

**William A. Crawford Oral History Interview—JFK #2, 3/19/1971**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** William A. Crawford  
**Interviewer:** William W. Moss  
**Date of Interview:** March 19, 1971  
**Location:** Washington D.C.  
**Length:** 10 pages

**Biographical Note**

Crawford, U.S. Minister (1961-1964) and Ambassador (1964-1965) to Romania, discusses Romania's 1960s derussification campaign, Romania's attitude towards the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Russia's relationship with Czechoslovakia, among other issues.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed August 23, 1978, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. 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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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**

William A. Crawford, recorded interview by William W. Moss, March 19, 1971, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of William A. Crawford

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, William A. Crawford of Washington, D.C. do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and the transcript of the interviews conducted at Washington, D.C. on March 12, 1971 and March 19, 1971 for the John F. Kennedy Library.

I hereby donate all literary rights in the aforesaid interview to the John F. Kennedy Library.

The tape and transcript may be opened to researchers at the discretion of the Director of the John F. Kennedy Library; his decision to be based on such considerations as potential embarrassment to living persons or their immediate successors, the interests of national security, or potential prejudice to the friendly relations between the United States and foreign nations.

This agreement may be revised by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

William A. Crawford James E. O'Keefe  
William A. Crawford acting Archivist of the United States

July 24, 1978  
Month, Day, Year

August 23, 1978  
Month, Day, Year

Second of Two Oral History Interviews<sup>1</sup>

with

William A. Crawford

March 19, 1971  
Washington, D.C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: All right. Now, I had asked you if you had anything more and you seemed to have some more.

CRAWFORD: Yes, I do. On second thought, there are two important subjects that I think we did not cover, although we touched on one very briefly. Both subjects served as background for my talks with the President [John F. Kennedy] and influenced the whole process of the decisions we took later in preparing for our talks with the Romanians and eventually in reaching agreement in '64.

MOSS: Would you like me to put that thing somewhere else so it isn't pointing at you like a mortar?

CRAWFORD: I think it's all right. Well, concurrently with Romania's move toward economic independence and closer ties with the West from '62 to '64 the Romanians had taken a number of specific steps to downgrade, if not eliminate, Russian influence throughout the country. So the first point I want to cover is the Romanian derussification campaign carried out internally; and then the second, the closer relations that were being established with the U.S. during the same period when they were

---

<sup>1</sup> This interview was extensively edited by Mr. Crawford.

moving farther apart with the Russians. You'll recall I had said that upon my arrival, Bucharest was still dominated by a giant statue of Stalin [Joseph Stalin], which on a dark night several months later was quietly removed. Well, there were a number of other significant things that were shortly to occur in terms of derussification. First of all, the Moscow-trained Romanians whom the Russians had placed in key positions in the internal security apparatus after the War [World War II], were soon got rid of. Then streets and villages which had been given

[-28-]

Russian names after the war reverted to their original Romanian names.

MOSS: Did the removal extend exclusively to the internal security or was this across the board?

CRAWFORD: No, this was mainly a question of the internal security apparatus. The Russian armed forces having already left in '58, the only other obvious Russian presence to remain was a small Russian military group connected with the Warsaw Pact. They were very inconspicuous—only some twenty or thirty of them—and though we saw certain steps taken by Romania to decrease its ties with the Warsaw Pact while I was there, no action to remove these particular people. That would have been a little too risky. The ones I'm speaking of who were removed were the Russian-trained N.K.V.D. [People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, U.S.S.R.] types, who in some cases were actually Russian citizens who had been placed in the internal security apparatus which the Romanians were now proceeding to "Romanize." Then there was the question of the Romanian alphabet. Romanian is a Latin language, and it does not have Cyrillic characters, but the same Roman characters that we have. But the Russians after the War had insisted on certain orthographic changes in the Romanian alphabet giving it a Slavic tone.

MOSS: Things like having a "gh" instead of a "je," new sounds?

CRAWFORD: A particular one was the Russian "i" which sounds a bit like the Romanian "a."

MOSS: Our transcribers are going to have problems.

CRAWFORD: For example, you take the name Romania, which is pronounced "Ro-mah-nee-ah." Now, when I arrived there, it was spelled R-O-M-I-N-I-A, as the Russians would have it. And during this period it was officially changed back to R-O-M-A—"Ro-mah"—the old Roman, in other words. And in fact, they sent us a formal note telling us so. You had these little changes, which were nevertheless symptomatic of a rising nationalism and downplaying of things Russian.

