfair—that there seems to me that there's much less of that as he grows older and that the man that emerges in '67 and '68 whether you'd agree or disagree with him on particular decisions, was very large and a growing human being. And I wouldn't myself think that it's wise to make the kind of linear comparison that Len Duhl's remarks suggest because I think the interesting thing about Kennedy is precisely that he was getting to be the kind of multi-dimensional person, the kind of master of himself that his brother had become. And I don't think you could have said that about Bob in '61 or '62 or even '63 and '64. But it seems to me that it was happening in a lot of ways in the last years of his life. That's, of course, what makes the killing more tragic, because it is of course also true in his older brother that the sense of self-mastery was very apparent in the last twelve months of his life—and more so as you look back.

MOSS: Fine. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

McGeorge Bundy Oral History Transcript – RFK #1  
Name List

**A**

Acheson, Dean G., 17

**B**

Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali, 13  
Bolshikov, Georgi, 7  
Boone, Richard W., 15

**C**

Cabot, John Moors, 13

**D**

Dobrynin, Anatoly Fedorovich, 7, 8  
Duhl, Leonard J., 14, 19  
Dulles, Allen W., 3

**E**

Edelman, Peter B., 15

**F**

Fredericks, J. Wayne, 14

**G**

Gwartzman, Milton S., 13

**H**

Hackett, David L., 15  
Harriman, William Averell, 2, 17

**J**

Johnson, Lyndon B., 9-13, 16, 17

**K**

Kennedy, John F., 1-3, 5- 11, 14-16, 19  
Kennedy, Robert F., 1-19  
Krishna Menon, Vengalil Krishnan, 13

**M**

Mann, Thomas Clifton. 13

McCone, John A., 3  
McNamara, Robert S., 3, 5, 15  
Mondlane, Eduardo, 14

**N**

Neustadt, Richard E., 9  
Nixon, Richard M., 13

**O**

O'Brien, Lawrence F., 15  
Onassis, Jacqueline B. Kennedy, 9, 12  
Orrick, William H., Jr., 7

**P**

Pusey, Nathan Marsh, 9

**R**

Rusk, Dean, 5, 7, 8

**S**

Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., 9  
Smith, Bromley K., 3  
Sorensen, Theodore C., 15  
Stein, Jean, 14  
Sukarno, Achmed, 11

**T**

Taylor, Maxwell D., 2  
Thomas, Franklin A., 18  
Thompson, Llewellyn E., Jr., 8

**V**

vanden Heuvel, William J., 13

**W**

Walinsky, Adam, 15, 16  
White, Lee C., 10