

Joseph M.A.H Luns Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/18/1965
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Joseph M.A.H. Luns (1911-2002) was the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands from 1956 to 1971. This interview focuses on the Kennedy administration's policy regarding the conflict between the Netherlands and Indonesia over New Guinea and John F. Kennedy's vision for an Atlantic Community, among other topics.

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Joseph M.A.H. Luns– JFK #1

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Oral History Project

with

Dr. Joseph M. A. H. Luns, Foreign Minister
The Netherlands

January 18, 1965

The Netherlands Embassy
Washington, D.C.

Murrey Marder, Diplomatic Correspondent,
The Washington Post

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARDER: Mr. Minister, when did you first come in
contact with the late President Kennedy?

LUNS: I first came into contact with the late
President in the beginning of '61 when he
was President about a month or so and when
I had with him a rather lengthy talk at
the White House.

MARDER: And, just as a preliminary, you had an
opportunity to see him a number of times

during the time he was President?

LUNS: In all, I saw the President eight times, but I had conversations with him four times, some rather lengthy.

MARDER: In that first conversation, Mr. Minister, what was the main subject that you talked about with the President?

LUNS: Well, at our meeting of early 1961, apart from European problems, the President and I discussed Far Eastern problems, especially the then burning question of Netherlands New Guinea which was claimed by Indonesia. At that moment I gave a long expose of the Netherlands position and of the reasons why we were very reluctant to hand over the territory to Indonesia and why we thought that the principle of self determination should apply to the people of that territory just as it applies to other territories. The President took note of my views and the

views of the Netherlands government, but, at that moment, no firm decision was reached, and it wasn't meant to be, only to inform the new President about the way things were.

MARDER: Was the President, in your judgment, fairly aware of the problems involved, or was he just beginning to acquaint himself with them?

LUNS: On the whole, I found him rather well informed, and I also found him rather sympathetic to the Netherlands views. He felt it was an important problem affecting the peace of Southeast Asia.

MARDER: I see. Well, would you like to explain, in your view, either at that conversation or subsequent conversations, your judgment of the way the United States handled the problem, particularly the President's role in it, what you approved of, and what you disapproved of, as frankly as you could?

LUNS: Well, you know that the relations between

Indonesia and the Netherlands was a problem with which the United States was very intimately and profoundly associated because of the role which the United States had played just after the war by promoting Indonesia's early independence and by having the Dutch quit earlier than it was, in the judgment of the Netherlands government, wise to do.

Of course, when President Kennedy was elected, Indonesia had been independent since 1949 so that the problem of independence had been settled. In the transfer of sovereignty Netherlands New Guinea, which was a completely different country with a different population compared to the rest of Indonesia and very backwards, however, was excluded. But President Sukarno of Indonesia had chosen to make that the bone of contention between the Netherlands and

Indonesia. The former American administrations, that is the administrations of President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower and President [Harry S.] Truman, had come around to the view that the principles of the United Nations and the moral principles of our modern world ought to apply also to the population of Netherlands New Guinea which is racially completely different from the people of the rest of what was formerly called the Netherlands East Indies. On New Guinea we had made some agreements with the American government, which the new Democratic administration of President Kennedy had promised to uphold.

So, at that first interview everything was, from our point of view, rather satisfactory; and I got the impression at that time that the President would follow the same line as his predecessor.

MARDER: I see. And then at some later point, there

was evidence of a basic disagreement in policy. Or was it simply the question of different approaches to carrying out the policy that was at issue between the Netherlands and the United States?

LUNS: No, I think at a certain moment the United States government, or rather the President of the United States, changed their views. And that came about at the beginning of 1962.

We had proposed in the General Assembly of the United Nations of 1961 that the territory should be placed under United Nations administration until the people of New Guinea would be able to express their own views: whether to become completely independent, whether to join Indonesia, whether to join with the other half of the island (administered by Australia) in one commonwealth, or whether to retain some special relation with The Netherlands.

We had already made the beginning of a system of self-government in the territory itself by organizing elections, by setting up a representative body, like a parliament, and so on. The United States Government strongly supported our proposals for a United Nations administration which, however, just failed to carry the two-thirds majority of the United Nations. And then at the end of '61 Indonesia began with its aggressive policy towards the territory and with threatening to go out for a full-scale war.

