

Thomas W. Wilson, Jr. Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 11/15/1982
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Wilson, Thomas W., Jr.; Journalist, Government Official, Consultant, Educator, and Author; Special Assistant, Deputy Secretary of State, International Affairs Organization (1961-1964). Wilson discusses the relationship between the United States Department of State, International Organization [I.O.], and the United Nations. He also covers Adlai E. Stevenson's influence on those organizations and foreign affairs, among other issues.

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Of

Mrs. Thomas W. Wilson, Jr. for Thomas W. Wilson, Jr.

To the

John F. Kennedy Library

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Signed: John W. Cal-
Archivist of the United States

Date: 8-8-02

Thomas W. Wilson, Jr.

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Wilson's appointment as James Harlan Cleveland's assistant
2, 12, 19	Adlai E. Stevenson, the United Nations, and International Organization [I.O.]
3, 21	United Nations ambassadors and the Department of State relationships
8	Stevenson's presentation of U-2 photos
10	Wilson's experience working for I.O.
11, 18	The Congo
13	The Chinese representation issue, Kennedy's Two-China policy
17	Russia
20	Stevenson and the Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962
21	Lyndon B. Johnson and the presidency
24	Wilson's thoughts on the Kennedy Administration
Addendum	Name List

Oral History Interview

With

THOMAS W. WILSON, JR.

November 15, 1982

?

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

WILSON: The thing to do would be to not waste a lot of time on things where I don't think I've got anything that would really add to the history. There are a couple of things down here especially in the major crises where it seems to me I've--I remember a few things that might be worth mentioning about and spend more time on those. Does that make sense?

STERN: Okay, well why don't we begin. The first thing I was interested in asking you was how you were appointed as assistant to Harlan Cleveland [James Harlan Cleveland]. How did that come about, the background?

WILSON: Well, that's very simple and completely personal. I'd know Harlan Cleveland I guess for about twenty years then. As a matter of fact, I went out in the middle of the war to the Middle East and was told I could take a couple of people with me; this was the time they were scraping the bottom of the barrel for able-bodied males. Somebody told me there had been a very bright young fellow from the Department of Agriculture who'd just come over to F.O.E. named Harlan Cleveland, and I met him, talked to him, offered him a job. He accepted it in the Middle East but he never came out because his draft status got changed. And anyhow, I was on one end of a cable and he was on the other end of the cable for about four years during the war and we knew what each other was doing. I guess when I got back to Washington I'd go to meetings where Harlan Cleveland

was and vice versa. And then the same thing happened shortly thereafter the Marshall Plan. I was in Europe for four years and he was in Washington.

And it must have been in the spring of '61, I went out to get on the shuttle for LaGuardia one afternoon and there was Lois [Lois Burton Cleveland] and Harlan Cleveland standing in line. And Harlan said, "Funny this should happen. I was just about to write you." And I said, "What were you going to write me about?" And he said, "Well, I was--I just accepted a job as an Assistant Secretary for I.O. [International Organization] and you're on a list of people that I carry around because I'd like to work with you again sometime." So, I don't know whether we settled it on the airplane or not. Anyhow, it was as simple as that. He asked me to come in with him, and it sounded exciting, so I did.

STERN: This was spring of 1961?

WILSON: Yes, it had to be. It was after inauguration. I remember that I reported for work very shortly after the Bay of Pigs disaster.

STERN: That makes it April or May.

WILSON: April or May, that sound right, yet. So it was in there.

STERN: How--as you recall now--how did Cleveland organize I.O. and particularly in terms of his relationship to the mission in New York. I wonder if we could talk about how you got instructions to them, how often you spoke to Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] or Stevenson's deputies or just how the whole thing operated?

WILSON: Well, if you look at that set-up on paper, which you obviously have, it's an unworkable arrangement. And like any other organizational structure it only works if the people in it want it to work. In this case, the people wanted it to work. And so anything will work if they want it to. The way Stevenson was a member of the Cabinet, had direct access to the president if he wanted it, if he wanted to use it. He also was head of an embassy which is dependent from I.O.

STERN: Right.

WILSON: And therefore, his boss on a working-day basis was Harlan Cleveland and then--though he outranked him--and then the Secretary of State.

STERN: That must have been a curious thing? The fact he was--that he outranked his own boss.

WILSON: Yes, but...

STERN: How did...? Go ahead.

WILSON: The people involved were sophisticated enough to accept certain anomalies. I

don't think any of them were bureaucratic defenders of turf. They all thought they were doing something important and worthwhile. They recognized talent in each other. And it worked. As a matter of fact, I don't know, I have no way of knowing what Stevenson's personal feelings toward Kennedy were. I'm certain that he admired him. My guess is that Kennedy looked to him--Adlai Stevenson--as a national asset that should be used and where better than at the U.N. [United Nations]. Rusk [David Dean Rusk] and Stevenson were two very different people, but I think there was a great deal of mutual respect. I think Cleveland was the cement though. He was probably closer to Stevenson and closer to Rusk than Stevenson and Rusk were to each other. I'm sure this wasn't--I'm sure this was made a bit easier by the fact that the White House man who followed that part of the government was Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr.], who also knew and respected all of the principles. And so it worked extraordinarily well.

But the U.S. delegation to the United Nations is an instructed mission. They get their instructions from the Department of State, in this case from I.O. And that's--really that's the way it worked day in and day out. I seem to recall that we had to urge Stevenson to come down to attend cabinet meetings. He made nothing of that relationship--the fact that he had a seat in the cabinet, as far as I know. And he usually had to be sort of dragged to Washington. They probably bored him for one thing. Anyhow, that's how it worked, and I think Cleveland was careful to make sure that when he talked to Stevenson he was talking for the secretary as well. But there was a kind of intellectual rapport among these people. They could talk to each other and get along. So, it really... [Interruption]

STERN: Did you ever see any examples of tension between the mission and the State Department? You may know this book by a man named Beichman [Arnold Beichman] in which he...

WILSON: I don't. No.

STERN: ...he talks about the mission as essentially having a natural rivalry with the State Department, and gives some examples of various--Henry Cabot Lodge and cases in which U.N. ambassadors were essentially attempting independence from the Secretary of State. And there are even some examples of this happening with Stevenson which we can talk about later. But he cites, for example, Kennedy saying at one point, calling the U.N. mission his State Department in New York, citing it as a natural rival. Did you see examples of that, was there any of that that was apparent?

