Carl Kaysen Oral History Interview – JFK #1, 7/11/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Carl Kaysen
Interviewer: Joseph E. O'Connor
Date of Interview: July 11, 1966
Place of Interview: Cambridge, MA
Length: 106 pp.

Biographical Note
Kaysen was a professor at Harvard University (1946-1966); Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (1961-1963); and director at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (1966-1976). In this interview Kaysen discusses his role as Deputy Special Assistant, strategic retaliatory forces and retaliatory missile defense, the Congo, Civil Defense, balance of payments, and the Basic National Security Policy [BNSP], among other issues.

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Suggested Citation
Carl Kaysen, recorded interview by Joseph E. O'Connor, July 11, 1966, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Carl Kaysen
JFK #1

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First Oral History Interview

With

CARL KAYSEN

July 11, 1966

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mr. Kaysen, when did you first get to know John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

KAYSEN: I met him several times during the period when he was a senator. Once or twice he appeared at, talked to a meeting of the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] and I met him then. I met him around here because he was an overseer. But on none of these occasions was it more than a casual acquaintance. In '59 when then Senator Kennedy decided he was going to start running

for president in some overt way. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], among other people, started to organize discussion groups in the academic community. The purpose of these groups was to prepare papers on various subjects. I at that time got involved in a group here. The group met with Sorensen a number of times; and had telephone conversations with him; produced papers on various subjects. This group had two meetings at which Senator Kennedy came. And I do remember very vividly one of them. This took place at a luncheon at the Harvard Club on a Sunday. There were about fifteen or sixteen people present. Each of us was asked to speak for three or four minutes on what he thought was the most important problem in his area and suggestions as to what views the Senator might take on it. The group covered everything from people talking

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about conservation to people talking about the nuclear test ban treaty. All of us were absolutely tremendously impressed with the speed at which Kennedy picked up whatever was said and the penetrating quality of the questions he asked. I was going to leave in '59 or '60 – went away, abroad – so that I didn't get involved in the campaign effort as many of my friends and colleagues did. I really had no further contact with the Senator, president-elect and President until I went to Washington.

I went to Washington primarily because Bundy [McGeorge Bundy], whom I knew very well and had known well for fifteen or sixteen years asked me to come and work with him. When I did come to Washington and as soon as I came down here in fact, I was introduced or re-introduced to the President, and we discussed a little of what I

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was going to do with him.

O'CONNOR: What you did, essentially, I guess was Bundy's choice rather than the President's.

KAYSEN: Well, I think, to put it in a little perspective, I started out working on problems that Bundy thought I could do something about that were important. But as I stayed there I got into some independent relations with the President, and I would say – let's say December '61 when I actually go the title of Deputy Special Assistant – I was really working for Bundy. By a year later I was working for the President and there were a variety of issues on which I would deal with him directly and keep Bundy informed. This was fairly typical of the White House staff organization in that there wasn't a strict line organization. People dealt with each other as they thought the business at hand required. It was perfectly clear that

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in a variety of different ways Bundy, Sorensen, O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] were more senior than other people, but this didn't prevent people from sort of saying what they thought. It was relatively easy to talk to the President. It was perfectly easy to give him pieces of paper which he, you know, would look at if he were interested and tell Evelyn [Evelyn N. Lincoln] to throw away if he weren't.

O'CONNOR: People have talked a number of times about the advantages of this sort of informal atmosphere and how it encourages freer discussion, freer advice. Do you see any disadvantages? I've heard one in particular. There was a break in the communications between the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], or at least the CIA intelligence machinery, and the National Security staff during most of 1961. Would you agree with that?

KAYSEN: Well, I probably would be in a poor position

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to speak about that. I didn't have too much to do with the CIA and CIA problems during 1961 except for one area, in which I worked very deeply. And that as the question of our estimates of Russian missile strength. I got extremely deeply into that because one of the things that I did – and I did it each of the three years in which the President was in office, including the very last year – was to prepare a comment on the key items in the military budget submission. The Secretary of Defense prepared a series of memoranda for the President on the major items in the military budget. The first memorandum, usually in some ways the most important one, was on the strategic retaliatory force. In '62 for example, there was a memorandum on the problem of the anti-missile missiles which was very important. There was a memorandum in '61but it didn't have the

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same significance. At one point there was a memorandum, I guess it was '63, on carrier task forces and nuclear powered carriers. But in general these things came over. The procedure for discussion of these memoranda was something like this. Three sets of people in the White House staff dealt with it but very closely. One was Bundy, and I was the man who dealt with him. The other was Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner] and Wiesner and an assistant of his named Spurgeon Keeny dealt with him. The third was the Budget, and this was done first by Dave Bell [David E. Bell] and then by Kermit Gordon, and in particular by a staff man in the military – the head of the military section of the Bureau of the Budget – Willis Shapley. And when the memorandum first came over Keeny, Wiesner, Schapley – thank you – would talk about them.

