

**Robert W. Komer Oral History Interview – JFK#4, 10/31/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Robert W. Komer

**Interviewer:** Elizabeth Farmer

**Date of Interview:** October 31, 1964

**Length:** 22 pages

**Biographical Note**

Komer was a senior staff member of the National Security Council from 1961 through 1965. In this interview Komer discusses President John F. Kennedy's [JFK] interest in Indonesia and Iran; U.S.-Indonesian relations; the Indian Ocean and Iran task forces; JFK's contact with the Iranian Shah; Pakistani-Afghani disputes; U.S. aid to Afghanistan; Komer's attempt to revamp the military aid program; McGeorge Bundy and Walt W. Rostow as President JFK's advisers; and JFK's direct contact with a select few National Security staff, among other issues.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed April 18, 1973, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

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

concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

Robert W. Komer, recorded interview by Elizabeth Farmer, October 31, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

File

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of Robert W. Komer

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, Robert W. Komer of Falls Church, Virginia, do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted on June 18, 1964; July 16, 1964; September 3, 1964; October 31, 1964; December 22, 1969; January 30, 1970 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interview is to be closed to general research for a period of 10 years, or until my death, whichever is the later.
2. Researchers may not listen to the tape for 10 years, or until my death, whichever is the later. The tape may be used only for background. Researchers may not cite, paraphrase or quote therefrom.
3. I retain literary property rights to the interview for a period of 10 years, or until my death, whichever is the later, at which time the literary property rights shall be assigned to the United States Government.
4. Copying of the interview transcript or portions thereof, except as needed to maintain an adequate number of research copies available in the Kennedy Library, is expressly prohibited, and copies may not be disseminated outside the Library.
5. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

*Robert W. Komer*

Robert W. Komer

*4/9/73*

Date

*James B. Roade*  
Archivist of the United States

*April 18, 1973*

Date

Robert W. Komer – JFK #4  
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	John F. Kennedy's [JFK] interest in Indonesia
2	U.S.-Indonesian relations
3	The Malaysia confrontation
5	The Indian Ocean task force
7	Forming the Iran task force
9	JFK's interest in Iran and contact with the Shah, including negotiations
12	Pakistani-Afghani disputes and problems with U.S. aid to Afghanistan
15	Komer attempts to revamp the military aid program
16	Komer encounters resistance to his plan for military aid
17	McGeorge Bundy and Walt W. Rostow advise President JFK
20	JFK's maintains direct contact with a select few of the National Security staff to get information without having to wait for the State Department

KOMER INTERVIEWS FOR KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY

I. (18 June 1964)

JFK and the Third World, pp. 1-8  
General Approach  
Kennedy's Characteristics

II. (16 July 1964)

Trying to Do Business with Nasser, pp. 1-9  
UAR and the Congo, 1961  
Action Program: PL 480  
Nasser visit?  
High Point, Summer 1962  
Yemen Intervenes  
The Yemen Affair -- "Komer's War," pp. 9-26  
Rationale for U.S. Policy  
Differing British View  
Evolution of Saudi-UAR Disengagement Proposal  
UAR Air Raids on Saudi Frontier  
"On a collision course"

III. (3 September 1964)

More on Yemen, Nasser, and Faisal, pp. 1-5  
The U.S. Air Squadron  
Bunder Mission  
The West Irian Settlement, pp. 5-8  
Kennedy and Counter-Insurgency, pp. 8-13  
The Special Group C-I  
Police Programs  
India-Pakistan, pp. 13-21  
Ayub, Nehru, and Galbraith  
Countering Soviet MIGs to India  
Chicom Border Attack on India, Sep 1962  
Kashmir Again  
Military Aid to India

IV. (31 October 1964)

Massaging Sukarno, pp. 1-5  
    Indonesian Economic Stabilization  
    Malaysia Confrontation  
Indian Ocean Task Force, pp. 5-7  
Kennedy and the Shah, pp. 7-11  
The Pushtunistan Dispute, pp. 12-15  
Revamping the Military Aid Program, pp. 15-17  
The Bundy State Department, pp. 17-22

V. (22 December 1969)

The Bundy State Department and How it Served  
    The President - 1  
The Modus Operandi - 11  
Using Intelligence - 15  
More on Modus Operandi - 19  
Relations with Other Key Officials - 31  
More Yet on Modus Operandi - 47  
Comments on Policy: Vietnam, Korea,  
    ROK-Japanese Settlement - 55  
Relations with Key U.S. Ambassadors - 61  
Handling Arab-Israeli Issues - 69  
Counter-insurgency - 95  
Envoi - 100

VI. (30 January 1970)

India-Pakistan Issues, pp. 1-5  
    Karachi/Bokaro Steel Mills  
    Aid to India  
    Multilateral Aid  
    India and Common Market  
Foreign Aid and AID, pp. 5-8  
    Clay Committee  
    AID Effectiveness  
    State Department and Operating Programs  
The Subcontinent and Middle East Oil, pp. 9-13  
    Komer-Rostow Mission to India, 1963  
    Oil and U.S. Policy  
    USSR and Oil  
    Marketing Oil  
Kennedy and African Issues, pp. 13-15  
    Congo  
    Asian and African Diplomats in D.C.