WILSON: Well, you know that the, one of the standard problems with diplomacy is always the alleged danger that the diplomat will get posted to another country, will become so defensive of relations to that country that he forgets that he's representing his own. Ah, obviously there is this kind of a tendency. I think you have the same thing at the U.N. only in a vastly more complicated form. You acquire a kind of vested interest--nothing wrong with that--you acquire a kind of interest in the functioning of that institution and in your relationships with other delegations and with blocks of countries. It is a special place. So, that's always present. But given the fact that there is, quite apart from the point that if you have lively and energetic people involved, who have free minds, they're

going to have different slants on policy. And whether you're sitting in New York or whether you're sitting in Washington will alter your point of view. I happen to see an extreme case when I was once--during the Marshall Plan days--and the European community was beginning to come together and the British were resisting it. And I can tell you from personal experience that it makes all the difference in the world whether you're sitting in Paris or sitting in London how you view the British policy toward the European Common Market. You understand it perfectly if you're in London, and you think the British are wrecking the show if you're sitting in Paris. I've done this and London and Paris are not really any further apart geographically than New York and Washington.

STERN: Right, sure.

WILSON: And the same thing happens on the shuttle between here and New York. So, there is that and there is nothing wrong with it. It's natural and inevitable. But apart from that I really don't know of any serious policy friction. There came moments, and you've got the reference here to the Article 19 debate, and maybe some other times when.... The difference would be mainly over tactics. You know, at what point do you make a shift in policy? Is the timing right or is it not right? But basically, fundamentally, substantively on policy points, there really wasn't much friction and I think partly that was because there was so much swapping of individuals. I was back and forth all the time between the mission and the State Department. And it was all the same place as far as I was concerned. I mean as far as the feeling is concerned, as far as the atmosphere was concerned. And then of course during the General Assemblies, the I.O. in effect half moves to New York and staffs the mission on the subjects that they follow in their Washington capacities, so that the two staffs intermingle a great deal, and in effect can substitute for each other. So that that smoothes things over and prevents the two staffs from getting, you know--what I mean--incestuous in their relationships. It worked remarkably well.

STERN: How, just exactly how, for example.... Well, I remember once seeing a remark that Stevenson made about--he was obviously grumbling and exaggerating--but someone once asked him how often he would be in contact with I.O. and he said, "Every hour." He said, "Them calling me every hour about something." I think that was probably an exaggeration, but just how often were you in contact?

WILSON: He's right.

STERN: He is?

WILSON: Yeah. I'm sure he was grumbling [Laughter] because he liked to grumble about these things, but we were on the horn all the time.

STERN: Mostly by telephone?

WILSON: Mostly by telephone. There was a telex machine of some kind; I don't know what it's properly called. We used to move speech materials on it. There was a

security, one of those awful telephones, scrambler phones. You could never get Stevenson to use it...

STERN: I gathered that.

WILSON: ...because it annoyed him. Ah, and they are pesky things to use. But, you know, but you see they were in touch at different levels. Guys working on the same subject functionally they are in touch with the opposite members all the time. And so as you sort of go up the scale. I don't think Rusk and Stevenson were in touch; certainly not every hour, probably not every day, but...

STERN: No, from the documents I've seen, their contact was not as frequent.

WILSON: ...but that went through Cleveland.

STERN: Right. Exactly.

WILSON: But Cleveland was certainly on the horn to New York X times a day and vice versa.

STERN: I know that you would often watch Stevenson's speeches on the television monitor from the U.N. Apparently, there were some cases in which he departed from what you expected...

WILSON: It wasn't a television monitor yet; it was a squawk box. But it was a speaker. It was plugged in to the General Assembly. And as a matter of fact, I think--I said most, it wouldn't be most it would be in four or five offices of the U.N.--that little thing is going all the time. And it is kind of muted background, but you're following it. Whatever you're doing you're listening to the debate with the other ear. And of course we had a direct phone just off the speaker's platform in the General Assembly. And you know, there's a famous story somebody must have told you about the time--was it.... I guess it.... What was that crisis? It was the Missile Crisis, yeah, when we were trying to get the O.A.S. [Organization of American States] approval in the morning...

STERN: Sure. Right.

WILSON: ...and everybody was watching the.... You've heard this story about--everybody saw--the word got to Sisco [Joseph John Sisco] that the O.A.S. had approved the quarantine, that was the point. Stevenson was in the middle of his speech and he didn't know it yet, and everybody saw Sisco come in to the room and sit down right behind Stevenson. And everybody knew what he had in his hand. And Kennedy called Rusk and said, "What's that son of a bitch doing sitting on his ass?" "They're mighty sorry," he said. "He just got up and gave it to him." And everybody was watching the same picture of him.

STERN: Yeah.

WILSON: But things were about that, almost that, tied together on a regular basis.

STERN: Can you recall any examples in which Stevenson surprised you, say things that you did not expect him to say or perhaps didn't even want him to say? I can cite one example during the time of the Indian invasion of Portuguese Goa he made a very vitriolic statement against Menon [Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon], which was against what the White House theoretically would have wanted him to say although I gather from some sources that President Kennedy was delighted. But apparently there was some embarrassment. He went beyond his instructions.

WILSON: I don't remember that. Menon so invited vitriol [laugh]. He was constantly lecturing people and keeping the peace and then the vision of his urging his troops on to conquer Goa. It was just a little bit too much to take.

STERN: Can you think of any examples when Stevenson exceeded his instructions or caused you any difficulty?

WILSON: I don't, and as a matter of fact contrary to a lot of opinions, Stevenson had almost no trouble at all with his instructions, the instructions he got from Washington or the draft speeches he got from Washington. He was....

STERN: Some people have told me that he tended to be very picky about them and would rewrite them, make a great effort to change things. Is that your experience?

WILSON: Well, we know that he is an endless fiddler with speeches but it was mainly from a literary point of view...

STERN: Rather than substantive...

WILSON:as a writer. And of course he always improved them. He was very good. But from the point of view of policy formulation, I really--I wrote most of the stuff that--so I was the guy if they wanted to argue with it, it would be with me. I can really hardly remember Stevenson objecting at all. He liked to put things in himself if he had time but usually there wasn't any time. By putting things in himself I mean really just making it a bit more graceful and more of a polished essay than you knock out under deadlines. And I know--I suspect he didn't do anything to kill those rumors. I was, I am a little sensitive on this point. Perhaps I remember--what was the senator from Washington.... No, no, no.