Along with this, the Romanians had only one foreign affairs review when I arrived, which was the Romanian edition of the Soviet periodical *New Times*. Then one bright day the subscribers to *New Times* were informed that from now on they would not be getting *New*

*Times* any more, but something called *Lumea*—which means *The World*. So *Lumea* appeared with a very slick cover, something like *Time*, and it carried the Romanian slant on foreign affairs. It was a much more open forum type of thing, and if it still basically followed the Communist line, it was their own international affairs periodical and you would find in it articles from correspondents all over the world, including such people as Scotty Reston [James B. Reston] and Cy Sulzberger [Cyrus Leo Sulzberger]. In fact, you'd see some entire reprints of their articles from the *New York Times*. And in some cases, you even got President Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson]—I believe this was after

[-29-]

President Kennedy died—statements *in extenso*; the kind of things that had never appeared before. It was a much livelier and very interesting publication which drew rather extensively from the non-Communist press of the free world, as well as from other Communist publications.

MOSS: Was this publication simply a matter of taking a Western idea of format and so on...

CRAWFORD: Only in small part.

MOSS: ...and doing it indigenously, or was there some advice from the West?

CRAWFORD: I doubt there was any advice, but they followed the format a bit. In other words, they wanted to provide their own tribune, if you will, for a broader exchange of ideas and a much greater variety of opinion than anything that could have come out of a straight Moscow publication. So this innovation occurred with little fanfare, but it made a considerable impression.

Then the Romanian-Soviet Friendship Society was all but abolished. And the Soviets had a bookshop in Bucharest called the International Bookstore which one day was renamed the Romanian-Soviet Bookstore, and then shortly afterwards was closed down. And the Russian language, which had been obligatory in the schools since 1945, was made elective in '63. And almost instantly, French began outstripping Russian in the classroom, and there was a great upsurge in the teaching of English. And the Romanians began to take occasional positions at the U.N. [United Nations] that were different from those of the Russians or of the bloc as a whole.

MOSS: I recall the vote on the nuclear-free Latin America.

CRAWFORD: That's right. Yes, that was one of their positions, and for a nuclear-free zone in the Balkans. So here they were asserting themselves. And another very cautious but interesting step they took was with regard to Bessarabia. Now, Bessarabia, as you may recall, was Romanian irredenta, which had been added to Romania's territory at Russia's expense at the end of World War I. And then it was re-annexed by Russia after World War II, and it became the Moldavian Socialist Republic, one of the

sixteen Soviet republics. But the Romanians preferred to be very quiet about this—because they didn't want any particular trouble. At the same time, they still considered Bessarabia to be Romanian, which it largely is in language, et cetera.

So one day the Romanians tried quite a ploy; they republished an old manuscript of Karl Marx which they had found, and which had apparently first appeared back around 1850. It had never issued from a Russian publishing house, but from somewhere in Holland. Anyway, this publication expressed Marx's view on the whole question of Bessarabia, in which he took the position that Bessarabia was Romanian and not Russian. And so this

[-30-]

suddenly appeared in deadpan fashion with a preface by a Romanian academician. The preface didn't try to prove anything; it was very guarded, merely noting that here was an interesting pamphlet of Marx's which had not appeared in the Soviet Union. Well, of course, it sold out promptly, and when it came out again a few days later in a new edition, it sold out again.

This was characteristic of the Romanian approach towards derussification. They would take a rather risky and courageous step of this kind, but they'd do so in low key. In this case, there was no particular polemic or echo in the Romanian press, although the Russian historians did respond with denunciations. But it placed the Russians in a very embarrassing position. I suppose what the Romanians were really trying to do as discreetly as possible, was to document their own case for the ultimate day when there might be some territorial revisions across the board. After all, the Chinese had been challenging Russia's long borders with them and advancing tremendous claims. So, in the Romanian view, perhaps, if there were ever to be some kind of a showdown on such questions, she might as well have Marx on her side. She didn't push it too hard; but it's just another illustration of the national trend at the expense of the Russians that was developing at the time.

MOSS:           You're talking about them being rather deadpan and subtle with the Russians. How were they talking about these things to you? Was it equally deadpan or...

CRAWFORD:    It was equally deadpan, yes.

MOSS:           No winks on the side, that sort of thing?

CRAWFORD:    Well, hardly, because they had to be very, very careful about it. But the face of the Soviet ambassador was growing longer and longer. Their position was then as it still is: "We want good relations with everybody, and we're not going to go out of our way to offend people." Although they didn't want to create unnecessary trouble for themselves, they were moving step by step towards a national posture in their relations with the Russians to counter the effects of Russian intervention in all its aspects since the takeover back in '45.