VI. cont.

- More on How the White House Operated, pp. 15-18
  - Appointments with JFK
  - Briefing JFK for Foreign Visitors
- White House-State Relations, pp. 18-23
  - JFK, Rusk & Galbraith
  - The State Team for India
  - Goa
  - Stevenson, JFK, Bundy and Rusk
- More on India-Pakistan, pp. 24-28
  - Long-term Aid to India and Pakistan
- The Indian Ocean Again - US/UK Relations, pp. 28-35
  - The Indian Ocean Task Force
  - US Navy Interests
  - India-Pakistan
- More on Africa, pp. 35-36

Fourth Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT KOMER

October 31, 1964

by

Elizabeth Farmer

For the John F. Kennedy Library

What I thought I would do is just to pick up some cats and dogs of relatively minor items to illustrate my consistent proposition that Kennedy was interested in everything that went on, usually had constructive ideas on it, got involved in just the widest possible variety of situations.

MASSAGING SUKARNO

Where I want to pick up the Indonesia story is after we got the West New Guinea thing settled, and the question then arose of how we should capitalize on our success.

It has long been an idiosyncrasy of mine that in our preoccupation with other key countries in the world, we have tended to write off Indonesia. This has partly been because of Sukarno's irresponsibility. But here's a country of a hundred million people, infinitively rich and highly strategic in very valuable real estate, oil, tin, rubber, etc. Somehow, since it never made much of a mark on the world scene, we tended to neglect it. One of the things about Kennedy that impressed me was that Kennedy was the first president who saw Indonesia as one of the potentially important countries in the Afro-Asian world. I think this



was an intangible which gained us a great deal with the Indonesian government. Sukarno being the vain man that he is, the Indonesians themselves being terribly prideful, the fact that Kennedy took a personal interest in Indonesia and its problems and was the first U.S. President to do so was an intangible benefit of real size.

At any rate, to return to what we did right after New Guinea, the Indonesians were in one of their periodic balance of payments crises. I wrote a memo to the President in August 1962 saying that we ought to capitalize on the New Guinea settlement and suggesting to him one of the standard Prime Minister's prayers; i.e., a NSAM to State, Defense, and AID saying, "Let's move toward a new and favorable relationship with Indonesia now that they are grateful to us for having brought about the New Guinea settlement. Let's invest a little money in this place, which desperately needs it." The President signed it the very next day, NSAM 179, to put the word out to the town.

By the middle of October we got back a reply from State recommending a stabilization program, roll over of debts, and in essence giving a pretty reasonable response. The President okayed that. He said, "Go ahead with the emergency actions, but let's hold off on the larger investment till we see." In other words, break it up into two packages.

We did this, and at the end of the year, the President approved the first big gesture, a seventeen million dollar loan for raw materials and spare parts to get an existing plant going again. We designed this specifically as a political gesture and to give them an incentive to continue with the stabilization program. The President was in one of his economizing moods, I guess, in the aftermath of the AID defeat of 1962, and he was very cautious about investing too much, but he said, "Let's do the things that have to be done now, and then if this works, we'll push our luck."

In 1963 we got into another little fracas with the Indonesians. The contracts for Stanvac and Caltex, which were the two U.S. oil companies (there was also the British company of Shell involved) ran out or were up for renegotiation. I forget the exact circumstances, but the Indos were talking in terms of nationalization. Well, you can imagine what this would have done to our enterprise of cementing relations with the Indos. So we jumped in, and the President sent out Wilson Wyatt, as a special emissary. I must say this idea of sending out special emissaries, though it's an anathema to Ellis Briggs and the old line Foreign Service, has the special cachet needed to get these things across. Wyatt did a whale of a good job in Tokyo with Sukarno. They worked out an agreement which was perfectly satisfactory to the oil companies, and they have been terribly grateful to us ever since. Now, depending on future relations with Indonesians, these new contracts may go sour too. But at any rate, it was a very useful thing to do, and it removed an irritant from our relations in business out there.

Just after this, the Malaysian thing began heating up. It was apparent that the stabilization gambit--a gambit to turn Indonesia inward and facing up to its economic difficulty by first going through the stabilization wringer and then going to a development program a la India, Pakistan, etc.--was just not going to work out. Instead, Sukarno decided to run another foreign diversion against Malaysia, which had been cooking along. Yet the thing that impresses me is that the President was always very resistant to too many useless, punitive measures involving aid. One of his last decisions, on the 19th of November, was to approve sixty thousand tons of PL 480 rice. This didn't cost us anything, of course, so he found it a useful gesture of the carrot and stick variety. Along with the sticks we were applying on Malaysia, let's have a few carrots.

Of course, the Malaysian affair really got hot after the President's assassination, so he was not heavily involved in that, but he did, during the formative phases, do a number of things. I recall that in early 1963, he made a very favorable statement about Malaysia at a press conference. His real view, which was powerfully influenced by Averell Harriman, was that it was not a sure thing at all that Malaysia was going to be a success. It was a thin hope. But we all felt that there was probably no better alternative to work out the balance between Malays and Chinese in Malaya than to add on the Borneo territories as an additional make-weight. The President's chief concern in this situation was that the British should not create some sort of an artificial state and then not invest enough in it (militarily, politically and economically) to make it go, with the net result that it would again be one of those problems that was laid on our plate. So the whole purpose of his policy on Malaysia was not to overengage the United States but to push the British to make the necessary effort so that it would not end up as a salvage operation for us a la Greece, etc. He discussed this matter with Macmillan on a number of occasions.