At the beginning of '62 the President's brother, the Attorney General, Mr. Robert Kennedy, went to Indonesia, and when he visited Holland on his return, it was obvious to me and my colleagues in the Cabinet that the President's brother had come around to the views of Sukarno -- that if only the United States supported

Sukarno and pressed the Dutch to relinquish the territory, with disregard of the principle of self-determination then Indonesia would become pro-Western, would follow Western policies, and so on and so forth.

It is my opinion that the President was swayed by his brother, Mr. Robert Kennedy.

MARDER: Well, if I can interrupt there just a moment, Mr. Minister. At that point, was it a matter of open dispute in terms of conversations between the Dutch government and Robert Kennedy? Was this subject openly faced as to a shift of positions by the United States, in your judgment?

LUNS: No, it was not. It was definitely not. We were given the impression that the United States Government was still upholding the policies pursued by the former government, especially the written agreement that the United States, if ever the Dutch should

become the subject of aggression in the Far East, would give us, in any case, all logistical support: while Mr. Dulles had always told me that the United States would not allow Indonesia, to say it colloquially, to grab New Guinea!

MARDER: I see.

LUNS: But, I sensed a difference in the attitude of the President, especially when on my way to Japan I had a long conversation with the President, at his request, in the White House. That was in April, 1962, when I felt not a hostility but a rather cool attitude when the suggestion was made to me that we should make a deal and that we should come to terms with Sukarno on his conditions. We refused to do so. It was a rather controversial exchange of views, at that moment, and I came back from it feeling rather despondent.

MARDER: Is there anything special that you can recall from that conversation, Mr. Minister, that would be pertinent historically? The conversation with the President that time?

LUNS: Well, at a certain moment I informed the President that the Netherlands government had decided to send two big fleet destroyers and two submarines through the Panama canal to New Guinea in order to strengthen our defenses there because, at that time, Indonesia was already attacking Dutch New Guinea with military infiltrations, and there had even been in January 1962 a naval engagement in which we sunk an Indonesian torpedo boat. And then the President merely replied --. "Oh, Mr. Minister," he said, "I will have to see Mr. [Robert S.] McNamara about that!"

Then, of course, I could not hide my feelings. I said to the President that I

suggested that there was no need for him to consult Mr. McNamara because no power on earth could prevent the Dutch fleet using the Panama canal, unless -- what I termed as being a rather remote possibility -- the Netherlands would declare war on the United States of America or unless the President would like to follow the example of Nasser and his repudiation of existing treaties and close the Panama canal to the Dutch! Then the President did thereupon not pursue that matter.

But that utterance, and other indications, gave me the conviction that there had been a change in the attitude of the President. although I want to say here that Mr. Rusk was always rather uneasy about the policies pursued by the President with regard to this particular problem.

WARDER: In that particular conversation, Mr. Luns,

I'd just like to go back over a couple of points in that because it could be of especial interest. Was this, then, the second conversation with the President, or had a conversation with the President been held . . .

LUNS: There had been one between the two conversations I have mentioned.

MARDER: I see. Was this particular conversation just the two of you, or was any one else present that you recall?

LUNS: There was present only the Netherlands Ambassador.

MARDER: To?

LUNS: To the United States. Dr. [J. H.] van Roijen.

MARDER: I see.

LUNS: I don't think there was anybody else present.

MARDER: And you said that the President did not pursue that particular avenue of the conversation?

LUNS: And the ships, I may say, did pass the Panama canal some weeks later!

MARDER: That was what I was about to ask you. Was there any particular negotiation or discussion which followed, or was it simply a normal transfer arrangement for the ships to go through? There was no subsequent discussion?

LUNS: No, No. The ships did get the usual clearance and they passed through.

And later on, when we sent about ten thousand men to the Far East, they did get permission, although without much enthusiasm, to stop over in American ports in the Pacific. But they were not allowed -- the troops -- to leave their ships while in port in American bases like Honolulu. But what we had expected was some support, diplomatically and logistically, from the United States.

