

Parker T. Hart Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 06/10/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Parker T. Hart
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Biographical Note

Hart was a member of the U.S. Foreign Service, 1938–1949; the U.S. Consul General in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1949–1951; Director of the Office of Near East Affairs, 1952–1955; Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, 1955–1958; the U.S. Consul General in Damascus, Syria, 1958; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 1958–1960; the U.S. Ambassador to North Yemen (1961–1962), Kuwait (1962–1963), Saudi Arabia (1961–1965), and Turkey (1965–1968); and the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 1968–1969. In this interview Hart discusses Ellsworth Bunker's mission in Saudi Arabia; meetings between Bunker and Prime Minister Faisal; Faisal's distrust of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Egyptian inaction in regards to the agreement reached with Bunker; difficulties with the U.S. Department of Defense over the agreement to train Saudi pilots and use American military equipment; major problems in the Middle East, 1957–1967; communications between John F. Kennedy [JFK] and Faisal; and Saudi reactions to JFK's death and to Lyndon B. Johnson becoming President, among other issues.

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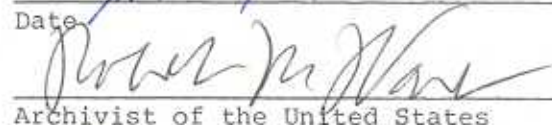
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of Parker T. Hart

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Third Oral History Interview

With

PARKER T. HART

June 10, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: First of all, have you read the account of the Yemen crisis that's in the Weintal [Edward Weintal] and Bartlett [Charles L. Bartlett] book *Facing the Brink*?

HART: Yes, I have.

O'BRIEN: How do you feel about that as an account? Is it an accurate account as you recall?

HART: Reasonably good. I don't have it in front of me, therefore I can't pick it paragraph by paragraph apart. But there was obviously access to somebody who was there by the writer. Who it was, I don't know because he didn't come to me. I don't even know the authors personally. Somebody sent me the book later.

The Bunker [Ellsworth Bunker] mission came at a juncture when bilateral diplomacy was no longer getting anywhere. I was working in Riyadh with Faisal [Faisal, King of Saudi Arabia] trying to persuade him that intervention in the Yemen crisis was not really in the interest of Saudi Arabia at that time. The point I was trying to make was that the old government of the Imamate had run itself out, and the people of the Yemen Republic should be given a chance; that the Yemenese in the end would take care of the Egyptians who were

interfering in just the way they took care of the Turks long before. It was best for Saudi Arabia not to get caught and squeezed there and have to spend enormous amounts of money on a struggle with the UAR [United Arab Republic] at a time when Saudi Arabia needed to conserve resources for development and reform—Faisal having taken over the executive power

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from the King [Saud, King of Saudi Arabia].

Faisal didn't see it that way, and he may have been right. And I may have been wrong, or our government may have been wrong, because, of course, I was speaking generally on policy instructions, but I was using my own technique and approach always. I was given great latitude by President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] in this whole matter. We had innumerable discussions and arguments over the undesirability of trying to support a royalist restoration when the royalists, particularly the Hamid al-Din family and the new Imam Al-Badr [Muhammad Al-Badr] had such a poor reputation in the country. Well, I won't go into all of that because there isn't time.

But in any event, John Badeau [John S. Badeau] in Cairo was not having much more success with Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser]. Nasser was impelled by the sting and the humiliation of the breakup of the union with Syria. And he had to find a scapegoat, and he found what he thought was a magnificent opportunity to recoup in the Yemen. He believed that the Saudi Arabian monarchy was falling apart anyway; all it needed was a good push, and he could make that right out of the Yemen on the basis of a new republic born on the very threshold of the Saudis.

O'BRIEN: Well, did President Kennedy send an envoy before Bunker, perhaps an oil company executive?