I note here we didn't really begin stepping into the Malaysian situation until after Malaysia was formed in, I guess, mid-September of 1963. Then Sukarno threatened to break all relations with Malaysia and started talking about confrontation, etc. The President did weigh in immediately then. He sent a message to Sukarno urging everybody to stand down and let the art of statesmanship perform its function.

The Filipinos at that time were sort of veering from the Malaysian side to the Indonesian side because of the dispute over their claim to a part of Borneo. Kennedy weighed in then, with [Diosdado] Macapagal, saying, "Look, recognize Malaysia, and don't give the Indos the feeling they've got you and I, through you, perhaps us." He went to work on Macmillan, urging Macmillan to give a little room to Sukarno, to stand down and allow the Tunku to go to a summit meeting, which was being suggested at that time. There was quite an exchange in those days between late September and early October with Macmillan. My own sense

is that this intervention of Kennedy's did produce a cooling-off period which prevented the initial formation of Malaysia from triggering something. Of course, November was the end of his active role in the affair. Ever since then, we have been pursuing the same policy, which has been to buy time to keep the parties talking, etc., etc., but it was a continuation of the Kennedy initiative.

#### INDIAN OCEAN TASK FORCE

Let me turn now to the next thing on the list--a very brief one. It was what we finally began calling the Indian Ocean task force. The President had always had in the back of his mind, as I got it, reservations as to the value of aircraft carriers in nuclear war. Well, as we looked at the declining utility of carriers as our own missile and polaris forces grew up, some of us began simultaneously looking at the problem of the real vacuum of U.S. power between Suez and Singapore. We had the Seventh Fleet in the Pacific, the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. We were fully deployed in support of NATO. But in the whole wide Afro-Asian arc from Suez to the Far East, we had nothing, the reason being that this was an admittedly British area of responsibility. But the British were, in effect, withdrawing from this area. The power that they were able to deploy there after World War II was extremely limited.

FARMER:       What did they have in the Indian Ocean?

KOMER:        A couple of Commando carriers based at Singapore, a cruiser, a few frigates--not very much at all.

              Another factor came along, which was the Chi Com attack on India. Ken Galbraith had the idea that if the Chi Coms attacked with planes on the plain of Assam, the Indians would need far more air support than they had available. A very good way for us to position air, both to provide a psychological boost to Indian morale and, if necessary, to intervene ourselves, would be to bring a U.S. carrier into the Bay of Bengal. We had an exchange of messages on this. The President was all in favor of the proposition.

Then came the Chi Com truce and their unilateral withdrawal (I think the 20th of November--I forget precisely) which meant the effective end of hostilities. The minute Ken Galbraith got that word, he sent in a message saying, "I guess we don't need that carrier any more." The Navy and Defense Department were extremely reluctant to send it but we had finally gotten it on its way down from Japan. So we issued the order to turn around. I very quickly argued that we should send it anyway, that we might as well get the benefit of the boost to Indian morale and show the Indians the type of power which was at their disposal, particularly since there was now no likelihood that we would get involved in a shooting war. This was all the more reason to do it. But by the time Ken Galbraith rethought the problem and came back in, we had turned the carrier around back to its normal area, so that never came off.

This did give a powerful fillip, however, to the developing idea that we needed more power in the Indian Ocean area and that the logical sort was a carrier task force for several reasons. First, it's not dependent on home bases; it has the whole high seas to move around in, which means that it can give you multiple uses. It can be of use to Africa on the one side, the Persian Gulf area, in defense of Iran, in defense of Pakistan, in defense of India, in defense of Burma, all the way around to the Malaysia-Indonesia area, so it gave infinite flexibility. Second, if carriers were becoming surplus to the nuclear war in NATO, we would have available forces for conventional application that would not involve building new carriers. So all these strands came together, and we suggested to the President maybe what we ought to move toward was establishing a U.S. naval presence with some combat deterrent power in the Indian Ocean area. He jumped on this one with enthusiasm and wrote a letter to McNamara, I think in July 1963. If I recall correctly, I drafted the letter in which the President said, "Our military presence in the area from Suez to Singapore is exceedingly light, and maybe we ought to have a small carrier task force there, if we could do it in a way which would not require extensive bases or gold flow or stuff like that."

This started off a lot of thinking and movement in the Pentagon. The Air Force was violently opposed to a new area of naval power. McNamara wasn't terribly enthusiastic about the proposition, as I recall, but the first thing we decided to do was to temporarily send a carrier squadron into the Indian Ocean which would cruise through the area, sort of show the flag and get people used to it. We figured this would take the flak, that this would be just a temporary deployment. Then the idea was that we would gradually build this up. The cruise of the Indian Ocean task force really didn't come off until early 1964 because then the Concord Squadron came along--yes, it was in mid-February 1964 we sent a carrier and a couple of destroyers through. Then we decided on the Navy recommended cruise of a nuclear-powered task force which took place mostly in August 1964. That was the way it went. They just came back to Norfolk, you remember, in early September, and President Johnson was thinking of going down there. At any rate, while the first movement toward the establishment of the U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean didn't take place until after Kennedy's death, the whole genesis of the idea was his. It was a White House initiative, and it is still being argued against, I understand, over in the Department of Defense, the Air Force, and elsewhere.