STERN: Scoop Jackson [Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson]?

WILSON: No, a guy who had been head of the law school at Indiana. Wayne Morse

[Wayne Lyman Morse]. Wayne Morse used to stand up every now and then in the Senate and announce that what Adlai Stevenson said in the U.N. yesterday wasn't Adlai Stevenson speaking, he was just reading what some bureaucratic hack in the State Department wrote for him. And I was the bureaucratic hack so I used to resent it. So it's not true. He didn't really object. As a matter of fact, he was quite easy to get along with and he was, you know, given the general impression about his temperament, he was a surprisingly good team player. I think he tended to think the formal part of it was maybe not as important as the personal relationships that he was able to build up. And in that of course he was his own man; he was free.

STERN: Right.

WILSON: So, I think he probably didn't think the formal part of it was all that important.

STERN: That's a very striking point. A number of other people have suggested that they felt he was not really that much a master of the substantive material and he depended to a large degree on his personality and his reputation, his standing, his status as a presidential candidate. Do you feel that that was....

WILSON: Yeah, and he was really more interested.... He was a moralist basically, I think. And he was more interested in the principle of the thing than in the details. Details bored him.

STERN: That's what Phil Klutznick [Philip M. Klutznick] said.

WILSON: Did he? Yeah.

STERN: He just.... Stevenson was not really into detail. He was not a detail person.

WILSON: No, I remember a briefing session with him on the Article 19 thing where given the fact that he is a lawyer and this was an issue that was--you know it paralyzed the U.N....

STERN: Sure.

WILSON: He just couldn't stand sitting around in a room going--it gets very technical, it gets very legalistic, and it just drove him crazy. He wanted to get on with something. However, on your original point, he made very few objections. I'd forgot.... The Goa thing rings a faint bell now. I don't know how it happened that he either had to say something or took the occasion to say something without getting instructions. But I don't remember any case of his going beyond the instructions. You know, there was that case before I was in the department of the Bay of Pigs thing, which he...

STERN: Sure.

WILSON: ...he was given doctored photographs or something, and I guess he announced on no uncertain terms, "One more like that and you'll need a new boy up here."

STERN: Although this skips ahead of it, I thought I'd just raise a point since you brought it up. I've had some difference of opinion in the people I've spoken to about an incident relating to the Bay of Pigs, but coming later than the Cuban Missile Crisis. I have been told that because of the doctored photograph in April '61, that Stevenson was very reluctant--one person told me we almost had to drag him into the chamber to show the pictures in '62, because he was afraid that they might be phony. Although others have told me that that was not the case and that he had complete confidence in those U-2 photos. Do you have any personal recollection of that?

WILSON: Yes, I sure do. The photographs were sent up to New York to brief other missions and to organize groups of, I don't know, smallish numbers. Three, four, five delegation heads would come over and get briefed on these photographs. Stevenson certainly had looked at them. I have no way of knowing whether he was worried about their authenticity but he gave no, he certainly gave no evidence of it that I saw. Then when the debate came in the Security Council, there was a lot of different opinions about whether these should be used or how they should be used. And what we originally did was set up this photo display in the Trusteeship Council Room, which is sort of adjacent to the Security Council, with the notion that maybe at the end of the debate the U.S. might invite other delegations to look at the photographs in the next room. There were--as I recall, it actually moved over there and set up. And then it must have been Clayton Fritchey told Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] that this is what we've done. And Pierre apparently hit the roof and said, "Get them out of there. I don't want these pictures used in New York at all. The White House will decide which pictures get released and when." They wanted to manage that show themselves. And he sent over and the pictures were brought back across the street...

STERN: Uh, hmmm.

WILSON: ...to the delegation offices. And I was in the delegation office because there was a possibility that this thing would move, this issue, would move from the Security Council to the General Assembly, in which case you'd have to make a brand new speech all over again. So, I was supposed to be writing that speech. And these were, I suppose.... Does the Security Council still have--what do you call it, progressive trans....? I mean, they don't have simultaneous translation. They translate bit by bit. So that it takes a while. Though I was starting to write a General Assembly speech but also listen to the Security Council debate. So when the interpreter was on, I went back and worked on the typewriter and then went back and heard the thing.

So, there was not many people in the mission because everybody was over at the Security Council. And you could just feel this debate building up to the point where these pictures could be absolutely critical. I don't trust my memory now. I think I'm the one who said, "Send them over to the Security Council and move them out in here. He's going to have to have them."

STERN: Did you try and get clearance to your call?

WILSON: Huh?

STERN: Did you try to talk to anyone in the White House about that?

WILSON: No.

STERN: No.

WILSON: It just seemed absolutely an on the ground tactical thing that that had to be done. What I am quite clear about is that, is that, when they were moved in, Stevenson--somebody--had in his right-hand coat pocket the run-down of these photographs and what they showed. I've been peripherally involved in educational films and television shows and so forth, and I know how hard it is to synchronize voice and action and camera. And with absolutely no preparation, nobody knowing what was happening, Stevenson suddenly turned around these photographs, took this piece of paper out of his pocket--his back was to the camera so you couldn't see this. He had this little list of photos under the table and he's sitting like this reading them: "Photo Number one shows..." And the camera would go to the picture, the colonel would put his pointer on it just as Stevenson was reading whatever [laugh] it was. It was the most perfectly synchronized production I've ever seen. It was all accidental. It was all.... It just happened that way. It was actually sensational. But it worked so well, I don't think anybody--I don't think Salinger or anybody else ever complained.

STERN: It was so successful I don't see how they could have.

WILSON: They couldn't. That's it. The only person I think that would remember the details of how they actually got moved back and forth across the street twice would be Clayton Fritchey, I think. Anyhow, that....

STERN: As far as you know Stevenson had no doubt about their authenticity.

WILSON: I had no reason to think he had any doubt whatsoever. Well, they were terribly impressive. Have you ever seen them?

STERN: Oh, sure.

WILSON: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I remember--it's the first and only question that I asked Harlan Cleveland when I guessed but was not supposed to know what was going on that weekend--it was, "How good is the evidence?" And he said, "Very, very good. It's unquestionable."

STERN: Hmm.

WILSON: So, I don't think you could have doubted it really. I'm sure he didn't.