HART: Yes. Terry Duce [James Terry Duce] came out. Terry was not very well. He was getting along in years and he was not in very good health. But he was highly respected by the Saudis, having been a vice president of the Arabian-American Oil Company, an oil geologist, and long after he'd ceased to be active in the oil business at all, maintained a very high cultural interest in Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arab people, students, helping students over here, doing an awful lot. His interests were catholic; they spread all over everywhere. He constantly was traveling. He came to Saudi Arabia—one of innumerable trips—to just see what he could do to try to find a bridge with Faisal and with the Saudis that could be useful in bringing about a disengagement on the Saudi side if there were a disengagement on the Egyptian side. It was, however, not a multilateral diplomatic effort such as Ellsworth Bunker was given. I don't think he got very far.

O'BRIEN: What were the limits of his instructions?

HART: I don't know.

O'BRIEN: You don't.

HART: Terry Duce's?

O'BRIEN: Yes.

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HART: I think he was given very loose instructions, as I remember it. He came and saw me before he went to see anybody, and he reported to me afterwards what the results had been. He sent a telegram back through us. But he didn't really get too far. He was received as an old friend, very courteously. He had a good conversation, but again all he was doing was simply just reinforcing what I was saying. What we needed at that point was a man who could shuttle full powers between Cairo, Riyadh, New York, and Washington.

O'BRIEN: Well, at that point were either you or Mr. Good allowed to make any, or given instructions to make any, inquiries as to military aid or discuss the question of military aid?

HART: Mr. who?

O'BRIEN: You said his name was Good?

HART: No. Are you talking about Badeau?

O'BRIEN: No. The oil company representative.

HART: Oh, Terry Duce.

O'BRIEN: Duce. Duce.

HART: D-U-C-E.

O'BRIEN: D-U-C-E. Well, were...

HART: To make any statements about military aid?

O'BRIEN: Yes, or to talk in terms of military aid.

HART: Well, we, as I recall it, had been talking already with the Saudis for some time about bolstering their air defense capability. This had been going on for quite a period of time. I don't think Terry Duce brought any particularly new thoughts to that; at least I don't remember. He may have mentioned it in general terms, but we were right in the middle of it from the standpoint of mission-to-mission

terms. We had had meetings with the Ministry of Defense. We were discussing equipment that they required. They were anxious to get equipment. They had already been hit, you see, several times by the Egyptian air force. They wanted more equipment. They wanted anti-aircraft, Hawk missiles, fighter aircraft, radar and so forth. They even wanted somebody to help fly those planes. They would have liked to have

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had Americans, qualified pilots in civilian clothes, come over and help them fly the planes. This was a very delicate issue.

O'BRIEN: Was it ever seriously...

HART: No. It was not seriously entertained from our side and not pressed from their side either.

O'BRIEN: Well, what leads to the selection of Bunker?

HART: Well, that, of course, is a story that perhaps I couldn't give you the full background on except, of course, Bunker was already recognized in several administrations as being an excellent troubleshooter. He established his reputation long before as an ambassador to several countries, and then he'd been used as an intermediary in the Indonesian dispute. His reputation was well established. I had known him previously, slightly.

He came out at great personal sacrifice. His wife was dying of cancer. It was hopeless already. He just counted, I guess, on the fact that it was going to be somewhat slow, and he came. He was indefatigable. He was always courteous. He was well briefed, and he was very intelligent and perceptive in his approach. That particular incident, described in the book by Weinman, is it...

O'BRIEN: Weintal.

HART: ... Weintal, was a close miss on a misunderstanding that might have been rather serious to his efforts. But it occurred as just one aspect of a series of conversations that were going on. On each visit that he had with Faisal—I think he made three visits—he would have at least three major conversations: the first conversation being generally introductory to the subject, the second follow-up, and then the third conclusion before going back to Washington or going on to Cairo.

O'BRIEN: Well, you were in on a number of those meetings, weren't you, or were you in on all of them?

HART: Every meeting.

O'BRIEN: Every one of them.

HART: Every one of them that took place in Saudi Arabia.

O'BRIEN: Well, there's the first one that's in March.

HART: Yes. As I remember it, it was.

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O'BRIEN: What does Bunker discuss with Faisal at that point?