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And we would talk about them not only among ourselves, but with Alain Enthoven in the Pentagon, who usually was one of the major drafters of them, with Adam Yarmolinsky, with Charlie Hitch [Charles J. Hitch], occasionally, when it was relevant, with Harold Brown, from the army. Then after we had looked at them there would be a preliminary vis à vis meeting – this did not happen in '61. We were aware of the lack of it in '61. It happened in '62 – at which on one side would be McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric], Brown, Hitch, and Hogan, perhaps Yarmolinsky; nonmilitary, the civilian high command of the Pentagon. The other side of the table would be Bundy, Sorensen, Wiesner, myself, a couple of other Budget Bureau people, Keeny. And we would simply go over the issues – oh, and Bell, very important, Bell – and we'd go over the issues. We'd indicate what we

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thought the problems were; what our comments were. Then there were generally two discussions in the Cabinet Room with the President – one or two. There was a meeting in Hyannis Port on Thanksgiving Day on this, there was a meeting in Hyannis Port on Thanksgiving Day in '62 – that's '61 and '62. At twelve o'clock – this is just a personal note – at twelve o'clock on November 22, 1963 we were having such a meeting in McNamara's conference room. A sergeant came in and said something in McNamara's ear. He went out. He came back. His face was whiter than your shirt. What everybody instantly thought – and I talked to several people after this – is, "There's been a nuclear attack," from the way he looked. And he called Bundy. Bundy went out and they just disappeared. We didn't see them again.

O'CONNOR: They didn't explain what…

KAYSEN: In a few minutes the same sergeant came in and whispered something in Ros Gilpatric's ear, and Ros announced what had happened.

O'CONNOR: By the way, do you have an ashtray here?

KAYSEN: Yes, there it is. It's not much of one, but that will do…
Now, this is a bit of a digression but it may be of some interest. Now, there were generally a couple of meetings, one – as the schedule went – one was in Washington and one was in Hyannis Port, at which these issues would be discussed with the President. One would be without the military – the one in Hyannis Port. Max Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] and Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer] were there in '61, and by '62 I suppose Max was Chief of Staff, and he was there. And then usually at Palm Beach around Christmas time the President would have a meeting with the Secretary of Defense and the Chiefs and discuss these

issues. And, as far as I know, none of the staff people were there. I certainly was never there, Bundy was never there, and I do not think Sorensen was ever there. I think this was strictly the President and the Chiefs with McNamara.

Now let me get back to your question. In '61 of course the big issue in the military budget, and it was a big new decision that the President was making which really would decide our policy in this for his administration – and in fact it has decided it for his administration and really for this term of Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] Administration – what the size of the strategic retaliatory forces should be. You remember the President had taken some emergency decisions in May on the budget and put a substantial extra sum into this. The question is what

belonged here in the program. And there was indeed a lot of interesting discussion about this. The White House staff people, which really mean Wiesner and myself convincing Bundy and Bell that we were right, believed that the estimates that McNamara put down were too high, that we didn't need this force. And there was a lot of discussion about what our estimates of the Soviet force were, and so on. I would say that the President certainly agreed with this, and McNamara may well have.

O'CONNOR: They were his estimates, weren't they?

KAYSEN: I know that. What McNamara thought was that these figures were the lowest figures that he could consistently support and carry the military along with him. And I think it was really very substantial on that

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basis that the issue was decided. I want to treat this as especially sensitive information which has to be dealt with however McNamara's own stuff is dealt with because again I'm convinced this is an honest report of the situation. This is my estimate of McNamara's mind and his own estimate of his mind is more accurate. I remember that just before the December meeting in the Cabinet Room in '61 Sorensen and I went out to Andrews – it was miserable, snowy, rainy day – met the President with the latest version of this memorandum that I'd been working on, and we rode back with him. He read it and he talked about it. And this is one of the reasons why I say I think that Kennedy shared the judgment that these were unnecessarily high in a military sense. Let me put it this way.