Things went from bad to worse when, at

a given moment, we had further to reinforce our garrisons in New Guinea and we wanted to send the men quickly by air, our troop-carrying planes were denied the right to land in the United States territory which, to our mind, was in flat contradiction to the written agreement that we would get logistical support!

MARDER: I see. Now, the written agreement about logistical support goes back to what period?

LUNS: That was a secret arrangement which was never published (and which I only mention here because this interview will only be published in later years -- at the time of the Secretary of State, Mr. [John Foster] Dulles).

MARDER: I see. Would you recall about when during Secretary Dulles' tenure? Was that late?

LUNS: That was rather late. In the beginning, Mr. Dulles had his doubts about Dutch

policies, but later on he rallied around to our views. I was confident that the United States government were in agreement with with Dutch policies. We thought that we ought not have a repetition of appeasement policies and, further on, the Netherlands government always warned the United States government and the British government, and also the government of what later became Malaysia, which was then Malaya, that the next item on the list -- Sukarno's list, I mean, -- would be British Borneo or what later became Malaysia, as well as Portuguese Timor; and that we, in fact, were protecting those territories because we had decided to make a stand on the principles of international law, and on the Charter of the UN. First of all we did not want to repeat the mistakes our allies made prior to the last world war, that is to give in

to a dictator. Secondly, we refused to yield to the use of force. And, thirdly, we pledged not to transfer territory without the wishes of the inhabitants being ascertained. Doing each of these three things is not (and it was not) a good thing. You probably know how it all came about. Mr. [Ellsworth] Bunker, under instructions of the American government, came up with so-called compromise proposals. Thereupon the Indonesians stepped up their military pressure. We had to kill off some hundreds of their paratroopers; we took prisoners, scores of hundreds; but finally it became obvious that Indonesia was bent on an all-out aggression. And it was also obvious that we would stand all alone in the Far East without any American, British or Australian support. As the problem of the future of New Guinea was something which was on the fringe of our interest (although

in the center of our principles) the heavy pressure from the State Department finally made us sign on the fifteenth of August, nineteen hundred sixty-two, an agreement by which Indonesia undertook to organize -- how do you call it? -- a plebiscite before '69, and according to which the territory would be until May '63 under United Nations administration and then under the administration of Indonesia.

I must say that I consider that the agreement really was a disguised form of handing over the territory! And I said so to the President when I met him afterwards too. My last one conversation was in May, 1963.

I may, perhaps add that the New Guinea issue was by far not the only problem I discussed with President Kennedy, but that it was one of the things over which the

two countries differed. And I still feel that President Kennedy, who was a great President and a very idealistic man, and who had all the qualities of greatness in him, and whom I admired very much, made, in this particular issue, I may say, an error in judgment.

MARDER: Well, Mr. Minister, I'd like to go back a bit to fill in some spots in the historical record. And that is, in this, this secret agreement at the end of Mr. Dulles's tenure as Secretary of State, could you recall, and sketch out a bit, the scope of it?

LUNS: Well, it was really a technical agreement between the military people, and it had a code name. And under it, it was laid down that if ever the Netherlands would really be the subject of military aggression or pressure from Indonesia, then we would at

least get all required logistical support on the side of the United States.

And it is a matter of historical fact that the United States was giving, and continued giving, military supplies to Indonesia up to the last moment! There were American Hercules planes which dropped paratroopers, and some American civilian personnel serviced those planes in Indonesia while the conflict was raging between Indonesia and the Netherlands!

MARDER: Well, what I wasn't clear on was whether that particular agreement was drawn up in anticipation of trouble over New Guinea, or whether it . . .

LUNS: Yes, it was about New Guinea.

MARDER: It was specifically about New Guinea.

LUNS: It was specifically about New Guinea. It was indeed only about New Guinea. I remember very well that Mr. Dulles always told me

privately that the United States of America never would allow Indonesia, as I said before I think, to conquer the Western part of the island!

MARDER: Well, did you have other occasions in conversations with President Kennedy to refer back to that agreement?