MOSS:           In this kind of situation, when you have to talk to the Russian ambassador [I.

K. Zhegalin], what sort of things do you say to each other?

CRAWFORD: Well, we got along famously, as a matter of fact, because I speak Russian and had served in Moscow. It so happens that all of the bloc ambassadors also, spoke Russian. So when they got together, that's what they spoke. And consequently I was able to join in many of their impromptu discussions very informally without need of any assistance. As I say, my relations with the Russian ambassador were extremely good, and we would jolly each other a good deal. But we usually avoided discussing the Romanian scene, which was going poorly for him. Fortunately,

[-31-]

he had a good sense of humor, and personally, we hit it off, though he was well aware that our working relations with the Romanians were constantly improving. Those with the bloc countries were also generally good throughout the period—except at the time of the missile crisis when things got rather strained and people promptly divided off into two camps.

MOSS: It's a bit of a tangent, but will you pursue that for a moment and sort of describe the atmosphere at the time?

CRAWFORD: Well, I vividly recall one particular day when we were reaching a point of real crisis. And I remember that I and the other chiefs of mission were out at the airport to see somebody arrive or depart. And normally I would greet the Russian and the Czech, and so on, just as I'd see some of our own N.A.T.O. [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] friends; perhaps not with quite the same warmth, but we would always exchange amenities. When I arrived on this occasion Zhegalin, the Soviet ambassador, was already surrounded by his own group; and all the Western representatives and most of the neutrals immediately came over to me. The atmosphere was electric, and it was quite obvious that things were polarizing. Only the Yugoslav ambassador was moving back and forth, not being quite sure which one he should be with.

MOSS: How did the missile crisis first come to your attention?

CRAWFORD: I'm trying to recall. I remember I had to leave a note with the Romanian Foreign Ministry early in the game, which set forth our own plans with regard to control of the seas and establishing an embargo of Soviet vessels approaching Cuba. I left our note with the Romanians, and after reading it they became very upset, but at least they accepted it. About two hours later, however, they sent the note back. And then I learned that the Russians had refused to accept an identical note delivered in Moscow. So the Romanians had followed suit somewhat belatedly, and probably reluctantly.

MOSS: How did you get this reluctance? Why do you say that?

CRAWFORD: Well, we heard more about the reluctance later. At some point during or shortly after the crisis, we got echoes of the Romanian attitude. Evidently



they regarded the whole affair as a contest between two big bulls on which they hadn't been consulted and in which they had no desire to become involved. They didn't want to be caught in the middle of something for which they weren't responsible. And later in his talk with Freeman [Orville L. Freeman], Gheorghiu-Dej [Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej] used this same illustration. In our subsequent discussions with high Romanian officials it became clearer than ever that they had not been taken into the confidence of the Russians nor been given any inkling of their plans to install missiles in Cuba. They had soon recognized that they were merely pawns in a Soviet power play, if you will. I think this

[-32-]

rude awakening greatly strengthened the nationalist tendency they were already manifesting, and as they thought back upon it, they grew increasingly determined not to get themselves involved in this kind of a situation again if they possibly could.

MOSS:           It reinforced the whole derussification idea.

CRAWFORD:   That's right, it did, because they had not been consulted and probably believed the Russian claims when first made about no missile emplacements in Cuba. When they found that the Russians were playing a nasty game with their own destiny, I think they felt betrayed: first, by not being privy to their confidence, and second, by seeing the Russians acting so irresponsibly in risking the fate of the whole world, including Romania. So for them the lesson of the missile crisis dovetailed nicely with their derussification campaign.

Meanwhile, our own relations with Romania were doing quite well indeed. If we go back first to shortly before my arrival, we'd already reached an agreement in 1960 with Romania on outstanding financial claims of U.S. nationals, and Romania had agreed to pay us a twenty-five million dollar lump sum settlement. So this was out of the way. And at the same time we had agreed to allow the Romanians to set up a trade office in New York, which they proceeded to do. And then, in 1961, the Romanians and ourselves signed a two-year cultural accord, which was the only one of its kind that we had at that time with any Eastern European country other than the Soviet Union itself. This was a two-year cultural understanding providing for exchanges of students and professors and scientists, for performing artists, books, radio, TV programs, exhibits, motion pictures, and athletic groups, and so on. And these arrangements were then renegotiated every two years. The first arrangement applied for the period of '61-'62, and then I renegotiated one at the end of '62-early '63, which applied to the period '63-'64, and we've renegotiated them regularly ever since. They provided a framework in which we were able to present three exhibits during the period that I was in Bucharest: one, a plastics exhibit; one, a transportation exhibit; and one was a graphic arts exhibit. We were able to get two American professors to teach in Romanian universities, one at the University of Bucharest and one at the University of Cluj. They came over with their families, and they taught American literature. All this was a good thing, and in the right direction.