HART: Well, to break it down by what was discussed at each individual meeting would be impossible for me to remember now.

O'BRIEN: Oh, okay.

HART: Have to review the files. But, in general, he came out with rather broad instructions to press the importance of disengagement in return for American guarantees that the results would protect Saudi Arabia from enclosure by Egypt. These were couched, as I recall it, in rather broad language and not too specifically on the first meeting. The first meeting was really intended, more than anything else, to establish confidence. I'm sure the same must have been true in Egypt.

Meantime, Washington was working to try to line up U Thant to be helpful on the disengagement process. U Thant had been a reluctant dragon on this thing from the start, never taken very much interest in it for reasons which I think have very little to do with his mission as Secretary General. I think he didn't want to tangle with Nasser for some broad policy reasons. So he wasn't very much interested in Yemen, Saudi Arabia either. A great deal of diplomatic work had to be accomplished in getting U Thant lined up.

But as far as Saudi Arabia's concerned, Bunker immediately struck it off very well with Faisal. They respected each other. Their opening meeting, I'm sure, was just general talk, transmittal of a message by President Kennedy to Faisal by Bunker, a very cordial message expressing his concern and his regard at the same time. The second meeting, as I recall it, was somewhat more specific, but I'm afraid I can't give you a full breakdown of what he had to say. But in one of these meetings he did use the word condition.

O'BRIEN: This was in regard to the Arab...

HART: He was following instructions, written instructions. And Faisal flared over that word condition. Everything had gone very well up to that point, but this one struck Faisal all wrong. It was correctly interpreted by Isa Sabbagh [Isa K. Sabbagh] as "shart" which is the correct word. And this word just inflamed Faisal. He's always had an aversion to it, and I guess it's rather.... It has connotations, anyway, in the Arabic which differ from English to some extent. It nearly wrecked the thing, and when I saw how it was going, I used the gambit of saying, "Well, Your Majesty, I think this is a confusion over real meanings of words." And Umar Saqqaf [Sayyid Umar al-

Saqqaf], the permanent Deputy Foreign Minister, spoke up and reinforced my statement by saying, “Ishtibak al-Kalimat” a mixing up

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of words.”

Faisal looked rather surprised, and Isa Sabbagh looked even more surprised. And I realized what I had to do was make each a fall guy to some extent in the situation because, while I couldn't accuse him of mistranslating a word, I made the point that the word carried connotations in Arabic which it didn't carry in English. So we worked this expression around, and I think we came out with the expression “alal assas” or “ala usus,” which is “on the basis.” That is, we were prepared to do certain things on the basis of performance by Saudi Arabia in this and that respect—which is much less offensive, not offensive at all. We're acting on the understanding and on the basis that you—no, we're not acting on the condition. This is too legalistic, too sharp and jagged an edge for him to take. We had a little crisis as such at the time. But it was bridged over and I think that neither one of us wanted to make anything particularly out of it.

O'BRIEN: Well, did Faisal have any great enthusiasm for the agreement that Bunker once reached with, of course, Nasser and...

HART: No. He had no great enthusiasm for it. Of course, we provided in the agreement an inducement. The agreement, as you know, provided for UN observance, disengagement and withdrawal of Egyptians troops, stoppage of aid to the royalists—observance of both. And then the fighter squadron to bolster the air defense capability, teach and instruct. This was a part of the air defense program only. A fighter squadron to come over for a temporary period, give instruction to bolster the defense capability, which meant, in effect, it was to be a deterrent for further Egyptians intrusions in the air space of Saudi Arabia. And it was not so stated, but it was clearly understood. In fact, this provision was explained to Nasser as being a training program in the air defense capability of Saudi Arabia in which the United States had long had an interest. We trusted that there would be no air violations which we were constantly protesting, and they were ignoring our protests and this threat would stop them effectively.

But as far as the enthusiasm for the project is concerned, no, Faisal was not enthusiastic because Faisal didn't believe Nasser would carry out his part of the bargain in withdrawing troops in Yemen. And he was right. And here, to try to clinch the thing on the last evening, I stuck my neck way out, and I said, “I feel sure, Your Majesty, that we can get Nasser to perform on his part. Leave it to us.”