LUNS: Quite a few times. And he always maintained that the United States' position had not really been changed. And, for political reasons, he tried to make me believe that Mr. Bunker's endeavors were for his own responsibility, but, of course, we were in no doubt about it that they were inspired by the United States government and that Mr. Bunker would never have taken that role if it hadn't been not only with the tacit approval but also with the strong support of the United States government. Indonesia, which was very reluctant to take hostile action

in the time of Mr. Dulles, had the impression, which I think was not wrong at all, that America was resigned to seeing New Guinea go to Indonesia. And I think, I may add, that the United States government, and especially the President, were taken in by the promises of the Indonesian President. They thought that by giving in on this point Indonesia then would become friendly to the West and would turn away from Russia and associating itself with China, and so on and so forth. The USA thought the sacrifice of the Dutch and of principles of international law were well worth it!

Still, I think that, with all due respect to the memory of a great President, that here, in perhaps not the most important matter but still in a matter important to the Netherlands and the world, the United States government, and especially the President,

took the wrong decision. Wrong politically, and wrong, I may say, morally.

MARDER: Well, then, I would think it might be worth asking, how might the situation have been played out according to your view of it?

LUNS: Well, I still believe, although it is difficult to speak about situations which have not arisen, that a stern warning by the United States of America to Indonesia that the United States of America would not allow Indonesia to invade Netherlands New Guinea and that America would come to the assistance of the Netherlands and, indirectly, to the assistance of Australia, to the assistance of Malaya too, (later Malaysia), would have had the effect that Indonesia would have given up its claim and that the Papuan population of New Guinea would have had its self-determination. We all knew what was going on, and yet I found that the President and his government felt that the United States of America should not oppose an Indonesian military conquest.

For fairness sake, I would like to add that the President, and Mr. Rusk too, assured me that they would not allow the Dutch civilian population to come to harm in an Indonesian attack; and that the United States, Mr. Rusk felt personally very strongly about it, would take measures in order to evacuate the Netherlands families with airplanes and ships under the protection of the American fleet. The Netherlands population was about fifteen thousand persons -- a little more perhaps [in the threatened territory.] But that was, of course, not a stand against aggression.

MARDER: I see. Historical ifs, of course, are always troublesome even to hypothesize about, but I was just wondering as a point of curiosity, do you think it would have been possible, under the situation as you are viewing it at that time, to have retained

New Guinea, or would there have had to have been some other disposition of it over a period of time?

LUNS: We were quite ready to transfer the territory to the United Nations. We were ready to accept any solution which would give to the population the right of self-determination. I repeat. It was not primarily a Dutch interest. It was principles we were defending. And we had made it clear in Holland and in the United Nations that it was not our wish that the Netherlands should remain there. We would have been willing to enter into all agreements which would have guaranteed a bona fide exercise of self-determination by the Papuans who, as I said, are completely different from the Indonesians, and who only by chance were administered by the same colonial administration were with a weak link

between the Governor in New Guinea and the Governor-general in Batavia, which is now called Djakarta. For practical reasons New Guinea formed part of the Dutch East Indies, but the Papuans were ruled and treated differently because it was such an entirely different type of country.

But you are quite right, it is very difficult to predict what would have happened in other circumstances. I am well aware of it.

MARDER: Is there anything else, Mr. Minister, apropos the New Guinea situation that you would like to note about your conversation with the President on that particular subject?

LUNS: Well, my last conversation with the late President took place some time in May, 1963. So half a year before that awful thing in Dallas. Then we had a sort of post mortem on the New Guinea question and the President

said he knew how I felt about it. But he thought that it might come out right. I contradicted him, and I maintained that it had been a wrong thing to do, but that, of course, it was no use to talk about spilt milk and as far as the future of the Papuans are concerned, we could only hope for the best!

I feel, too, that the President sensed that I held his brother responsible for the shift in policy. And I may say, too, that at that time during the New Guinea crisis the American officials in Holland were also trying -- well, undermine is perhaps too strong a word -- but to encourage the parliamentary opposition to the Dutch government in its New Guinea policy. It all was, rather I think, not a very happy chapter in the long history of Dutch-American relations.

But, in order that there should be no misunderstanding, let me say again that is only a part and, from the American point of view, a small part and not a very important part of the overall policies of President Kennedy which in Holland have been, and still are being, much admired. So I want to correct the feeling that here somebody is speaking who did not admire President Kennedy. I'm only regretting that in this particular issue the President followed policies which I think were politically not very wise and morally rather wrong.