Then in early 1963, at the conclusion of the negotiation of our agreement for '63-'64, the legation was allowed by the Romanians to publish a cultural bulletin and also a scientific

bulletin—two bulletins—to be circulated to some five or six hundred Romanian individuals and institutions of our choice in the cultural and scientific world. These bulletins dealt with American developments in both fields, and they appeared about once a month in the Romanian language and have continued to this day. And I understand that they now have a circulation of about a thousand each. We considered this was something of an achievement, and I think it's had a worthwhile effect.

[-33-]

We also pressed for the setting up of an American library in Bucharest, to which the Romanians finally gave us their agreement in principle. This was something that was subsequently implemented when President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] visited Bucharest in 1969. Immediately following his visit, an agreement was formally signed for the setting up of such a library. So things have moved considerably since my time, but they've moved steadily in the direction of much closer cultural ties. These cultural understandings and the steps that we took in furthering a certain cultural rapport between the two countries were useful not only in encouraging new ideas, but probably their greatest usefulness lay in fostering a habit of good working relations between us. You can agree on cultural things much more easily than you can on political and economic matters. But having achieved a good working rapport in this field, I found it very useful when the time came to expand into more substantive areas. Because they had grown used to working with us constructively on such matters, they developed a certain confidence in their dealings with us, which then proved helpful in other areas. So there was all this.

I should also mention the establishment of an American school there during that time. Most of our missions in Eastern Europe had run such schools for some years, all primary schools, except the one in Yugoslavia which went a little higher—the first six or eight grades, in other words. Well, we didn't have one in Bucharest when I arrived, nor was there one in Sofia [Bulgaria]; these were the only two capitals where they were lacking. So in the fall of 1962, I persuaded some legation families to join together and set up a six-grade school (later raised to eight). We had procured the necessary texts and supplies. The wife of an attaché who was a professional teacher took on the job of heading it. Then we asked the Romanians for their cooperation in providing a second teacher. And they were glad to send us a very charming young Romanian woman who was a graduate of the pedagogical institute, and whose English was exceedingly good, to teach at our school. So we began with six students of our own, and by the end of the first semester, things were going so well that we took in a few more, this time children from the diplomatic corps with background in English. I should mention that the only foreign school in Bucharest at the time was the Soviet embassy school. So we wound up the year with fourteen students, and the next year we had thirty-some to begin the school year. The Romanians meanwhile had arranged to provide us with the whole building, where we had previously occupied a single apartment. It had a lovely court and happened to be not far from our legation. So they not only provided us with a teacher that year—and then with another—but agreed to make the whole building available to us for school purposes. I understand the school is still in those premises and now has some sixty students. And so we also got very good cooperation from the Romanians in this effort.

I mentioned some of these things to the President in the course of my talk with him in August of '63, and although the major part of our talk was devoted to the economic side, I did outline for his general background, the troubles the Russians had been running into, and the good working relations, which we had been developing.

[-34-]

MOSS: Let me ask you this. In the fairly nice progression of increasing rapport...

CRAWFORD: Yes.

MOSS: ...I assume this means that your military attachés, your political reporting people, C.I.A. [Central Intelligence Agency] types and covert activities had to be exceedingly low profile. Do you have any problem controlling this?

CRAWFORD: No, I didn't have much of a problem with that. Our military did have to keep a low profile, but I didn't have any real gung-ho types.

MOSS: Nobody trying to penetrate the apparatus and that kind of thing?

CRAWFORD: No, no. And so far as any C.I.A. outside activities are concerned, they were off base there, and there was nothing that could have happened without my first being informed about it. We were strictly not to rock the boat in any sense. There was to be no activity of any kind with regard to recruitment or anything of that sort. In other words, anything of a C.I.A. operational nature outside the embassy premises was proscribed. We wanted to make sure that we did maintain a low profile and allowed this good working relationship to develop. So fortunately, there wasn't any real problem with that.

Now I might add just one thing further that I think was not touched upon. When we discussed the President's memo of September 19 [1963], in which he called for the elaboration of certain guidelines to be drawn up with respect to further trade with Eastern Europe, the follow-up on that was that these guidelines were actually being drawn up when the President's death occurred. They finally appeared in mid-December in the form of a paper establishing general guidelines for trade with Eastern Europe as a whole, and attached to it, another paper, which was an action program for Romania. The latter laid the groundwork for the discussions we were soon to have with the Romanians. So I think the talk that I had with the President, followed by the strong position that he took in his September memo, along with the fact that the Romanians were continuing to assert a more independent stance than any other Eastern European country, did substantially result in an action program for Romania being drawn up as a one-country paper...