STERN: Can I just pursue that point for a moment?

WILSON: Sure.

STERN: You began to suspect what was going on before, obviously before, the president spoke then?

WILSON: Well, I've jumped--I've jumped around I'm afraid.

STERN: Yeah.

WILSON: This goes back to the begging of the Missile Crisis. I think it must have been a Saturday afternoon because I... Well, I know it was. I got called into the office and Harlan said, "Look this is pretty stupid, but you better write the best speech you've ever written and I can't tell you what the subject is." [Laughter] You know there was a very tight security clamp on this thing. And it had to be either Berlin or Cuba. Well, he said, "But just throw the book at the subject anyhow." And then, actually, by the next morning I was on the list of people who had to know. But there was some hours when I didn't. But some clue persuaded me that it was Cuba. And so I said to him, you know, "How good is the evidence?" And he said, "It's undeniable."

STERN: That's fascinating. I wonder if we could go back to '61. Very often, particularly undergraduates who are doing research at the Library and reading oral histories, will read an oral history by someone, for example, who was an assistant secretary for I.O. or held your position. And there often ask--they often ask what exactly does a person who holds a position like that do on a daily basis. And I've always tried to ask that question so they would get some detail. And basically what I'm asking is if you could try and describe what a typical day was like on that job if there is such a pie. I realize how tough that is. But more or less, from the time you came in to the time you went home, more or less on a typical day, just exactly what you were doing; what you spent your time doing?

WILSON: Well, I say, a typical day would be typical until about nine-thirty, [Laughter] in the sense that there is a certain routine. People come in to the State Department very early in the morning. They screen the daily cables and some of them take a very much screened list out to the Secretary of State, and ride in with him in his car and brief him on the way in and that kind of thing. Well, this is going on simultaneously in other places, including the political section of I.O. Rusk had a daily staff meeting. I don't remember what time. I do remember it started on the dot and ended on the dot. It was short and very much to the point. So, I.O. Political Division would have screened the overnight cable take to a few priority subjects before, say, Cleveland came to work. Cleveland had a staff conference, a staff meeting, maybe a half an hour before the Secretary's staff meeting. So that I.O.--five, six, seven of us--would go over the subjects relevant to, relevant to I.O.

and the U.N. Then Cleveland would go to the Secretary's staff meeting; when we came down we'd re-gather. So that, Cleveland went up with some kind of I.O. opinion on whatever was on the docket that day. He would come back with the Secretary's reaction and at that point we had whatever policy guidance there was to be. I would think, although I didn't do this myself and I don't remember, but I would think it was--surely Cleveland would call Stevenson for anything he thought was worth talking to him about on the basis of...

STERN: Right.

WILSON: ...his internal meeting and his meeting with Rusk. And then everybody went about whatever it was that he had to worry about that day. The day went on to oh, seven-thirty, eight, eight-thirty, whenever you got out of there. I think, I think the thing that students going through this kind of material probably need to know is that some extremely large proportion of the time in this kind of an agency--I can't vote for the Department of the Interior anyway--in this kind of an agency, is spent putting out fires, handling emergencies, dealing with crises, getting rid of the things that have come in under the door and over the transom at night that didn't exist when you went home the day before and have got to be settled before sundown. Now, they may include a lot of crummy, lousy little problems like what senator's going to be on what delegation--bearing in mind that I.O. used to put together U.S. delegations for how many international meetings a year? I don't know. But it was probably several hundred--one a day, say, average. All of which had delegations including experts and political representatives and representatives of citizen organizations and people that liked to travel. And an awful lot of time is taken up settling jurisdictional arguments about who goes on what delegation where.

But more seriously than that, you mentioned the Congo crisis. It was during that that I really first, I was really first appalled by this point. Maybe the way to bring it up is to say that Harlan Cleveland is a fellow, who by basis of his professional experience, his personal interests, his political predilections, point him all in the direction of working on constructive international project programs, institution building, conflict resolutions, and so forth. Now here he was as head of the Bureau of International Organizations Affairs which includes all intergovernmental, international organizations, primarily the U.N. system of agencies, but others too. All these major international conferences of a scientific nature and so forth and so on. I was struck one afternoon when he and I hurried out of a meeting and got back to his office about six o'clock and sort of sat down and said, "Now we get our work done." And started talking about the cables that had to go out that night. Now, what we had come from was a briefing meeting instructing the U.S. delegation to the biannual--I think it still is--the bi-annual general assembly of UNECSO [United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization]. And suddenly it dawned on me that the Assistant Secretary with that background, that kind of background and kind of personal thrust and bias that I mentioned, was in charge of all these inter--our relationships with all these international organizations; and he wasn't spending five to ten percent of his time on the constructive things going on in the world because of the bloody war in the Congo; and we were running the air lift.

STERN: He spent--Cleveland spent a great deal of time on the Congo...

WILSON: I did.... We had sitting in the office--you know, next to his office was a colonel. And we were really--because we were airlifting U.N. troops. Did it very well too. But the point is that suddenly we were experts in air-supply logistics, you know, and feeling that it was an intrusion to have to go talk to people who were going over to a biannual UNESCO meeting. So, this is.... Even Kissinger [Henry Kissinger] has talked about the intellectual bankruptcy of--because--that hits people in high government positions because you come in with--you go out with whatever intellectual ammunition you came in with because there's no time. Once you're in there you're trapped with the immediate pressing, the urgent crisis problems. And I have--the only answer I ever thought of to this is so silly that I never mentioned it to this point. The only solution I could ever see is you double the staff and you have an offensive team and a defensive team and...

STERN: It wouldn't work.

WILSON: Huh?

STERN: I don't think it would work.

WILSON: I wouldn't try to sell it to Congress. [Laugh]

STERN: That's a very interesting point, I think.

WILSON: But, it's a distressing thing. There is no time to think. You're just caught up in a whirlwind of activity and you try to keep your head above water and hope things don't collapse before noon tomorrow.

STERN: On the Congo crisis, that was one example where apparently the president was concerned that the U.N., Stevenson and the U.N., were essentially negotiating without checking with the White House often enough. He said--who did he say it too? I can't remember--he said, "I don't want to find out what Stevenson is doing in the *New York Times* the next day." He insisted on being briefed the evening before...

WILSON: Mmhhmmm.

STERN: ...on what had gone at the U.N. Apparently, the nature of the crisis was such that the U.N. had a, some, degree of independence.