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I think by '61 Kennedy had already come to the conclusion that McNamara had come to by '63, namely that "superiority" really didn't mean anything and the difference between superiority and parity or near parity was not significant; that you could never get a force that would do anything much for you beyond deterrence. Now, if one were to read the rhetoric of the DOD [Department of Defense] memoranda from '61 through '63, the three memoranda I'm familiar with, it's perfectly clear that the rhetoric was moving in the direction of the arguments that were made in the White House in '61. Now, the numbers didn't change, and of course you could say the real decision was the numbers, not the rhetoric, but I think this is an interesting sidelight.

Let me make a general comment. Here I will get back to your question. Let me make a general

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comment here which is that on several issues Kennedy clearly had in mind and acted on a principle which might be this, that, "When a Cabinet officer with and operating responsibility persists in a recommendation I'm almost always going to follow that. If my staff tells me that this recommendation's wrong I'll let them have their best go at convincing this fellow, but if

they can't convince him and he pushes ahead I'm essentially going to back him because I have to operate that way. If I'm not going to back him I'm going to fire him." Now, I do not think this principle ever applied to the Secretary of the State, mainly because the Secretary of the State never stood for anything. But it clearly applied to McNamara and it clearly applied to Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon],

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there were the sharpest conflicts between staff advice and Cabinet advice.

Now, to get back to your question. As far as '61 goes, you would have to get Bundy and Bromely Smith to talk on it. However, by the end of '61 and especially in '62 and '63 I was dealing with the agency very, very frequently – not as much as Bundy, but very frequently in great detail. And I would say that certainly by this time the problem simply didn't exist. We had very good relations with both the deputy directory in charge of intelligence, Cline [Ray S. Cline]; the deputy director in charge of plans, Helms [Richard M. Helms]. We could and did readily pick up the phone and talk to them. They could and did readily pick up the phone and talk to us. McCone [John A. McCone] was a very, very frequent visitor to the White House. I sometimes thought – this may be simply

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a wrong impression – that if one looked at the calendar one would find McCone with more private calls than any other single high level member of the government outside the immediate staff.

O'CONNOR: There was no specific liaison man, between the National Security Council and the CIA, for example, was there?

KAYSEN: Bundy.

O'CONNOR: I was under the impression that there was a man under him.

KAYSEN: Oh sure, there were several people…

O'CONNOR: Cooper [Chester L. Cooper] was one name that was given to me.

KAYSEN: But that I think is just incorrect. There were Chester Cooper and Bromley Smith who was responsible for the flow of information and there was a group of CIA and DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] men who came over every morning with the President's daily intelligence briefing which was given to Bundy,

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and either Bundy or Ted Clifton [Chester V. Clifton], the President's military aid, would brief the President. This group usually came in early in the morning, about 8:30, and met

with Smith and Clifton and went over the day's intelligence. If there were any questions, and so on. But I would think that the important point is not that there was – Cooper did originally come as a low-level liaison man or a middle-level liaison man – but I think the important point was that the high level contact was good. You know, there was the special group with some NSC [National Security Council] directive number – 6612 I think it was called – which controlled the activities of the CIA. Are you aware of this?

O'CONNOR: Yes.

KAYSEN: Now, this met once a week. Bundy was on it. The chairman of it was Max Taylor while he was in

the White House. I suppose Bundy became chairman after Max went over to the Chiefs. Ros Gilpatric and either, usually Alex Johnson [U. Alexis Johnson], but sometimes Averell Harriman from the State Department would come over; John McCone and two or three of his people; somebody from the Joint Staff, the secretary, the Chairman's special assistant, or the Director of the Joint Staffs. And that was once a week. And as I say the daily flow on the telephone was very good, and whenever there was any particular hot item whoever was dealing with it would be dealing with the agency people reasonably currently. When I was dealing with the Congo I was talking to the Agency people on Africa pretty much all the time.