MARDER: Perhaps we can go on now, then, to some other subjects. What would you say, Mr. Minister, was the next largest subject in point of discussion that you had with the President? Would it have been about the Atlantic Community policy?

LUNS: Indeed. That was what we discussed during

the four times I saw the President, or better, when I discussed political matters. In all I saw him eight times, and I had some conversation at a meal too. The President was very aware of the need of Europe and America coming as closely together as possible. And in his famous speech in '63 about the Atlantic Community which led to the so-called Kennedy Round, he expressed it in eloquent terms and I am happy to say that Netherlands views and American views, especially the views of the late President, were in this respect, completely identical. The late President and I also looked upon certain European policies, for instance the policies of France, with the same, well, let me say misgivings.

I know the President was very disturbed by the thought that the good relations, and

the close relationship, between the old continent and the United States of America and Canada would suffer, or would become less strong, because he rightly saw in that community the best guarantee for the preservation of the ideals for which the Western World stands and which are the most advanced ideas of our time: ideas of liberty, ideas of freedom, of democracy and of peaceful cooperation.

MARDER: What was your impression, or, if you could recall more specifically, did the President ever spell out to you in very specific terms exactly how he envisioned the operation of the partnership relation between Europe and North America?

LUNS: The President had in mind that the countries of Europe should unite as much as possible, and he was very much in favor of the Common Market opening up its organization to

to other countries, especially the United Kingdom. He further envisaged that between this wider European Community and the United States and Canada, there should be forged strong links politically, economically, and militarily. It was never the President's view that the sort of strong lead -- or you may, perhaps, call the "Hegemony" of America -- should be perpetuated. In my opinion, he was not at all eager to see Europe play a role of second fiddle.

MARDER: Well, this is what I wanted to ask about specifically, Mr. Minister. In this so-called Grand Design, as the President sometimes referred to it, did you, as the Foreign Minister of one of the smaller countries of Europe, have qualms that this in fact would, as President de Gaulle has so often said, result in American domination

of Europe? If not, why not?

LUNS: I want to make it quite clear that the Netherlands never felt that way. We were quite satisfied with the assurances of the President and of his government that a real partnership and not a sort of second place position was aimed at. And I may say, too, that in the Netherlands, although we had our disagreements with the United States of America dating from '45, '46, '47 and at the time of the independence of Indonesia in 1949, there always was strong pro-American feeling. And there still is.

MARDER: Yes.

LUNS: There is no feeling of antagonism whatsoever against the United States or the American people, and we see in that partnership, and we saw at the time, the best guarantee for preserving our way of life and for

preserving the dignity of our position and of the place of Europe in the whole world. So I can say that your question can be replied to in the complete negative.

MARDER: Now, in your conversations with the President, can you recall specifically his views about President de Gaulle? Did he believe, in your judgment, at any point, that it was possible to establish some modus vivendi with President de Gaulle, or did he regard that as hopeless?

LUNS: I think that he regarded it as possible. He was very strongly in favor of coming to some sort of agreement with France. And do bear in mind that when the assassin's bullet struck it was November '63, and a lot which has happened since had not yet happened then. The President, although I must say he found it a difficult proposition, was hopeful that finally he might come to

an understanding with France.

In the question of de Gaulle, he often asked what we Europeans thought about the French President. I always replied to him that the French President's memories of the way he had been treated during the war by Great Britain and America had, of course, something to do with his rigid attitude; that France, being a proud nation with a marvelous history and a great culture and with other fine assets, aspires to play the role which history, in the French view, wants France to play. But I, nevertheless, felt that the French general, the President -- I mean President de Gaulle -- did not quite see how much the world has changed and that France simply could not play the same role as a so much powerful and so much greater country like the United States of America. And,

furthermore, there were, of course, some basic differences of views.

MARDER: Some diplomats have said that one of the things advantageous to the way the President discussed his Grand Design, the partnership between Western Europe and North America, was that he never made it too specific. Others have criticized it on grounds that it was not specific enough. Those who have praised it on grounds that it was desirable to have it generalized said that it would have been disadvantageous to make it too specific because no one could foresee precisely how it would evolve. If it were made too specific, it would only open itself to contention. Those on the opposite side have said if it had been more specific, Western Europe could have gotten a clearer view of precisely what it is that the President had in mind.