#### KENNEDY AND THE SHAH

Let me move on from that to Kennedy and the Shah, or how we created a modern revolutionary monarch from the very model of a modern Major General. This one started very early in the Kennedy Administration, when we had some riots in Teheran which seemed to underline the fragility of the Shah's rule. It happened, of course, back in the period when we were setting up "task forces" to do everything. This was a great worry to the Department of State, which essentially saw task forces as a dilution of its authority and means of White House interference in its normal conduct of foreign policy. In May 1961, after the riots, the President directed that we form an Iran task force, and I became the White House man on it. [Kenneth R.] Ken Hansen of the Bureau of the Budget, who had been out in Iran as head of the Harvard economic mission, was also on it. We had a great run for our money

because we posed the basic question. It was essentially that the Shah is never going to be able to hold on to his power and, as a result, we will have chaos unless we get the modernizing revolution going faster, and this must become the primary focus of our policy. This business of just accepting Iran as it is, of giving the Shah military baksheesh every time he gets worried about a Russian threat, or an Afghan threat, or an Egyptian threat, or something like that, was just simply buying us time but not building anything. As a result, the Iranian situation was slowly deteriorating.

The task force came up with what I think is the first real action program toward Iran with any substance that the United States government has ever had. Before that, we simply had no coherent rationale for our policy. I think we ran it through the NSC, because of complaints about not enough NSC meetings. The President warmly endorsed it, gave instructions to Rostow that we were to follow through to make sure that this plan got actually carried out.

Back in those halcyon days, we were terribly discouraged by the slow pace of the execution by State and the embassy and the country team. I recall writing a memo to the President in August saying, essentially, we are not doing enough to support the new [Ali] Amini reformist government that the Shah had finally put in, and urging that we do a little forward contingency planning. This eventuated in the President asking Mac Bundy to write the Secretary of State saying, "Look, the President is concerned over the loss of momentum in Iran of the Amini regime. Let's have an additional report of the Iran task force (which was highly offensive to State, I might say). We want State's recommendations to the ambassador for further action." Of course, we got a status report and this needled the Department to come up with a few useful things. I remember commenting to Bundy that we got more interesting ideas than useful movement as a result of this follow-up memorandum citing the President's worries. We had gotten into the proceeding pretty far in three months in trying to needle them ourselves.

The President, I must say, always kept a pretty healthy interest in the Iranian situation. He never explained why, but he was always good for a letter to the Shah and followed through magnificently on the question of reform. Once we got the Shah onto the wicket of running "a white revolution instead of a red one"--I think that was Amini's phrase, anyhow the Shah borrowed it very quickly--Kennedy must have written the Shah about a dozen times, or there was an exchange of about a dozen letters and messages between them, in which the President always emphasized this reform theme. The Shah's theme was always a new external threat: the Russians are giving more aid to the Afghans; I'm worried about the Afghans in Pushtunistan; I'm worried about the Kurds; I need more military equipment. The President would always reply, "You can depend on us. The United States strategic umbrella in effect is still strong and firm, but your problem is developing an internal consensus in Iran, modernizing the country. The real threat to you is internal, not external," etc. You know, it's interesting as a case in--let's call it psychological massage. But it worked: the indication of the personal Kennedy interest, the pleasant repetition of the refrain. The President always complimented him on the new reform measures, like the land reform that the Shah finally borrowed from Amini and carried through. These things had their effect, and I think that now any observer would call Iran one of the bright spots in the Middle East. The country is moving. The Shah is still worried about external threats and manufactures them when they don't exist. He still asks for military assistance and is still spending an unconscionable amount of his oil revenues on military toys which we are willing to sell him. If we don't, he will buy them from somewhere else. But essentially we got some movement.

When we invited the Shah--he came, of course, in April 1962 and the President gave him a big massage--all of these themes were laid out with highly complimentary references to the revolutionary monarch, etc. But I recall that just after the Shah's visit, the President asked me what new things are we planning to do in Iran, how are we following up effectively on this visit. This is one of the things he always did. He kept these matters in his mind, and he followed through on them, though of course I ginned up a lot



of new action. Among other things, we got Ed Mason to go out to Iran to look at the Iranian economic situation, which was not a wholly satisfactory one. I think this had an unusual effect on the Iranians because Mason in his usual fashion talked very candidly to them.

Another exercise the President was involved in that turned out to be extremely useful was our selling the Shah on a "new look" military establishment. We finally made a deal with him whereby if he would cut his forces from about 200,000 inefficient troops down to about 160,000 more efficient troops, thus relieving the local budget burden somewhat and preventing the creeping rise of his military budget (which was, of course, expensive), we would undertake to provide him a five-year forward commitment in military aid, including a number of items for which he was desperately eager.