Well, this was something he constantly threw back at me in subsequent months. He said, “I only did it because you promised to get Nasser to perform on his part of the bargain, and he didn't.” Oh, he came back at this time and time again throughout the fall and the winter, up

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until January when the whole thing changed by Nasser's calling his meeting in Cairo of heads of state. But up until that time he was constantly hammering away on this point that he had only done this.... He said, "I had great reservations about Nasser's willingness to carry out any bargain of any kind but particularly this one, and, as you see, he did not withdraw his people. And I stopped my aid to the royalists. Now I cannot sit with my hands folded." He was great in dramatics. "I cannot sit with my hands clasped over this problem if Nasser continues to flout this solemn undertaking."

So every two months when, you know, the two sides had to pay for the United Nations observers by extending their contributions at the end of a two-month period for the next two months or for the two months just lapsed perhaps—no, I guess it was the next two months at this time. At the end of October Faisal was ready to quit. Nasser had not been withdrawing his troops meanwhile in any quantity at all. It wasn't even certain that he'd withdrawn, there was a rotation in and out. And it was very difficult to turn him around on that occasion.

But, in any event, the Bunker mission was a personal success for Bunker. It brought him and Faisal together to establish a relationship of confidence. And it bought time, and that was the most important thing to buy. But Faisal was not enthusiastic about it because he didn't believe Nasser would live up to it, and he was dead right.

O'BRIEN: You had some difficulty in diplomacy with the Department of Defense and the Air Force, I understand. Someone told me that.

HART: We did indeed, because Curtis LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] who was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was opposed to the whole thing. You know, he's a very black and white thinker, no shades of gray at all. As far as he's concerned, this is nonsense to use our aircraft this way, to train a handful of Saudi pilots. We're not going to go to war with Nasser. We're just going to have airplanes there as a deterrent. It didn't add up to him. He said, "If we want Nasser to do something, why don't we tell him to do it. I need those planes other places." He didn't like it. He had a motherly attitude toward his aircraft crews and planes. He didn't like to see them go out there on some kind of wild-goose chase.

He was overruled by the President, but he kept fighting. He kept the pressure up, and eventually he caused the entire unit to be withdrawn without previous agreement by the Saudi air force. I was given instructions to notify them. This was in January; they'd been there for six months. I knew that my ability to stall and to keep them there had run out because I had to do it almost month by month. Curtis LeMay didn't want them to have them there more than thirty days or at the most sixty. That was the condition under which he'd be willing to go along. We kept them there for six months.

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O'BRIEN: They operated with pretty stringent rules and guidelines.

HART: Well, the rules were carefully worked out with President Kennedy personally. And President Kennedy took a deep, direct interest in this

whole thing. I came home the summer after Operation “Hard Surface” had been safely installed and had started its mission; I came home on a brief home leave with my family, who preceded me and I followed. And I had consultations with the President.

One of the things that concerned me very much was the rules of engagement and the rules of the flight of these aircraft on their so-called training missions. They would be flying with American pilots for the most part in an area potentially dangerous, down toward the Yemen. Well, first the Department didn’t want them to fly any closer than a hundred miles to the Yemen border, and I pointed out that that wouldn’t establish our credibility because Qīzān was within forty miles, and they’d already bombed Qīzān, Najrān was right on the border. But realizing that the border snakes around in the desert there, I said, “Why don’t we say the distance of Qīzān, so that we can have an overflight of Qīzān. You need to overfly Qīzān from time to time.” And they agreed. So it was a forty-mile approach. Of course, the Egyptians were never informed of that.

I established, with the Department’s consent, an irregular pattern of flights every week so that twice a week at least—sometimes three times a week—they’d be down in the neighborhood of the Yemen. The other days they’d be flying in other parts of Arabia, down the north coast. So the Egyptians would know that they might encounter an F-100 on the northern coast of Saudi Arabia or down near the Yemen. They didn’t know where they were going to be; it was very irregular. We worked it out week by week. And they did, of course, they knew we were there. I think it did operate successfully. It gave Saudi Arabia a lot of time and from the time....