WILSON: Well, it had a field for it--it's an operation and the Secretary General wasn't sure what was happening on the ground either. That makes heads of state very nervous.

STERN: Right.

WILSON: Including that one.

STERN: Cleveland told me that he--I'm sure you were involved in this--had some sort of radio communication in the field unit which told him exactly where the U.N. troops were moving and knew more about it, really, in some cases than people in the air that were there. He very closely monitored it.

WILSON: Yeah.

STERN: And it certainly did make Kennedy nervous.

WILSON: Yes.

STERN: Hence the evidence of back then. [Laugh] In the case of the Congo, as an example, did you feel that Stevenson was in command of the detail on that issue or was it really something that he essentially served more as a symbolic person on it and other people, likely, for example people behind the scenes, were really the people who did the work, who did the details?

WILSON: Oh, well, you know, it's always the Pedersens [Richard Foote Pedersen] and the Siscos who are doing the real detailed work. But if their relationships with the guy who has to be the front man are good, that's the way it ought to be. I don't really remember anything particular about Stevenson in the Congo, but there was a case where the U.N. was in fact serving as a world peace-keeping force, effectively, operationally, on the ground and that's what some people thought the U.N. was set up for. So, there could easily have been arguments about details but not about the general thrust of it.

STERN: How about on some of the issues where the evidence suggests that Stevenson was somewhat uncomfortable with the United States position. Take two specific examples--well, one particularly: the Chinese representation issue, in which he had to work very hard to deep Communist China out of the U.N. But there is some evidence that he was not comfortable with that and might not have thought that it was really the best thing for the United States to be doing. Did you ever have any personal experience on that issue?

WILSON: Well, given the fact that Kennedy tried to move off that frozen position himself and got clobbered...

STERN: Right.

WILSON: ...I don't think there's anything much Stevenson could have.... You know, I'm sure he would have wanted to normalize relations with China but he was, I suppose, party to the.... In any event he knew about the effort that Kennedy made to go for a Two-China policy as a transition...

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

WILSON: ...the occasion--I think Kennedy took some soundings, decided he would like to try to go ahead with it. Rusk said we better clue our Japanese allies in to this. Chinese delegation--Japanese delegation including, I think, the Foreign Minister. You know this story, don't you?

STERN: I'm not sure. Why don't you continue.

WILSON: And Rusk confided to them that the U.S. was thinking about this and wondered how they felt about it. And they seemed to think it was a fine idea. And this mission for some reason or other went to Detroit after Washington and some correspondent for a Detroit paper followed the Japanese delegation to Detroit, where he thought they might talk a little bit more freely, maybe. And indeed one of them did. He said he thought it was really terribly clever of the U.S. to come up with this Two-China policy. And the next day the rockets started going up, and some delegation to the China lobby went to work, and Kennedy was visited by a delegation from the Hill that told him.... The way I heard it was that he could have his Two-China policy or he could have something else that he wanted even more, but not both. He was blackmailed and he just backed away and decided it wouldn't fly.

So, I don't think.... I think Stevenson felt that Kennedy, must have felt, that Kennedy had done the best he could but for domestic political reasons there was not a prayer of changing that hard-line policy. And anyhow, it was, you know.... Don't forget that at this time, the Chinese.... I don't know the sequence of this, but I think probably even later than this, when the Chinese would go to a meeting of the International Red Cross, they'd break up the meeting by stomping on the floor and moving the chairs and grabbing the microphone and so forth. They couldn't even cooperate in a Red Cross setting. So, you've got an institution which already is got problems with its members--like the Soviet Union and the U.S. and so forth--and I was certainly ambivalent about whether you want to invite the Chinese in to an international institution that they were set out to try to wreck. You wouldn't need that. It was hard enough.

STERN: Of course it was clear that they would--excuse me--never accept a Two-China policy anyway. So, in that sense it was perfectly safe.

WILSON: Well, I think that's what the Japanese thought was so clever about it.

STERN: Mm hmmm. Okay.

WILSON: Yeah. [Laugh] I remember their using the word clever and I think that's exactly what they meant. Did I say--I said Japanese didn't I?

STERN: Yes.

WILSON: Yeah, yeah. So, you know, when.... I remembered once when the debate was on at the U.N., a front page editorial in *Red Flag* rededicated the People's Republic of China to the Maoist proposition that all political power flows out of the barrel of a gun. You can make a pretty good case for keeping that country out of that organization...

STERN: Yeah.

WILSON:and not feel very badly about it. In any case he did and I don't think he had any problem with it.

STERN: Yeah. On another issue which I know Stevenson felt better about: did you have any role at all in writing the speech on Angola? There, he voted against the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies, and felt lot better about it because he felt that that's what the United States shouldn't be doing in terms of supporting...

WILSON: I don't remember that.

STERN: ...Angolan independence. You have no recollection of that?

WILSON: No, I don't remember that. Was that quite early I wonder?

STERN: I think it was sixty-one. Yeah, 1961.

WILSON: No, I don't remember that.

STERN: It was one of the peculiar cases where the United States voted against NATO and with the Russians.

WILSON: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

STERN: And Stevenson was pleased with that although I have seen evidence that Kennedy then kind of backed off, fearing loss of the Azores, and he was a little uncomfortable about it.

WILSON: This, I didn't know about.

STERN: Okay.

WILSON: I wasn't aware.

STERN: Okay, fine. We'll go on to something else then. Do you have any, did you have any, personal knowledge about the incident that came right after the Cuban Missile Crisis concerning the Bartlett [Charles L. Bartlett]-Alsop [Stewart J. O. Alsop] article and how Stevenson reacted to that? You may remember...

WILSON: Which article?

STERN: The article by Bartlett and Alsop claiming that Stevenson had essentially advocated a sell-out of Munich at the White House meetings. Did you ever have any sense of his reaction to that? Did you ever talk to him about it or Cleveland about it? He certainly--he supposedly came very close to resigning over it, and was very distressed. Remember they said that he had.... Apparently, it had to do with his suggestion about trading the missiles in Turkey and Italy for the missiles in.....

WILSON: Yeah, it rings a bell, but I don't think I.... The only thing I can sort of drag out of my memory on that is that I think Stevenson went on a morning television show right after this story, this article, broke and said what he had to say. I'm almost sure that this probably was his initiative, and what I think I remember is that he didn't clear this with anybody. He didn't talk to anybody, he just did it.