Julius Holmes played a stellar role in this. He was the first ambassador, so far one of the really few ambassadors, who was ever willing to take a new look at an existing major program. As a result, I think Iran has become one of our more successful exercises in how both to cut down our military aid and improve the efficiency of the operation. It's turned out very well.

We have just had recently another step in this direction, whereby in return for the Shah's agreeing to buy only so much equipment, we have agreed to give him a combined credit sales and grant military aid program which reduces the cost to the U.S. taxpayer substantially and results in a major gold flow to us, and which still gives us real control over the Iranian military buildup.

Amini, who was the first reform Prime Minister, resigned in July of 1962. This led to a great deal of concern on our part. It looked like it might be the end of the reform period. The President wrote the Shah saying he hoped this would not mean the end of the reform period and conveying to him as a bonus the details of this multi-year MAP program which I have described to you, which I think was a useful psychological input at that time. Then the President, who was always eager to use the Vice President on these

exercises in personal diplomacy sent the Vice President on a tour to the Middle East with Iran bulking large in mind. The VP went out there, repeated the whole reform theme, etc., etc., as a useful thing to do.

After about August 1962 Iran sort of receded into the background partly because things seemed to be going fairly well. The land reform program was started in January 1963, and the President, I remember, sent the Shah a congratulatory message sometime in January on getting it started so successfully--I think they had a referendum or something.

I see that in March 1963, we suggested that our leader put out a new NSAM saying, "Look, boys, let's review the Iranian situation and see if there isn't more we ought to be doing." We got another long report from the State Department; I recall thinking it was terrible and suggesting that we send it back and get a better answer. We did. The next episode was another letter from the Shah in June 1963, asking for more military hardware. At this time there was this new Arab Federation, which, by the way, did not add up to a hill of beans. It fell apart before it ever got created. The President, replied to this in July saying, "Look, there is no real threat from the Arab Federation," again urging real economic reform as the best medicine for Iran. That was about the last major involvement of the President in the Iranian business until November 1963.

We had finally got the ambassador trained to the point where he was suggesting Presidential letters to the Shah instead of always worrying about White House interference. State produced a draft in response to his suggestion that the Shah come over here. (I note that I thought it was lousy, too gooey among other things and didn't really face up to. . . . It was a letter without substance). We re-wrote it over here. The President's last initiative to the Shah was a letter on the 6th of November, once again playing the same theme and reminding the Shah that the Soviet backdown in the Cuba missile crisis had real implications for Iran in that it showed that we did have strategic superiority. So the Shah didn't have to worry so much. Enough of Iran. Let us move next door.

## THE PUSHTUNISTAN DISPUTE

Another minor league exercise in mediation among our friends. This one is a hardy perennial: the Pak-Afghan dispute over Pushtunistan which breaks out periodically in a big argument over Afghan transit rights through Karachi and up through the passes into Afghanistan (the normal Afghan route for most of their foreign trade). An awful lot of trade has since been shifted over the past several years to go through the U.S.S.R. now that new roads and railroads have been built between Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan. Here again, in the President's first year in office, we had the second Pak-Afghan transit dispute blowing up, and I think at the beginning of September of 1961, the Afghans broke diplomatic relations with Pakistan. It was a self blockade. They refused, in effect, to import their goods through Pakistan. Of course, all U.S. economic aid going to Afghanistan went through Pakistan. We were not going to send it through the U.S.S.R., so this meant, in effect, that Afghanistan was denying itself U.S. aid as a means of pressure on us to get the Paks to restore the Afghan consulates and other things which were the proximate cause of the dispute.

Kennedy jumped right in on this one--this was back in the halcyon days, too--and sent out [Livingston T.] Libby Merchant as a personal Presidential emissary. Livvy, who is rather an old hand, went around to see Daud [Mohammed Daud Khan] and [Mohammed Yusuf] Naim and then went down to see Ayub. He came back within a month and said, "None of these guys have any give. There is really no prospect for successful mediation at this point. I suggest you let me go back to my post and forget about this thing." In effect, the United States cannot compromise this dispute; both sides are too set in their ways to permit any immediate prospect of a settlement.

So we laid off. But the Afghans kept coming back at us to weigh in with our Pak allies. The alternative Kabul was pressing was to have us ship our aid goods through Iran or the U.S.S.R. The U.S.S.R. was naturally out, and Iran was a very long and expensive route. Kennedy's view was why should we have to pay tribute to the Afghans by paying double for transporting our aid to them when they had denied themselves this aid by closing the normal route through Pakistan.

As a result of our coming back at them with this argument at Kennedy's request, there was a temporary lifting of the self-imposed blockade in early 1962; it lasted about eight weeks. But by the end of the eight weeks, despite our suggestion, they started it again. One of the most ridiculous, self-defeating disputes I've ever seen.

We got the Shah involved in a mediation effort and constantly built up his ego by suggesting that since he was a friend of both parties, he was the ideal man to settle this thing. This thing lasted almost two and a half years. The Shah finally was the one who served as the deus ex machina to bring the two parties together when they at last got bored with the dispute.