Well, long before the unit arrived, there were no further problems of defection in the Saudi air force. You remember, three pilots defected with their aircraft very early in the crisis. This was before the Bunker mission. They never did that anymore. But the Saudis never trusted their pilots very much. They never put them in combat. Even when their cities were bombed, they never put them over in the area, kept them in another part of the country. As a matter of fact, the Egyptians bombed Abha and hit a hospital killing twenty-one people on the very hour the Saudi air force was doing barrel rolls and maneuvers for exhibition purposes in Dhahran, and I happened to be there. It was just after that exhibition was over we heard about the bombing of Abha. They didn’t trust their pilots.

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The only people they trusted—the Saudis at that time—were the Mujahidin, the “White Army” under Prince Abdullah ibn Abdulazīz [Muhammad bin Abdulazīz Al Saud], half brother to Faisal. But they, of course, were mounted in trucks with small weapons, light weapons. They had them deployed. And they would have given the Egyptians a rough time. If the Egyptians had tried to come in, that Mujahidin would have just loved to fight them. They would have had a rough time. They had a bad enough time in Yemen. If they’d tried to invade Saudi Arabia, they would have made a big mistake, in my opinion, because they’d have had a lot of trouble.

O’BRIEN: Well, what’s your response, and what’s Faisal’s response when U Thant is talking in terms of a summit between Nasser and Faisal and Sallal [Abdullah al-Sallal]?

HART: Well, he would have none of it at any time. If Sallal and Nasser wanted to come see him, he would have probably said, "You can come if you wish."

But he was not going to go to see either one of them, nor was he going to go somewhere to meet with them. He didn't regard Abdullah Sallal as worth meeting with. Sallal to him was just a usurper, a man of no background and no lineage in the Yemen—not even tribal connections that were important—a military usurper, attempted murderer of his own chief. He wouldn't have sat in a room with Sallal willingly.

And Nasser, he had a personal feeling about. If there was going to be any improvement in relations there, it was up to Nasser. He'd broken relations with Nasser when Nasser had bombed his territory—winter, beginning of '63. President Kennedy, you remember, gave a kind of a reiterated guarantee to Faisal in January of '63, and in spite of that, the bombings still continued. And Cairo was thumbing its nose at the United States and doing what it liked, figuring it was going to go right ahead and overthrow that government. And Faisal estimated that was Nasser's point of view and just wasn't going to have anything to do with him.

As far as U Thant was concerned, he didn't think much of U Thant either because U Thant sent Ralph Bunche [Ralph J. Bunche] to Cairo, and he wouldn't send him to Riyadh. U Thant hadn't played that well at all.

Now Nasser, finally, was the one who got Faisal to go to Cairo simply by calling a conference against Israel—the heads of state in January '64. Faisal did go for that purpose, and then they had their bilateral meetings. The first one was to break the ice.

O'BRIEN: Well, as a person that's been involved in Middle East affairs for a number of years, I think the question that's going to be one that's going to be important to the people interested

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in the Middle East is: Why there really isn't any major problems in the Middle East, with the exception of the Yemen thing, let's say between 1957 and 1967? I'm thinking mainly in terms of Arab-Israeli relations.

HART: Well, there were major problems in the Middle East between '57 and '67.

O'BRIEN: Yes.

HART: You had the Lebanese civil war. You had the attempts to overthrow Jordan. You had the Iraqi revolution; you had complete reorientation of Iraq. You had Nasser's attempt to try to bring Iraq on board in his United Arab Republic and it failed—injurious to the Soviets as well as with Nasser, a fact that over the years was a great, great strain. Then you had Qasim [Abd al-Karim Qasim] turning around trying to find an outlet for his frustrations by claiming that Kuwait was his. Then you had the Arab League with the Saudis in the forefront sending a force into Kuwait to protect Kuwait. And you had lots of inter-Arab squabbling, fairly considerable—some of it. This

period was a period of great inter-Arab turbulence. Yemen was only one, but it was the most, perhaps one of the most dramatic and most serious because I think the casualties were immeasurably greater than in any of these other crises. The Lebanese insurrection did cause casualties, but I think the Yemen was far greater. The estimates were very hard to make, but some people made as high as two hundred thousand people in support of Yemen. (I do not share this estimate and would restrict it to a few thousand.) It went on from '62 until '67.