STERN: I think that's true, yeah.

WILSON: But that's about all I remember. But that seemed to....

STERN: I was wondering, for example, if Cleveland may have talked to you about it. I know that Stevenson felt that his credibility had been damaged and again thought about resigning and all of that. And of course wondered who had leaked this stuff....

WILSON: But didn't Kennedy back him up?

STERN: Yes, he did.

WILSON: Right away?

STERN: Yes, he did. He issued a very strong statement.

WILSON: Yeah.

STERN: Apparently, Stevenson always had suspicions about who, where--I mean Bartlett was a close friend of Kennedy's...

WILSON: Yeah.

STERN: ...and he always wondered where that material came from.

WILSON: Yeah.

STERN: And from what I've gathered, blamed it not on JFK but on RFK [Robert F.

Kennedy], assuming that Bobby Kennedy had leaked it. But I have no idea whether that's true.

WILSON: I just don't know.

STERN: Okay, okay. Back in--back to something in '61: the crisis that was precipitated by Hammarskjöld's [Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld] death and the Russian attempt to bring in this troika. Were you involved at all in the efforts to head that off; which eventually was successful?

WILSON: That was when Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] came to the General Assembly wasn't it?

STERN: That's correct.

WILSON: Yeah. I don't, I don't know. I remember the occasion and I remember.... I think we were fairly successful in making the troika a symbol of nonsense. Somebody turned up with a picture of a Russian troika and whether this is the way they actually run or whether it was luck or not, the horse in the middle was headed straight ahead; the horse on the right was pulling off this way; and the horse on the left was pulling off that way. And that picture was so effective. You remember it? Do you....

STERN: I think so....

WILSON: Have you ever seen it? This is how a troika works. And I don't think it was such a serious problem at the U.N. It was too transparent.

STERN: On the Article 19 issue, which you mentioned earlier, Clayton Fritchey told me, for example, that he thought that it was an attempt by hardliners to humiliate the Russians and force them to perhaps even leave the United Nations. Do you see any truth at all in that?

WILSON: Well, Clayton Fritchey's an old friend of mine [laugh], but I don't agree with him on that. No. I think you maybe might call it legalistic. I guess there's something hard-linish about that. But as a political thing to embarrass the Soviets, I don't think so. I think this was, I think this was motivated by purists in the--probably literally in the legal office what you call the counselate--Office of the General Counsel.

STERN: Counsel, right.

WILSON: But, you know, I think we got through a--bear in mind that, as far as I know, all western conceptions of world peace turn around the notion of extending the rule of law. You know, we insisted on calling the U.N. a parliament of man and think of it as.... You know, and installing a kind of *Robert's Rules of Order*, parliamentary

procedures and so forth. And the people who worked in The League of Nations and on the U.N. and on various versions of world constitutions and so forth have had a fixation about the need to have enforcement powers in any workable international institution. Article 19 is the only article in the whole charter, as you well know, that had enforcement authority. It's the only tooth in an organization that was supposed to have teeth. And to invalidate that article would be to render this institution, which many people had great hopes for, literally toothless when it comes to enforcement. So, actually, the case, Article 19 was constitutionally pristine. It was legally impeccable. It was morally sound. The only thing wrong with it was that it was politically unfeasible. That's all. And it took us a long time to find that out. I think tactically we probably were wrong in.... Also, of course, it had to do with paying for peace-keeping operations....

STERN: Mainly for the Congo.

WILSON: ...and can--and if you can't finance peace-keeping operations, you can't have peace-keeping. That's the way it goes. What's more, it had to do with the General Assembly right to step in if the Security Council failed to deal with this. Therefore, it had to do with the integrity of the Uniting for Peace Resolution which the United States offered and supported. So, it was a very real issue. If we had planned on how to make sure that this Article 19 isn't eroded, we probably would have moved against the Haiti or somebody who was delinquent because they just hadn't paid their dues...

STERN: Right.

WILSON: ...and not let it come up where the culprit was the Soviet Union and therefore became a East-West issue and therefore became a superpower issue, an issue between the superpowers in a world that wants as little to do with the superpowers as they can manage. So that tactically there may have been a better way to go about it. I'm not saying that there aren't--that there weren't then people that would think the U.N. would be a pleasanter place to be without the Soviet Union. But, I am certainly, I was certainly, unaware of even a trace of political, ideological, great power politics in that position. I think it was a legal and a constitutional--and some people felt a moral position that just wouldn't hold up...

STERN: I think one...

WILSON: ...in the political arena.

STERN: Right. I think one point that tends to work against Fritchey's argument is, for example, the fact that the Russians were given the opportunity to pay voluntarily...

WILSON: Yes.

STERN:so as to get themselves off the hook.

WILSON: Oh, yes.

STERN: You know, that was....

WILSON: As a matter of fact, that.... Well this would have to be checked but now that you mention it I think that we didn't launch this, you know, right out of the blue. I think there probably were moves--and maybe a number of them, quiet ones to persuade the Soviets not to get into this bind and to encourage them to get off this collision course with Article 19, and they chose not to take advantage of it. I think I'm probably right about that now that you bring it up. So, I agree. I think that kind of washes out the anti-Soviet motivation for that position.

STERN: On another issue, in March of '62 Scoop Jackson delivered a rather strong anti-United Nations speech in the Senate. This was at the time when the Senate was considering a one-hundred million dollar U.N. bond issue. And I know Stevenson was very distressed about that and eventually delivered a strong speech. Do you remember whether you had any role in writing that speech on that issue? He was not happy about Jackson's position. He had support from people like Gale McGee [Gale William McGee], for example, who felt differently about the U.N.

WILSON: Yeah, I remember the Jackson speech. I remember the occasion. I probably did have something to do with it though I don't remember. I'm not sure whether that was the same time or whether it was the same occasion or whether another time. I think Jackson had a piece maybe in *Foreign Affairs* about how we should junk the U.N. and form a world organization of right-thinking nations.

STERN: I know that. I know what you're talking about. I don't think it's exactly the same time but it was certainly the same position he was on.

WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

STERN: Yeah. Stevenson tended, I gather from a number of sources, tended to see Jackson as perhaps allied with certain people in the administration who were unfriendly to Stevenson, and thus, tended to be a bit conspiratorial about it. At least that's what some people have indicated to me.