When Ayub came over in September 1962 this was the main subject of discussion, (just before, the Chi Com attack on India. If that had happened, of course, there would have been no other subject of discussion). Ayub showed very little give in talking with the President; he was extremely eloquent. They met up in Newport, you may recall; it was the second Ayub visit, not the first one with the Mount Vernon soiree. Then when the GA [U.N. General Assembly] began, the President saw Naim, who was the Afghan Foreign Minister and one of the two key people in the Afghan regime at the time. He made a strong pitch to Naim about the self-defeating nature of the Afghan policy. No progress there either, a very frustrating thing.

The President kept up his interest in this; we kept suggesting various initiatives, moves and countermoves. He conducted a fair correspondence with King Zahir [Muhammad Zahir Shah]. We decided we were going to get nowhere with Naim and Daud, the strong men, so we had better go behind their backs and work on the King directly. This was a slow starting gambit, but actually it turned out rather well. The King finally got rid of Daud and Naim and installed a new Cabinet, which unfroze the dispute. As I recall, the new Cabinet came in early 1963, and the first thing they said to us was, "Don't push us too hard. If the new Cabinet immediately compromises this dispute, it will look as though we are just cowards and we will get kicked right out again. But if you will give us six months or so, we will work this

thing out." By golly, they did.

The President wrote King Zahir a third time in June 1963, urging that the dispute which was slowly being compromised by our efforts and the Shah's mediation efforts be finally worked out. They were arguing over a communique or something like that. This time we had invited King Zahir to come to the United States, and the pitch that the President used was essentially, "We are looking forward very much to seeing you in September. I hope we are not going to have to spend all our time talking about this dispute." The King got the hint in no uncertain terms, and they finally did work that out by the middle of 1963.

Kennedy sent out the usual congratulations, he was a great one for that. The number of congratulatory messages we sent exceeds the number of mediatory messages, unfortunately. But that was the end of this little episode. They restored diplomatic relations, as I recall, a few months thereafter.

Then came King Zahir's visit here which was quite significant. The President made a great impression on him. Here was a man whom we had thought more or less of a figure-head, but who had, in fact, come forward and taken control. He had disposed of his cousin Daud, and Daud's half-brother Naim. Zahir, in effect decided that he was going to run a modernizing revolution that was going to make the country tick and bring Afghanistan out of the 19th Century into the 20th. That's been going on ever since, and the impression that Kennedy made on him was one of the indelible things that had a great deal to do with his deciding to take this reformist tack and to move on into the new Constitution (which was just promulgated, I think, a couple of months ago. It was finally approved by their Grand National Assembly in August or September of this year). Zahir became so taken with his reception here that he did make clear to the President that Afghanistan fully understood the problems it had being nestled up so close to Mother Russia and being so dependent on Russia as a result of massive Soviet aid. (Afghanistan has been about the fifth or sixth largest Soviet aid client. For a little country that is quite a lot).

He made very clear that he did not intend to get into too much of a position of dependence on the U.S.S.R. and that he thought modernization of Afghanistan was the best way of really giving Afghanistan something solid. He did not show a great deal of give on the Pushtunistan issue, as I recall, but he sort of made implicitly clear that they wouldn't overdo it on Pushtunistan. So much for Afghanistan. We had more to do with Afghanistan in the three years 1961, 1962, 1963 than in the preceding 150 years.

#### MILITARY AID PROGRAM

Just one more item, Elizabeth. This comes under the heading of what I at least regard as a failure. At least it is one issue that I failed to sell the President on. It was the whole question of a new look at our military aid program. You recall that we had a task force before the New Frontier came in on economic aid. There was a big Presidential board and then we had a major reorganization with [Henry R.] Harry Labouisse and then Fowler Hamilton. We tried to give a whole new look and in a sense tried a developmental focus in the economic aid program, etc. Very soon after coming on board, I sold Mac and Walt Rostow very quickly on a parallel re-examination of the military aid program, largely on the ground that in so many of these key countries we were providing both military and economic aid, and they were getting in each other's way. These were mostly underdeveloped countries; few of them could afford the huge military burden, even with us providing all the equipment. They had to provide local currency for pay, quarters, and uniforms, and food, etc. So my argument was that you're only looking at half the problem if you revamp economic aid without revamping military aid too. The President was intellectually receptive to this argument but never put the same amount of steam into it or behind it that he did behind the economic aid turnaround because the military program was not as vulnerable on Capitol Hill, at least not at that time. It has since become just as vulnerable, if not more so.

At any rate, we got the President's okay to set up an informal inter-agency steering group with myself, Hansen, and [William P.] Bill Bundy and [Jeffrey C.] Jeff Kitchen over at State to look at the military aid programs of the key countries where about 70 per cent of the money went. South Korea, the Chi Nats [Nationalist Chinese], Pakistan, Greece, Turkey--these are the places where we spend all the military aid money and where we also have big economic aid programs. After a great hassle and wrangle over a period of about three months, we came up with what I thought was an extremely good report. We put it to the President in January 1962, along with a very strong recommendation from me endorsed by Mac that nothing would happen unless he personally intervened and said, "Now look, I want some of the recommendations of this report carried out--force cuts, cutting back on MAP, shifting of a certain amount of this over into economic assistance to the amount feasible. . . ." The general thrust of the report was that in all of these countries the real threat was more of a subversive internal one from their failure to make a go of it as a nation, rather than the threat of overt Chi Com or Soviet attack. The Korea-type threat to these countries was just not the main problem from our point of view. The President bought this completely, but Rusk and McNamara were lukewarm about the exercise. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were flatly opposed to any cuts of any kind in military assistance at this time--you know the standard demurrer.