O'BRIEN: Well, is it the factor of Arab against Arab that simply results in no major conflicts with Israel in that period?

HART: Well, as far as Israel is concerned, at that particular juncture Israel was in the second plan of importance as far as Nasser was concerned. The first requirement, as far as he was concerned, was to promote Arab unity. Having failed with Syria—Syria having broken away—he was never reconciled to that breakage. He was going to try to get Syria's government changed if he could. But having failed also to get Iraq on board, he was determined not to lose the Yemen which had been a part of his union, you see.

Yemen had been a bond with the—what do they call it?—Union of Arab States [Arab Union] that was formed in 1958. That isn't the correct title of it. But Yemen came on board as a federated part of the union, not as an integral part such as Syria was. It was a federated part, Imam Ahmad [Ahmad bin Yahya Hamidaddin] retaining really all of his independence. Nasser never thought much of that arrangement, never thought much of the Imam and never thought much of the Yemen.

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Well, when the Yemen overthrew (the Imam) or was ready to overthrow him, he [Nasser] had foreknowledge and helped in the planning of the coup. He was determined to really get the Yemen as a base of operations against Saudi Arabia. If he could approach Saudi, if he could overthrow what he considered to be a fragile and weak government of King Saud, Nasser would be master of the peninsula and its enormous resources, and then hell, he'd made up for the loss of Syria, and he had more wealth than Syria or Iraq perhaps could have provided to him. So he was determined to do it. One of his tools was by the Arab socialist movement. And he attacked Saudi Arabia as being a retrogressive, reactionary regime and one which would be overthrown and replaced by a socialist republic, Arab socialist republic, and he used Sallal as a mouthpiece for this.

Now, as far as Israel is concerned at that particular juncture, I don't think Israel was in the forefront in his thinking. But when he found that this whole gambit just simply resulted in America coming into Saudi Arabia in strength and it wasn't working and it was ruining his relations with the United States and his Arab relations were in a shambles, he showed his flexibility by just standing back and saying, "The real danger now to all Arabs is the taking of the Jordan waters by Israel." He called for stopping this, which (actually) wasn't an issue, an important one. It was a kind of a summons that the Arab chiefs of state couldn't very well refuse, even though they could see through it, and so they came. It was another form of pulling the Arabs together under his chairmanship. Since he couldn't command them, he

tried diplomacy. And actually he apologized for having attacked some of them, said that he'd really overdone it.

Basically, he has this capacity, Nasser has in his person-to-person dealings with the chiefs of Arab states, to disarm them to a considerable degree after having done about everything except murder them—trying to do that. He can disarm them with his personal diplomacy. He never disarmed Faisal, but he could make Faisal smile and be agreeable. But Faisal always in his heart, I know, will distrust Nasser.

O'BRIEN: Well, how do you look at the Kennedy Administration in the way they handled the Middle East?

HART: Well, I thought that the.... There's only one real criticism I have of the handling of the Yemen crisis, since that's what we're primarily talking about. When the proposition was hatched for disengagement, it was hatched with the UAR and through the UAR with Abdullah al-Sallal before an approach was made to King Faisal. When I had to take Kennedy's letter in to King Faisal, saying that this was the proposal that had been made and had been agreed to by the UAR, he was absolutely furious [interruption] that the United States which had had an old and long and an intimate established relationship with Saudi Arabia should, on a major issue affecting Saudi Arabia's security, make a deal

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with Nasser before it made it with him, Faisal, and a deal which to him was transparently in Nasser's favor, because that deal called for American recognition of the Yemen Republic on the basis of a commitment by Saudi Arabia to stop aid to the royalists, in return for which the Egyptians would withdraw. And he said, "That means I stop now and they start withdrawing." He said, "Never. When they have withdrawn their last troops, I will stop it and not before." And he said, "You should never have made this kind of a deal with this man." He was so angry he picked up President Kennedy's letter and he slammed it down on the table. I've never seen him react this way before or since. He was furious and he had a right to be.