WILSON: Well, I don't know. I may have been.... I don't see anything surprising in that coming from Scoop Jackson....

STERN: Neither do I.

WILSON: I don't think he would need any conspiracy. All he would need is a, somebody on his staff who was a disillusioned U.N. buff to [Laugh] write a speech for

him, which he had. And I say, I may have been naive, but I didn't sense anything remotely close to a conspiracy. You know, I'm sure there are people who were uncomfortable with Adlai Stevenson. He was a tougher kind of a guy than some other people.

STERN: Right.

WILSON: And maybe Bobby was one of them. I don't know.

STERN: Yeah, some of the people who were close to that situation, George Ball [George W. Ball] for example, argues that Stevenson, particularly after the Cuban Missile Crisis and the incident involving Bartlett and Alsop, came to be really kind of alienated from the Kennedy Administration. To use his words, Stevenson became "fat, useless, and bored." He was not really committed anymore and especially...

WILSON: This is George Ball?

STERN: George Ball said that, yeah.

WILSON: Hmm. George was pretty close--he was closer to Stevenson than I was personally. But I don't know. I'm just kind of phrasemaking. He had trouble with his weight. [Laugh] Like a lot of people they had a terrible time keeping his weight down. He does get bored with details. And I think he often pretended to be bored when he wasn't.

STERN: Why do you say that? That's a curious point.

WILSON: Well, I guess that's nothing but a personal judgment. I guess I've sat around tables like this late at night with him editing speeches and seeing, you know, how much he cares about the things he's talking about. And I don't think he thought it... I don't know, maybe he wasn't quite as much on the same wave length as he would have liked to have been with some others, but I guess the.... Well, the last time I saw him was at the twentieth anniversary ceremony at the Opera House in San Francisco.

STERN: Shortly before he died.

WILSON: Yeah. And ah, he certainly was anything but bored at that time. He was.... Anyhow, he was interested enough to sit up till four-thirty or so in the morning the night before fiddling with his speech. Maybe that's a matter of personal pride in the quality of his prose, but also substantively, I think. And ah, you know, but I know that he talked to Eric Sevareid [Arnold Eric Sevareid] about just this time in Paris, and said he was thinking of resigning or something like that because he was bored and so forth. But I think he had just, or shortly after that, gave a roaring good speech at the UNESCO meeting. And I remember hearing somebody who.... Hadn't he just held a press conference in the London Embassy...

STERN: That's right.

WILSON: ...before he dropped dead? I remember somebody saying how really very good he was. I don't know. I think he just.... I think he resisted, you know, manifestations of enthusiasm. I think he probably suspected it was a little bit corny. And he wouldn't want to be corny. I think George's comment's a little hyperbolic.

STERN Okay. Did you go--just as a bit of a codicil on the Cuban Missile Crisis--did you have any role at all in the, and do you know what Stevenson's reaction was to the post-crisis meetings at the U.N., the fact that McCloy [John Jay McCloy] was sent to sort of assist him, if that's the right word. How did he react to...? Was that galling to him? In a sense, some people saw it as a vote of no confidence, or at least the administration wanted someone there to watch him. They thought he might not be tough enough and they sent McCloy there to help the negotiations with Zorin [Valerian A. Zorin] and Kuznetsov [Vasily Vasilyevich Kuznetsov]?

WILSON: Well, didn't this lead to the McCloy-Zorin principles?

STERN: Well, yes. That's right. Yeah. But that's not something you were directly.... Who said...? It's generally--most people don't realize, of course, that the Missile Crisis just didn't end that morning.

WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

STERN: The negotiations went on for weeks.

WILSON: Yeah.

STERN: [And] in some cases were pretty tough. Were you involved at all in those?

WILSON: I must not have been. No. I don't remember anything.

STERN: One other question that occurred to me was--you were talking earlier at the beginning about the fact that this relationship between I.O. and State, and in some sense the White House too, was a crazy relationship and would work because the people wanted it to work. And I wondered how did that change or did it change with the sudden change in presidents at the end of sixty-three. Did Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] coming in as president change your job? Did you see a change right away? Did things pretty much go on the same? How?

WILSON: I think the relationships went on very much the same. Although I'm talking about a very limited time. Let's see, when did--when was Kennedy's assassination?

STERN: November of '63.

WILSON: November of...

STERN: Sixty-three.

WILSON: Three. Well, I must have been there about a year and a half after that then.

STERN: I know, for example, that he called--Johnson called--Stevenson in and told him, "You will be my man in foreign affairs." And there are those people who say that Stevenson had a renewed sense of optimism that he might be more important than he had been in the Kennedy years. But apparently, that didn't work out with Johnson.

WILSON: Oh, oh, oh, alright. Well, I think it's relevant to recall that when Stevenson died Lyndon Johnson dragged Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] off the Supreme Court.

STERN: Court. Right.

WILSON: Ah, I'm sure, I'm sure Arthur Goldberg would be the first to say that being a justice in the Supreme Court was the highest thing he'd ever aspired to, and he had a life appointment. The point I'm trying to make is that when Lyndon Johnson took office he considered the U.S permanent representative to the United Nations to be such an important job from the U.S. point of view that he probably literally sat on Arthur Goldberg and twisted his arm to leave a job that he certainly didn't want to leave...

STERN: Right.

WILSON: ...to take that job. So, I recall [Inaudible] that said something about how Johnson looked at the U.N., which is more or less the way that it had been looked at up until that point. The next thing, I think, is that he probably didn't pay much attention to it for the overriding reason that he was getting deeper and deeper into Vietnam. And of course, people forget that--and most people would probably stamp their feet and deny it--but the U.S. made several efforts to get the U.N. into the Vietnam business or to turn that problem over to the Soviets. But you couldn't get it on the agenda. Um, but my.... I would say that between the time when Johnson came in and.... Well, when did Stevenson die?

STERN: July of '65. On Bastille Day.

WILSON: Yeah, well, I really left I think in August or September of '65. So, but I think the relationship between State, I.O., White House, U.S., U.N., rocked along about the way it had been with less and less interest probably from the White House as the president got more and more....

STERN: Yeah. You were still there then at the time, of course, of the so-called Utun Peace Initiative?

WILSON: I didn't recognize that in your notes. What does it refer to?