O'CONNOR: The memoranda that you wrote in connection with the retaliatory missile defense, things of this sort, was the direction of these

memoranda toward cutting down on our…

KAYSEN: Well, it was toward not building up as much as we planned to build up. Remember, we made an enormous build up commitment in 1961, and it was really an argument that we didn't need as big a build up commitment as we were then making; that given our estimates of Soviet forces our reaction time should our estimates prove wrong; the problem of the interaction of our build up and of their build up. You know, if we build up faster they build up faster and the net result wouldn't be any different than if we both build up slower in terms of a military balance; the past history in which we tremendously estimated the Russian bomber build-up and built up a bomber force much bigger than perhaps we would have built up, or certainly would have looked justified, if we had looked at the Russian bomber build up

in a different light. That was the direction of it.

O'CONNOR: One other thing, Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] mentions in his book is that you had in mind – or he implies this I believe – that you had in mind by indicating by our budget what sort of attitude we had with regard to disarmament, things of this sort...

KAYSEN: Yes, I certainly had this in mind in the sense that I had in mind the proposition that you couldn't take the Soviet level of effort as given, that it would respond to ours, and that if we both ended up with much higher levels of effort it might make the disarmament process much more difficult and less likely to occur. I still think that was a correct view and I think we did overdo the '61 decision.

O'CONNOR: Were your memoranda also affected by the allocation of our resources in the sense that…

KAYSEN: Well, in '61 there was no problem. After all we had a lot of unemployment and it wasn't a question of saying, "We can't afford it." Nor would I have argued that the money could better have been used on say, aid, because it was perfectly clear that the money wouldn't be used on aid. I think one could have argued that the money could have been better used on a build up of conventional forces.

O'CONNOR: That's what I was wondering.

KAYSEN: And we did in fact talk some about that. The problems of the size of the conventional force picture were ones that were never very clear. For a lot of reasons it was easier simply to grasp intellectually the kind of arguments about how big a retaliatory force, a strategic force had to be. You had a clear picture of what you were trying to do; you had the other country, knew its retaliatory

force, or you thought you did, you had some estimates of how it was growing and so on; you knew what the target system was. When you talk about how big the conventional forces should be you get into very speculative arguments about how many contingencies you might have to need at once and in what different parts of the world, and how long they might go on, and who's going to help you, and it's all a great deal vaguer, you see.

I had the feeling that there may have been a political manpower constraint in the back of McNamara's mind. But I have no evidence for this feeling, and several times when I discussed it with him as to whether he felt that sort of the program for fourteen army divisions and three and a half marine divisions, as I remember it when we started out, was

too small, and was limited by a notion that he didn't want to raise the draft calls above certain amount. He denied this strongly and he just said this is his judgment of what was needed. It was also true that the Army, which had made a case for a bigger force in an internal Army planning document, had made such a miserable case that, you know, it probably biased everybody the other way. I think a third thing was the feeling generated by the campaign discussion of the missile gap and that the most urgent task was this task, and if one looked at the '61 memoranda it's clear that the memorandum on the program package one on strategic retaliatory forces was just much better; much more effort had gone into it, it was much more thoughtful, a much more complex set of calculations in it. I think basically the problem was that the

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conceptual understanding of what you're trying to do with these forces was never as clear. And then you got into the political problem of the size of forces in Europe. That was one that was very hard to deal with really.

O'CONNOR: Walt Rostow has often been named as the man who gave much of the impetus toward building up the conventional forces. I wondered if you were involved in that at all. There was definitely a…

KAYSEN: Well, Walt was involved in this business about placing a high value on special forces of various kinds. I was not. I personally never thought much on this effort.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I though that might have influenced your memorandum on the amount of money we would devote to nuclear forces.

KAYSEN: No, no. My main thought in that was less the amount of money – I didn't want the

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money to be wasted – than the notion of our level, a high level stimulating the Soviet high level and our responding, and just an arms race. Now, this certainly was wasteful of resources and I would have thought it more useful to have perhaps more conventional forces and to do things maybe sooner than we in fact did do and are doing – like building these big troop transports which I think is very important, things of that sort. But the question of these special forces didn't get into it. First of all they were small numbers and they don't amount to much in the way of money, and I'm talking about when you talk about missiles, submarines, and all that.