In my opinion, it was miserably handled. They should have let me know, and I should have gone and negotiated the groundwork, instead of which it was all hatched back here in Washington with the Ambassador of Egypt and, as a canned and pre-prepared thing, I was told to take it to Faisal. I sure earned my pay that day. I can tell you. That's when an ambassador earns his pay is when he's told to do something that's almost indefensible, and it's on instructions of your President, and it was a personal message from the President.

Well, that got us off to a very bad start, and, of course, then we did eventually recognize the Republic after two and a half months of delay. I don't think we could have done much else but recognize the Republic. If we hadn't we'd have been thrown out and lost everything that we'd put into the place, and I don't think that would have gained us anything if we had been thrown out.

On the other hand, it didn't gain us very much to stay either because we really never accomplished anything in the Yemen during that period. Abdullah Sallal was a man you

couldn't accomplish any business with; in fact, none of that succession of regimes that followed him. They finally threw us out in '67. We'd put our money in and we hated to give it up. We had a position there; the Russians were trying to move in; the Chinese, the Red Chinese were there; the Egyptians were there. What we would have missed by being thrown out was intelligence take and the informational take that we were able to get over that occupational period. And that was useful for us to have it.

But we did it in a way, of course, which meant that, well, regardless of what you think, Faisal, we're going to do it. Now, I think we made that up in our relations to Faisal to a considerable degree: the help we gave as a result of the Bunker mission, the "Hard Surface" exercise, the improved air defense, the demonstrations of support by our monthly fleet visits, our destroyer visits once a month to Port Jidda, our training teams. We demonstrated over and over again throughout 1963 our regard and our interest for Saudi Arabia and determination to keep it independent.

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So I think we made up to a large extent.

And I must say in defense of President Kennedy's handling of the thing, that during those months following this initial mistake his messages to King Faisal were very responsive to Faisal's real psychological needs and frequently very responsive to recommendations that I made. Usually totally responsive to them actually, because I sometimes would get these messages in the middle of the night—they forgetting that it's a seven hour difference in time—and I'd be getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning to answer a message and finding that it contained a personal message from President Kennedy to Faisal, and it didn't have quite the flavor that I wanted. I would try to dress it up with some phrases which when translated into Arabic would make it graceful, which in English looked a little too flowery and easily could have been scoffed at and were by some people back here I learned later; yet they accepted it. And I'm sure that President Kennedy personally accepted them because he wanted to do the right thing. He knew that the earlier part of that thing hadn't been handled quite the way it should and had a very bad reaction. And he could see that it wasn't getting us anywhere, and he wanted to keep Faisal on board. His relations with Faisal warmed. Kennedy did from the very start of his Administration make a big effort to try to establish a warm, personal connection with every chief of state in the Middle East, and I assume, with other countries as well. This was a very important thing to do, particularly in the Middle East where personal relationships count for so much.

O'BRIEN: Well, one final question on the Yemen crisis. What role did the British play, first of all in intelligence? And then secondly, how do they view the policy that we follow in regard to Yemen?

HART: Well, they weren't in agreement with it. Their assessment was that if they gave up on the royalists and recognized the Republic that they would be damaging the position of the Sultanates in the West Aden Protectorate. We're not so worried about the East Aden Protectorate or heaven knows with the West Aden Protectorate. And they would be supporting forces of radical change that they thought would

affect adversely their interests in South Arabia. So they never could bring themselves to go along with our formula for disengagement. We tried very hard to get them aboard. We finally had to recognize by ourselves, and they were thrown out. They never agreed with us, but, of course, they lost the whole thing later on anyway. They'd announced later on and it was just a measure of the bottle of the time falling, perhaps, down there. I question their judgment of the problem itself, whether it would have made any difference if they'd recognized the Republic or not.