The NSC meeting which we had on this in January 1962 was a disappointment to me because the President listened to all the arguments but did not really engage himself. We drafted the best thing afterward that we could in the form of a NSAM saying, "We want further studies on these problems. Our bias ought to be on the side of revamping and cutting." But it was not a very powerful document. In essence the stalling tactics of McNamara and Rusk carried the day.

I might say that after that the President got more interested in these things, and so did Rusk and McNamara, so that we were moving toward a re-examination of our posture in Korea, withdrawal of some U.S. forces and a cut-back in ROK [Republic of Korea] forces. With the GRC

[government of the Republic of China], the problem was more complicated because most of the GRC excess was on the off-shore islands and was basically a political question. Greece and Turkey we never got very far with, except the net effect of the progressive congressional cuts in MAP plus the war in Vietnam and Laos, which has absorbed so high a proportion of what we do get that there has, in effect, been a series of cutbacks in the military aid program very similar to those that the steering group recommended. The trouble is that we have made these cuts without having any kind of a policy, without any kind of a program, without any advance planning, so we have had all the disadvantages of having to cut, without any of the advantages of doing it sensibly. This is very discouraging, and we are mounting right now another look at these key military aid programs.

FARMER: You felt that this was a lost opportunity then.

KOMER: Yes, I felt that this was one of the few cases where I was urging the President and Mac, who had a great rapport with the President, that if they were fully signed on, we would get somewhere. Essentially, I think the President and Mac backed off a bit because of the strong resistance from the two key guys (which was a little discouraging because I think the two key guys did not focus on this problem as they should have). This is one of the cases where they accepted the advice of their subordinates who were great practitioners of conventional wisdom.

#### THE BUNDY STATE DEPARTMENT

That covers most of the minor items I wanted to talk about, but I would like to end up with a few remarks on what to me was a perfectly fascinating device for the execution of Presidential responsibility in the field of foreign affairs--the Bundy staff itself. I think its relationship to the President and the way he used it is a fascinating chapter in the use of Presidential power because it was a rather unique thing.



I served as Bob Amory's deputy on the NSC Planning Board, and for long periods I was the chief NSC liaison fellow in CIA. So I had about four years of watching how the old NSC process, Planning Board, the OCB [Operations Coordinating Board], etc., worked. It was all form, no substance--to put it crudely. But when we had a new President come in who was determined himself to place his strong imprint on foreign policy, he had to have a mechanism to assist him in this process. Kennedy did not have great admiration for the existing bureaucracy--either the Pentagon or the State Department bureaucracy--and he naturally tended to want to have around him a little group of people whom he could use as his own instruments in a number of ways. This was where Bundy and Rostow came in. Now I don't know what the President said to Bundy and Rostow when he brought them in, but I'm sure he must have said something along these lines in order to command talent like that.

The second thing that he did on Bundy and Rostow's recommendation was, in effect, to abolish the entire NSC-OCB machinery. A quite elaborate machinery had been set up in this building of some very practiced bureaucrats who were great people for putting out pieces of paper and staffing out inter-agency concurrence. I don't want to blame the staff too much because essentially the failure of the old NSC-OCB system was the failure of the great departments to play the game. The State Department always resented this NSC structure as an infringement on its prerogative as primus inter pares in the field of foreign policy. Therefore, State always took a very negative view toward inter-agency collaboration in this framework. Now, if you had had a strong President in Eisenhower with a strong Special Assistant in Gordon Gray or his predecessors, you would really have gotten a lot more movement out of the NSC staff structure. Back in the days when Bobby Cutler was in, during the halcyon days of the Eisenhower Administration during 1953-54, then the NSC structure was really jumping because old Bobby Cutler was a guy who really liked to stir up the animals and had some very strong ideas--a lot of them half-baked I might say--about what ought to be done. But that was a period when Cutler at least was trying to get Presidential government going. At any rate, the last four years, the time when I was involved, it was a shadow organization.

To shift to the way the President used the Bundy operation, let me just mention when Mac and Walt recruited me, I wrote them a little memorandum (in January just after the Inauguration) saying, "You fellows are going to be taking over as Gordon Gray's successors. I served three or four years in that old machinery which was a period of colossal and increasing frustration. I would like to tell you what I think are the dozen or so key problems the New Frontier has to get going on in the field of foreign and security policy." Then I just gave them a three or four line paragraph about each: reaching a new and tolerable relationship with Nasser; a new look at the military aid program; re-vamping of the foreign economic aid approach; doing something with our Indian enterprise; things like that. The others were fairly standard ones.