O'CONNOR: Okay…

KAYSEN: Let me get back to a point which I think is of some interest. And this is the

question of

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the virtues and vices of this staff system. One thing that I think was very striking about the Kennedy team, and even about the Kennedy Cabinet – although I, you know, I'm in a less good position to speak about that – was the very good spirit that prevailed. Not everybody on the White House staff liked everybody else. Sorensen on one side and Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] – O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] on the other. There was real tension between them. But to my knowledge, and I really had pretty good knowledge, there never was any, you know, intriguing personal vendetta, jockeying for position about anything. It was Kennedy's habit to be rather careless about handing out assignments. He would often ask people to do things by happenstance. Whoever walked into the office at a certain time might be given a certain job. This gives a slightly

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wrong impression. There were some things he was extremely careful about and knew exactly whom he wanted to do what for and all that. But with many things, perhaps unimportant things, it was simply a question of handing them to the first fellow who walked in. And we had a very good informal system in which if you were asked to do something which frequently or usually was done by somebody else would call him up and say, "The President asked me to do this and that. Here's what I'm going to do. Is there anything you want to do or say?" And if you reported back you would see that the other fellow reported back with you so that the thing would be passed over to him. This worked very well, and I found that I worked on a number of things in which such responsibility as I had was closely tied to Dungan's responsibility. There was never

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any problem with this. I think Bundy and Sorensen worked quite well together. My own feeling was that this was an extremely good bunch of people. They all knew their jobs and did them well. And it was easy to operate this way. I would also say that simply the President's personality was such as to evoke a very strong sense of loyalty and devotion and to repress any of these not unnatural sentiments of jealousy, envy, and so on that occur in a group like that. One reason for that – I, you know, feel this very strongly – is that he had a tremendous natural courtesy and good manners. I don't think that I've ever – in the period that I knew him, which was a short period – heard him indulge in even a moderate rudeness to anybody. And when he got made at somebody it usually blew by very quickly. And sometimes when he was

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annoyed; I've heard him say things about other people, you know, "Why did so and so do that? He should have known better. That was a very stupid thing to do." Having said that,

that was the end of it. And he would never say to a man's face, "Why did you do that?" Once in the whole period I heard him get really angry at somebody – I don't know who it was – over the telephone and say, "You lied to me. You shouldn't do that. Why did you tell me a lie?" And he was furious and blew, you know, "God damn it," and so on. But even with people he disliked he had this gentleness. Oh, to give you an example of something. This is a sensitive item, but it's amusing. One day he got an intelligence report that George Smathers was out on a big yacht in the Cuban straits, and that a bunch of suspicious

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boats thought to be belonging to anti-Castro exiles were circling around, and so on. And I thought this would amuse Kennedy, as indeed it did. And he – this was a period, by the way, when some operation had been going on about a bunch of these fellows having landed on an uninhabited city in the Bahamas and the British arresting them. You may remember that. So we were watching what was happening, and I called this to Kennedy's attention. He was quite amused. He let go with a few thoughts of amusement of having George Smathers arrested by the British. But then he ended up saying, "Well, George has never done anything for me since he was my best man. But he's a good guy. I like him." And that was characteristic. I remember an occasion of a column by Joe Alsop [Joseph E. Alsop] which was one of these columns that,

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you know, on the day it was published it looked foolish. It had been written two days before and something had happened. I happened to be seeing the President early in the morning that day. I asked him whether he had noticed the column, and I said, "Well, it's kind of amusing to see Joe get kicked, isn't it?" And he reacted rather sharply. He said, "No. Why? Why do you say that? Why should I enjoy that?" I said, "He kicks you often enough." "Well, you know, he's a friend of mind. I like Joe." And that was the end of it. And on the whole I just don't think he was capable of any kind of vindictiveness. And this atmosphere suffused the staff. Probably somebody has described these perfectly delightful sessions before a press conference.

O'CONNOR: No, I don't know what you mean.

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KAYSEN: Well, when the President had a press conference there were two briefing sessions. I was not a regular attendant at these; Bundy was. But there were quite a number of occasions – and I don't remember how many, certainly half a dozen, probably more – for which Bundy was absent and I would go. The President would have breakfast in the morning with the Vice President and the Secretary of State [Dean Rusk], and, after a wile, Bob Manning [Robert J. Manning], the Secretary of State's press officer, and his staff people, Larry or Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman], Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger] of course, Kenny, Water Heller, Bundy, sometimes the director of the Budget.