I think the trouble with the Republic was it was in the wrong hands. The Republic of the Yemen was in the wrong hands at that time. If it had been in the hands of Ahmad Nu'mān [Ahmad Muhammad Nu'mān] and Muhammad Zubairī [Muhammad Mahmoud Zubairī] it would have been

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in good hands, and it would have been very much easier for the British to recognize it. And as far as we were concerned, I think we shouldn't have had any hesitation to recognize it in such hands as that. But with a character like Abdullah Sallal it is a pretty hard pill to swallow. It went down slowly and it caused indigestion.

He was no good really. He had been a treacherous person in his dealings with Imam, a man of apparently no principle and a rough type, a soldier but with no background in the country that gave him a position of tribal strength. He had nothing to draw upon really. He was there just as little more than a puppet. He was for the moment a hero because everybody was so sick of the old Hamid al-Din family. He was a hero just like any unknown colonel emerging in a military coup can be a hero. But in the long pull he didn't have what it took at all to have their support.

So I think that it was unfortunate it took so long for the crowd that's now there to arrive and gain their position. I believe their position is probably more solid because it's based more on tribal connections that are really important for any government of Yemen.

O'BRIEN: Well, one last question in regard to the whole interview. What changes do you see, or what's the response of the Saudis to the change in Administrations between Presidents Kennedy and Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], and how do you see it?

HART: Well, that change was a blow to the Saudis. They did esteem President Kennedy. There had been built up, in spite of his one misunderstanding, a rapport between Faisal and Kennedy by mail and also by the Faisal visit which had preceded. You see that was the thing that made him the maddest. He'd just been over and seen Kennedy in September and then they pull this one on him in October. He was really sore about that because he'd established this personal rapport with our President.

In any case the death of President Kennedy was a real blow, and the Saudis were so suspicious of Johnson that I had to constantly knock down the argument that Johnson had caused Kennedy to be killed. They were persistent in saying, "You know, he's a Zionist." Johnson. "He spoke before the Zionist group. He knew that Kennedy was a friend of the

Arabs. He caused Kennedy to be killed.” This kind of simplistic, Arab thinking is rather characteristic.

O'BRIEN: Is this characteristic of trying to read American politics perhaps through their own experience?

HART: Through their own matrix to some extent, yes. They just didn't believe. They didn't like Johnson's style from the very beginning, the Saudi Arabs. And when Kennedy died, they trooped into my office for three days from all over the country—old, young, everybody—and spoke as Saudis which are.... Saudis are normally rather taciturn

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people not much given to expressing emotional feelings even in times of death. Death is an inevitability. You don't make anything out of it. They made something out of this. They talked to me as I've never had Saudis talk to me, and I've been living with Saudis for years. They were really cut up about it.

And, partly, their grief just gave Johnson a darn poor start. He didn't deserve such a poor start in their feelings as he got. And he tried to overcome it. I worked very hard also on his letters to King Faisal to make sure they had the flavor that could reestablish a confidence there. Johnson cooperated pretty well, and the letters did get through to Faisal. And I think Faisal's feelings toward Johnson must have been pretty good by the time I left. I think they were. But that was not shared by the Saudis in general. The Saudis in general didn't give Johnson a tumble, any more than the Turks gave him a tumble, as I found out when I got to Turkey. He just didn't appeal to them, but he did try.

O'BRIEN: Well, in rereading.... Pardon me. I'm sorry. You were going to say something?

HART: No, that's all right.

O'BRIEN: In rereading your interviews is there anything else that you feel that you'd like to add at this point?

HART: Well, I haven't really gone over the whole text yet, so I'll save that for later.

O'BRIEN: Well, thank you, Ambassador Hart, for a very good interview for the Kennedy Oral History Program.

HART: Well, I've enjoyed it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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