Do you have any feeling on this particular topic, sir?

LUNS: It would be a criticism which, to my mind, would not be completely fair because at the moment when the President made his offer, his statement, there were so many things which had to be worked out that he could not be too specific. For instance, nobody knew how the Common Market would evolve. Everybody thought at that moment -- I said '63 but the speech was in '62, I think Everybody was confident at that moment that Great Britain would soon enter the Common Market. Nobody knew -- I, myself, didn't know too -- that France would veto in January '63 Great Britain's entry.

Then, there was the question of the economic relations between United States and Europe to be negotiated in the Kennedy

Round within the framework of the so-called GATT -- the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The negotiation still had to take place and even at this moment, January '65 they have not yet started.

So, I think the President's proposals could not be too specific. They had to be in general lines. And I regret, of course, that much of what the President had in view has not come about, but it is not the fault of the late President Kennedy nor of the present American administration!

MARDER: What about discussions with the President on the unification of Western Europe? Did you have anything special in your talks with him on this topic?

LUNS: Well, at that moment, we were having conversations with our five partners about some sort of political union,

and the Dutch were the most reluctant to go along with the then existing plans of France's President. To wit, to form a tight organizational system of the six countries of the Common Market, each country maintaining its national sovereignty without any supranational element, institutionalized and separated from the economic set-up in Brussels, and closed to other countries. We were willing to go along as long as it was fairly certain that Great Britain would become a member of the Common Market and of the new political organization, but when that was vetoed, we reverted to our original stand which was that a restricted group of not more than the six countries ought to be organized on the lines of integration and on supranational lines and open to third countries. In that respect the President expressed great

sympathy with Dutch policies and, although he did not want to say so publicly in order not to give the impression that the United States of America wanted to interfere in the affairs of Europe, I think he would have been happy if our ideas would have been accepted by the others.

HARDER: You said, Mr. Minister, your last conversation with the President was in May of '63. In January of '63 President de Gaulle, as you noted, barred British entry to the Common Market. I was wondering if in that May '63 conversation with the President you had any discussion which indicated his feelings as to whether the blocking of British entry to the Common Market, in his view, was a permanent obstacle or just a transitory development in his so-called Grand Design for Atlantic Community.

LUNS: My view is that the President was prepared to accept as unavoidable that for the time being there would not be a political union within Europe; and that his Grand Design ought to be realized step by step with Europe still divided in a number of separate national entities, each country speaking for itself -- Dutch voice, a Belgian one, a German one, British and a French one, etc. But he was still quite confident that progress could be made especially through the so-called Kennedy Round of negotiations on trade relations. We, of course, shared these hopes, but I can't help feeling that the President had been dismayed by what had happened in January in Europe, and I don't think that he was overly enthusiastic about the bilateral treaty between Germany and France although he saw very well that it

was a good thing that the hostility between these two powers was gradually being converted into friendship, although the method used was perhaps not completely to his liking.

Anyhow, he was still confident that we in Europe would come to some sort of an agreement and that we would advance on the way to the Atlantic partnership.

MARDER: Did you ever have occasion with the President, Mr. Minister, to discuss nuclear questions, or disarmament? I wanted to see if there were any other special subjects that you had opportunity to get into conversation with the President about.

LUNS: You know that in May '63 the question of what is now called the MLF [Multi-Lateral Force] or ANF was just coming up.

MARDER: Yes.

LUNS: And during that last talk in the second half of May '63 we talked about this MLF idea. At that moment the President hoped that an agreement could be reached before the end of the year -- before the end of '63.

MARDER: I see.

LUNS: And he hoped very much that the Netherlands would take part, first, in the study and then in a multi-lateral force. In the beginning of '63 the United States government had told us that taking part in the studies would mean a strong presumption that we would take part also in the force itself. On that assumption we felt we could not take part in the studies because we wanted to be free in our ultimate decision. Then in May when I had that talk with Mr. Kennedy, and later with Mr. Rusk and Mr. Ball, on the subject that precondition, if I may call it that way,

was dropped and we decided to take part in the study.