STERN: Ah, well, apparently, he had talked to Stevenson in late '64 about a meeting, possible meeting, between the United States and the North Vietnamese at Rangoon and Stevenson, it isn't entirely clear why, didn't.... Apparently, he pursued it as far as mentioning it to Rusk and Rusk seemed to say no, it'll never work. And I was wondering whether you had any insights...

WILSON: None at all.

STERN: ...as to why Stevenson didn't seem to push it? I know that Pedersen and Cleveland and others, Sisco too, told me that it was such a revelation and shock to them to find out that this thing was even happening, that they then rushed around trying to get Stevenson to say no. What was this all about. It was this serious, and he tended to not take it very seriously, which I think was probably true.

WILSON: Who, Stevenson?

STERN: Yeah, I think he's probably right.

WILSON: Mmm hmm.

STERN: I don't think Johnson at that point, nor Rusk, were ready really to negotiate. I think they still thought they could win, and therefore...

WILSON: I think that's probably right. But no, I can't add anything to that story.

STERN: Well, is there anything you would like to add, any other points about Stevenson or about the U.N. during that period, any personal observations of JFK, perhaps?

WILSON: About what?

STERN: About personal observations of the president, anything you might remember, any times you met him or things of that sort? [I'm] always looking for new anecdotes about the president if you have any.

WILSON: About Kennedy you mean?

STERN: Yes. Right.

WILSON: No, I don't think so. I think what this whole discussion, this whole subject, reminds me of though, and that is that for something like fifteen to twenty years after the Second World War, the U.S.A--and I thought consciously, deliberately, by intelligent choice--was following two simultaneous tracks of foreign policy. One was sloganized in the term "containment."

STERN: Mmm hmm.

WILSON: ...God knows which stood firm against the Soviets all around the world. If anybody can remember the Berlin Crises and so forth.... But from the--in the worst days of the Cold War and even through McCarthyite kind of hysteria, we were really, this was a holding action, we thought. I thought. I thought that's why I was there. Why you worked on something better. And it was nothing.... Nobody saw anything contradictory between having a strong air force on the one hand and building up food and agriculture. That's a poor example because we didn't do much for F.A.O. [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations]. But...

STERN: Back to your point.

WILSON: ...but basically, building up the institutions of the U.N. system as well as other forms of cooperation and collaboration. Somewhere along the line we lost the second thread. I'm not sure where it was. Maybe it was in Vietnam. But we now only have one mind. But, all I'm saying is that this discussion reminds me that I thought most of the American government was hard at work trying to build up an alternative system to Cold War and containment, and this seems to have been forgotten somewhere down along the line in the last five years.

STERN: Certainly in this administration.

WILSON: Huh? Yeah, it began to go in the Carter [James Earl Carter] Administration too, I think. Well....

STERN: Okay, let me just ask you one final question and that was: Do you, now and with the perspective of nineteen years, do you see President Kennedy and the Kennedy years differently than you did say immediately after the Kennedy years ended? Is your own assessment of Kennedy as president different? Has it changed in the way it was say ten or fifteen years ago? How do you see his place in history now?

WILSON: I don't think I've got anything very profound to say on that. I was certainly caught up in the enthusiasm of this sort of, you know, the young vigor of a bright, new administration. So I was biased to begin with. I think I'd been a little surprised later on to think in how many ways the Kennedy Administration was really not very educated.

STERN: Can you be a little more specific on that? What you mean by that?

WILSON: Yes, after making the following point which is that I'm still impressed, I think, with how fast John Kennedy learned.

STERN: Mm hmm.

WILSON: And the people around him learned. An example I would give you is the, that I guess it was probably on the '61 session of the General Assembly. Yup. Cleveland may have told you this story. But he was invited up to Hyannisport for a weekend.

STERN: Yeah, it was August of '61, right.

WILSON: Yeah, and the subject that weekend--these were always working things--the subject was the upcoming U.N. session. And they were out on a boat. Anyhow, let me tell the part I know. Harlan got hold of me and told me that he'd been to Hyannisport and that he and that they were talking about the U.N. session, an agenda, and the subject of disarmament, arms controls and disarmament, had come up. And Cleveland said that Kennedy said, "Isn't that just a lot of propaganda?" And he said, from then on, Stevenson and Kennedy passed each other. They never got into it contact. They got into a discussion with Stevenson kind of moralizing and Kennedy playing the realist, see, and not understanding each other. And Cleveland said, "I think the way to get them on the same wavelength is to write a speech for the General Assembly and clear it with the President."

STERN: Mm hmm.

WILSON: And we did that. And I guess first was Rusk. I guess Rusk cleared it with the president, then Stevenson cleared it and delivered it. And so they were talking about--from then on, they were talking about the same subject.

STERN: Mm hmm.

WILSON: They could talk about the arms control problem.

STERN: See they ca...

WILSON: What...

STERN: Go ahead.

WILSON: So, this, you know, one piece of paper serves an educational, a large educational function. But, that's a piece of paper that involves a policy speech by a U.S. representative. That's the way a lot of policy gets made. That's the way a lot of education takes place.

STERN: You feel Kennedy was educable then? That he was...

WILSON: I still think he was very educable. He learned very fast. Sure.

STERN: Any other points?

WILSON: I don't think so.

STERN: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Name List

A

Alsop, Stewart J. O., 15, 16, 20

B

Ball, George W., 20
Bartlett, Charles L., 15, 16, 20
Beichman, Arnold, 3

C

Carter, James Earl, 24
Cleveland, James Harlan, 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10,
11, 13, 16, 23, 25
Cleveland, Lois Burton, 2

F

Fritchey, Clayton, 8, 9, 17, 18

G

Goldberg, Arthur J., 22

H

Hammar skjöld, Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl,
17

J

Jackson, Henry M., 6, 19
Johnson, Lyndon B., 21, 22, 23

K

Kennedy, Robert F., 16, 17, 20
Khrushchev, Nikita S., 17
Kissinger, Henry A., 12
Klutznick, Philip M., 7
Krishna Menon, Vengalil Krishnan, 6
Kuznetsov, Vasily Vasilyevich, 21

M

McCloy, John Jay, 21
McGee, Gale William, 19
Morse, Wayne Lyman, 6, 7

R

Rusk, David Dean, 3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 23, 25

S

Salinger, Pierre E.G., 8, 9
Schlesinger, Arthur M., Sr., 3
Sevareid, Arnold Eric, 20
Stevenson, Adlai E., 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23,
25

Z

Zorin, Valerian A., 21