

FOREWORD

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Punctuation:

The following conventions are used throughout the transcripts:

- * * * To indicate a pause in the recording while the speaker listens to the person speaking at the other end of the telephone. Used when only one side of a telephone conversation is recorded.
- [?] When the transcriber is not certain of what is said on the recording.
- To indicate a sentence which the speaker trails off without completing it.
- . . . When a speaker is interrupted before a sentence is completed.
- _____ To indicate the speaker's emphasis.
- [] Used to enclose editorial comments of the transcriber such as */Meeting appears to be breaking up/* or */Several speakers speak at once and none of the words are intelligible./*

Names:

The first time a name is mentioned, the full name is provided whenever it is known. "JFK" and "RFK" are used for President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, respectively. When the identity of a speaker is unknown, "Speaker?" is used; when the identification of a speaker is uncertain, a question mark follows the name. The heading of each transcript gives the names of all participants listed in the President's Appointment Books as scheduled to attend the meeting.

Preparation:

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the audiovisual research room in 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.

Papers of John F. Kennedy

Presidential Recordings

Dictabelts

Dictabelt 18A

Conversation #4: President Kennedy and W. Averell Harriman

April 10, 1963

President: Hello.

Gov. Harriman: Hello.

President: Oh, Governor.

Gov. Harriman: Yes, sir.

President: I will be over there talking to the press today, and I suppose we are going to get some questions on Laos. The situation doesn't look very good, does it?

Gov. Harriman: No, the only good thing about it is that Souvanna [Phouma] has made his public statement condemning the Pathet Lao for attacking his forces. That gives us a reason for now going directly to the . . . to Moscow.

President: Yeah.

Gov. Harriman: It looks very bad, and a . . . but a . . . his taking a firm stand is the first time he has done it in public. He has done it privately before.

President: When did he put out the statement?

Gov. Harriman: Yesterday; I'll get that for you.

President: Is it a . . . The communist want to drive the Kong Le out of the, uh.

Gov. Harriman: They have been trying to do that from the beginning. You see, in the beginning, they tried to persuade him and tried to subvert his people . . .

President: Um.

Gov. Harriman: . . . and he was rather a . . . they were rather unsuccessful in that. They had this fellow, Colonel [inaudible] and a relatively few. Then they tried to starve him out and it was due to our getting the stuff to him--a . . . Phoumi's doings rather, and Souvanna that he held out, and then they directly attacked him. And I think the Pathet Lao aided and abetted by the Vietnam because they have got them in the background. A certain number of them which give them the strength. The Pathet Lao probably couldn't stand up to the Kong Le people if they weren't supported.

President: Yeah, yeah.

Gov. Harriman: Now, we have no indications yet--Ed Rice is here with me. (Ed, we have no indication that Kong Le is giving up at all yet, have we?) (No.)

Gov. Harriman: He has retreated out to Plaines des Jarres to a smaller airfield about eight miles west, which has kept his forces pretty well intact.

President: What do you think? Are we going to the Russians or is anybody going to the Russians?

Gov. Harriman: I think we ought to. I am having a talk with Roger Hilsman a little bit later as to what kind of approach. He's been thinking about recommending to you that I go myself to point out to Mr. K [Khrushchev] that this is really a serious situation.

President: Yeah. Yeah.

Gov. Harriman: But this morning I think they will get to you the background of what to say, but of course, fundamentally, if we can call it a partition of Laos de facto it's about the best we ever hoped for, but this is a setback, and it will be in direct confrontation now between the Pathet Lao and Phoumi's forces, which would be much better if we had a cushion of Kong Le in between.

President: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What do you think I might say about it. You want to ask somebody over there to get me up a response to a question?

Gov. Harriman: Yes, I certainly will. Well, undoubtedly they are getting it up. Mike and Roger Hilsman are working on it now.

President: Ok, fine.

Mr. Harriman: I will get it over to you.

President: Thank you.