And, as you know, at this moment we are taking part also in the multinational experiment with your destroyer. It was then coming to ripeness, that idea of a multilateral atomic force, but he could not foresee that it would not be as easy as the American government thought at that moment.

MARDER: Was it your impression, at that time, on the subject of the MLF, that the President regarded it still, at that date, as only a possibility or would you say -- my impression from what you say is that he was putting his position somewhat more forcefully than that -- that he had by then come to the conclusion that this was the only working possibility?

LUNS: I think the President had come around to

the idea that some sort of MLF, or another sort of thing along the same lines, was the best solution in order to prevent proliferation of atomic weapons and in order to tie Europe stronger to America and in order to fight what you may call the renascent nationalism in Germany. It was especially with a view to the German problem that the President was so in favor of the MLF and he said so rather strongly.

MARDER: Mr. Minister, are there other points that you would like to note? Anything special that comes to your mind.

LUNS: Well, I may say what endeared the President to everybody who met him was his sense of humor and his wit and the way he talked about things even if he did not agree with you, even if it was on a painful subject. I remember coming to Washington

that last time. It was just after the Dutch elections and it was widely believed, also in the United States of America, that because of my New Guinea policies I would not come back in the new government and that my political career had been impaired. The President was rather astonished that I got a rather high record vote in the elections in Holland, and his first words were, "Well, Mr. Minister, I hope you can teach me how to win an election!" I give it as an example to show he was always open for the amusing sides of politics, and he had a sort of magnetism which few people have and which made him popular even when you disagreed with him!

MARDER: I'd like to ask you this, Mr. Minister. In these conversations with him you had opportunity to touch a number of large, complex topics. Would you say, in candor,

that the President had a generalized knowledge, a superficial knowledge of these things, or did you find him knowledgeable in substance and specifics? I would like you to say as much as you can about his diplomatic ability, his awareness of the substance of problems.

LUNS:

I would say his awareness of the substance of the problems and his general knowledge were, to my mind, rather profound. I found him well informed and very quick-witted; he saw a problem very quickly in its essentials; he was very good in seeing the weak points of one's argument; and he had studied the problems at hand rather thoroughly which, of course, having to deal with so many things, was rather an achievement. In other words, he was an impressive man. And I don't say this because of his tragic end. I would always have said so, having

known as Foreign Minister President Truman, President Eisenhower, and then President Kennedy -- and after him, President Johnson, who visited Holland about two weeks before he became President of the United States. He was, in short, to my mind, a remarkable President with a remarkable personality.

MARDER: Were there any other matters of bilateral interest between The Netherlands and the United States that caused any specific difficulties or complications that would shed any light, now, historically on the Kennedy years?

LUNS: I may say that there were, of course, difficulties on various specific questions between the two countries! When there are common interests there are always clashing interests, too. One of these problems was the air transport agreements

between the two countries. We thought that, being the biggest foreign customer of American planes and having the oldest airline in the world and having asked, as the first of all foreign airlines, to have a line to the West Coast, it was not very fair of the United States to refuse only to the Dutch these landing rights in San Francisco. At the same time these commercial rights were given to the former enemies like Japan and Italy and Germany! But I don't want to overemphasize these difficulties because there will always be these sort of things. And being a relatively small country, geographically anyhow, I understand that, of course, there may be considerations why some bigger countries get from time to time a better treatment. It remains a discrimination against smaller countries

all the same!

MARDER: Would that, then, Mr. Minister, about cover from your present recollection the specific points that you would like to make of potential historic interest about the President?

LUNS: I think so. I am very happy to have been given the opportunity to say something.

I may add that the last time I saw President Kennedy was in September '63 when he visited the United Nations with Mrs. Kennedy. The various Ministers and heads of delegations were presented to them, and we had a little chat. I remember the President laughingly patting me on the shoulder while he said to his wife "You know, Jacqueline, this Mr. Luns is a most formidable Minister!" [laughter] And, of course, I was pleased, and we laughed a little. That was the last time

I saw the President alive. Finally, I may add that he is one of the men for whom I will continue to have very great admiration.

MARDER: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Minister.