By golly, within a week of my sending this memo to Mac Bundy and to Walt, I got a call from them saying, "Listen, we think this is interesting, would you come over and talk about it?" So I came over, and the first thing they said to me was, "We agree so completely with what you said in your memo there's no point in talking about that. What do you think we ought to do with the OCB?" I said, "Chuck it." We talked a little bit about the structure one needed to put the President's imprint on policy. After about half an hour of extremely friendly talk on this subject, they said, "How would you like to join us in this enterprise?" I said, "Just tell me when." "How soon can you come over?" "Twenty-four hours." It didn't happen quite that fast. But I resigned and came over.

When I did, Mac Bundy made very clear that he was going to have two or three people who would be the President's men in specific areas of responsibility. We sort of broadly blocked the thing out. In effect, I would be operating not just as an assistant to him but as the President's guy in certain policy areas. It turned out to be the Middle East only as a matter of circumstance because the Iranian thing that I mentioned earlier happened to come up and got tossed my way. Then Middle East things naturally began falling that way, and I ended up with the Middle East. This was not the basis on which I was brought over, nor did I have any pretensions.

The manner and style of the President's use of the Bundy operation, particularly of Mac and Walt and Carl Kaysen, but the rest of us, too, was never to have more than five or six people in the thing. We had maybe twenty people in all, but a lot of them were just normal liaison types of one kind or another, or doing security jobs, or special details. The inner groups was four, five, or six, seldom more. At the moment, it is about four again.

Kennedy used us in, I would say, three rather well-defined ways, possibly four. One was as eyes and ears. He wanted to have his own people reporting to him on what was interesting and important, since knowledge is of course the key. You cannot depend on the departments and agencies to keep you fully clued on everything, and particularly on things that they don't want you to know about in the first place until they have made up their own minds as to what they think the situation is. Then they will tell you what is going on.

So Kennedy established right from the outset (and Bundy followed through on that pronto), that he wanted a complete flow of raw information over here; that we were going to get all of the State cables; that we were going to get all of the interesting intelligence; that this was going to come over here raw, and there was going to be a little operation which would have at its fingertips at any time of the day or night the latest word as it came in from the field. It's hard to overestimate the importance of this, because when you have the same information at your disposal as the people that you are talking to have they can't give you a song and dance.

Moreover, our operation was so slim and so quick that we would have the information, and the President would get the information, before the Secretary of State. The key things would go over to the Secretary just as fast as they would go to the President, but some of the other things that we got on to and said, "Gee, these are interesting," are things that the Secretary of State normally can't keep up with. Kennedy showed incredible quickness and absolute faithfulness in keeping up with intelligence and having Bundy interrupt him at all times of the day or night with the latest poop.

He kept up with things that other senior officials around town didn't have time for. It was amazing. So this eyes and ears function was very important.

There's a second aspect of this eye and ears business, which was this small group of guys going out and circulating around town as the President's men and talking to middle level and top level officials and getting an informal idea of what differing views and attitudes were going around town. We operated as sort of a shadow network which clued the President on what the bidding was before a formal, inter-departmentally cleared recommendation got up to him. In many cases, he was able to move long before the bureaucracy had finally gotten around to telling him how he ought to move. Where speed was of the essence, this was extremely important.

FARMER: Surely this must have produced a different kind of decision, a different kind of resolution.

KOMER: Precisely, and I was going to get on to that, too.

I think the second vitally important aspect was that the President had sources of independent judgment and recommendation on what each issue was all about, what ought to be done about it, from a little group of people in whom he had confidence--in other words, sort of a double check. He had open to him, in other words, second-guessing by a little group of people who would say, "This is essentially what this problem means to us, Mr. President. The State Department doesn't agree. The Defense Department takes yet a third position. But as we look at the thing, Mr. President, this is how it nets out to us. Here is what we think ought to be done about it." Of course, this was done in a majority of cases orally through Bundy or Rostow, in some cases in writing or orally through us. Take for an example the Yemen affair. In effect, I would be the action officer for the President--or in the Iranian affair or in a number of others. The fact that he had an independent little staff operation which was interpreting, analysing, second-guessing, double-checking the flow as it came in made his ability to conduct Presidential decision-making at the top level doubly effective.

The third point, and this one I can make very brief because it's a perfectly obvious one, is the follow-through. The purpose the OCB was supposed to serve, was to make sure that the policy once decided upon gets carried out--which is one of the hardest things in the world to do. That, of course, was also a major function of the Bundy operation. It was to keep tabs on things and see that the cables went out and the responses were satisfactory, and that when the policy wasn't being executed, the President knew about it so he could give another prod. You remember how many times I said that we went back at him and said, "Mr. President, we are not doing the things in Iran that we are supposed to do. Let's give them another needle," etc. This is kind of an informal way of doing the job, and I will argue that it just was an order of magnitude more effective than the OCB machinery, primarily because of the instincts of the President and the talent of the people like Bundy, Rostow, and Kaysen that he had around him, also because of the nature of the organism which he set up, which was a group of the President's men who were technically not Presidential appointees but who belonged to the National Security Council staff. This was merely a budgetary device. Since NSC already had its own budget, it was sacrosanct. So instead of adding people to the White House Staff, Bundy carried them all over here. But, in fact, Kennedy made very clear we were his men, we operated for him, we had direct contact with him. This gave us the power to command the kind of results that he wanted--a fascinating exercise in a Presidential staff technique, which, insofar as I know, has been unique in the history of the Presidency. Enough said.