MOSS: The only...

CRAWFORD: Yes, as the only country paper, along with the general one for Eastern Europe as a whole.

MOSS: Did this become a model for later ones?

CRAWFORD: It probably did, although of that I'm not really sure. But the policy guidelines, which appeared December 17, set forth

[-35-]

general principles and a certain scenario for the use of expanded trade with Eastern Europe as a means of advancing our objectives there when developments in individual countries warranted. Then the action program for Romania carried a specific set of proposals which, as I say, were used as a basis for our subsequent negotiating position. All of this was then approved by President Johnson in February of '64, but the groundwork was first laid at the initiative, really, and under the great personal impetus of President Kennedy for the later success of the talks.

It's instructive to note that as the time for the talks approached, the Romanian differences with the Russians became intensified. The Romanians, for example, were invited to Khrushchev's [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] seventieth birthday party—that is, Dej was invited—in April of '64, and instead of going, Dej abstained and convened his Central Committee. In other words, he chose to hold a long Central Committee meeting precisely during the four or five days when the Khrushchev birthday celebrations were going on, to issue what amounted to a proclamation of political independence. He had already asserted their economic independence in 1963. But this statement went farther and took the Russians to task for having interfered in the past in Romanian Communist party affairs to a considerable degree, and it established the principle that there should be no father-son parties but only brother parties, and so on. So this was more or less the culmination of the derussification campaign. And it was only about two or three weeks later, on May 18, that the Romanians arrived over here, to cap the climax if you will. It was really a pretty risky business to have taunted the Russians to the extent that they had by their Central Committee statement and Dej's refusal to go to the birthday party when all the other Eastern European leaders were going, and then to follow that up by sending a high-level delegation to Washington for the important talks that we proceeded to have with them. A very risky and ticklish business, indeed.

MOSS: All right. Later, of course, you have the Czech experience that is in our background now, but wasn't then. Why the difference...

CRAWFORD: Why the difference?

MOSS: ...in the two experiences?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, why the Russians moved into...

MOSS: Yeah, why were the Romanians able to get away with it and the Czechs not?

CRAWFORD: Well, I think that there are a couple of good reasons. One is that the Romanians maintained an internal position which was fairly orthodox. They didn't challenge the basic Communist system. In fact, their internal controls were still rather Stalinist. Liberalization of ideas and so on had not developed internally as they had in Czechoslovakia. The party maintained tight internal controls. There was no such

[-36-]

thing as relaxation of censorship as there had been in Czechoslovakia. There was no such thing as the possibility arising of a fractional movement within the party, or of two candidates for an election. They, on the contrary, remained very orthodox. So the Russians did not have any fear that the system itself was being challenged by the Romanians, even though they were going much farther than anybody else in differing with the Russians on foreign affairs and were asserting a strong posture of economic and, to a degree, political independence vis-à-vis the Russians. But the second point is that even in foreign affairs, they recognized what the Russians couldn't tolerate, and they set strict limits. Above all, the Romanians were very careful not to give any impression that they might do what the Hungarians had done, which was to move out of the Warsaw Pact. They were very careful about this, and about not challenging the system itself. So I think that where the Romanians and the Czechs parted ways was that there was a much higher degree of liberalization actively developing in Czechoslovakia, which I think the Russians were afraid might lap over among their Communist neighbors and possibly into the Soviet Union itself. In particular, I believe they feared the possible effects of Czech intellectual ferment upon the already somewhat imaginative Russian younger generation. Well, there was little of that kind of intellectual excitement to upset the Russians in Romania. There was no more than a very guarded movement towards greater liberalization at the time, and the party was well in control.

MOSS: Didn't reckon with anything as subversive as discotheques. [Laughter]

CRAWFORD: That's right.

MOSS: I think that's about it.

CRAWFORD: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

[-37-]

William A. Crawford Oral History Transcript – JFK #2  
Name Index

**F**

Freeman, Orville L., 32

**G**

Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe, 32, 36

**J**

Johnson, Lyndon B., 29, 36

**K**

Kennedy, John F., 28, 30, 34, 35, 36  
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyevich, 36

**M**

Marx, Karl, 30, 31

**N**

Nixon, Richard M., 34

**R**

Reston, James B., 29

**S**

Stalin, Joseph, 28, 36  
Sulzberger, Cyrus Leo, 29

**Z**

Zhegalin, I.K., 31, 32