And Pierre would bring out the sort of things that were in the news and things the President would probably be asked to comment on, and people would talk about them. I mean either Kennedy would say, “Well, yes, let’s go on

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to the next one, I know about that,” or he’d ask questions. And the Secretary or Bob Manning would raise similar things. And occasionally the President would ask somebody what he thought or order somebody to find out the answer to something if the answer wasn’t known. And then on such a day one then spent the rest of the day on a kind of dead run trying to get in – this would be over about ten o’clock – trying to get in the answers to these questions and keep up with what was happening. Then Sorensen, Salinger, usually Bundy, but in a few cases I, would then go up to the President’s bedroom around 3:15 – the press conference being at 4 o’clock – 3:15 to 3:30. He would be getting dressed. He’d be having a bite. And we would be giving him the answers to the questions he’d asked, last minute news items, what had been said in the Congress up to that moment, and

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that kind of thing so that he would be all briefed up. And these were the most delightful and charming occasions that I can remember. We’d start. We’d see Kennedy in bed. He’d be eating something. He’d be sitting up in the bed. Salinger mostly, sometimes others, would be handing pieces of paper to him. He’d read them very fast and then throw them on the floor. And he’d get up and wash and shave, and this and that. And all this briefing would be going on, this mountain of papers, and he was terribly funny. He used to say very, very lively things. He enjoyed these things. I can remember once the Mexican ambassador [Sanchez Gavito] had lost his tempter at the OAS [Organization of American States]; denounced the United States as a bunch of children who believed the world is like a TV cowboy movie, you know, with their white hats and black hats

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and just terrific; and walked out of the OAS. Pierre told the story and said that, “You’ll be asked to comment on that.” And the President said, “Now, what should I say? Let’s see, they’re the gringos and we’re the Yankees: We’re the gringos and they’re the greasers. That’s right. I guess what I ought to say is, ‘Those greasers can’t do that do us gringos.’” [Laughter] And he kidded around with this for a while. He was asked the question. I mean, you know, we went on to the next thing. I always watched the press conference. He was asked the question and he went on to say, “I’m sure that if Ambassador So and So lost his temper it was a momentary lapse. We’ve always had the highest regard for him. We’ve always had the friendliest relations,” and so on. And that was just the spirit in which these things went on. That was the spirit in which the

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enterprise was run. Now let me make another comment just on a matter of business. You know it was O'Donnell's business to run the President's schedule. And O'Donnell was very jealous of his prerogative in this respect, and right. He was very helpful, and if you saw O'Donnell and so on. If you had something the President should do and it came out of a discussion that you had with the President it was your business to say to O'Donnell, "The President would like to see so and so and so and so. When is a convenient time? He'd like to see him tomorrow, he'd like to see him this afternoon Can he see him then?" and so on. But there were two times at which the President's back door was open. The White House staff people always went in the back door, by Mrs. Lincoln's door. These were about 1:15 or so, which is when he generally

broke up for lunch. He'd go and have a swim about 1:30 and have lunch. And about 6:30 to a quarter to seven, sometimes later, depending on whether there was a long meeting in the afternoon. And what would happen is whoever had some business would simply line up at Evelyn's desk and stand around there. And you'd stand around and wait, and depending on how busy you were and what else you had to do and so on. This put a premium on being brisk, doing your business very quickly, and you could do your business very quickly. Sometimes toward the end of the evening if it was late three or four people would be in there at once. Kennedy would turn from one to the other. I think this system, which enabled people to know what they were – people knew what other people were up to. It was very open. It was very easy. Now, I'm

only a, you know, a second order commentator on this. Bundy and Sorensen, especially Sorensen, would be the best sources for how this enterprise worked. But without my comparative basis, having not worked in the White House before or since in the same way, I still think of it as an extremely efficient system which promoted good personal relations and did the President's business with great dispatch.

O'CONNOR: The courtesy may have applied across the board, but I wouldn't be surprised if the informality applied in situations regarding Lyndon Johnson, for example, or regarding Dean Rusk. I should think an…

KAYSEN: No. I can tell a story about that which may be in Schlesinger's book because I told it to him. I'll have to think a little to date this,

but I can tell you what it was about. It was about following up in INF [Inter-allied Nuclear Force] discussions sometime probably in the early summer or late spring of '62 – '63, I mean – after the meeting. Paul Nitze had just been in Paris, and he was back to report on the state of affairs – INF, MLF [Multilateral Force], and what not. It was an

occasion when Bundy was away and I was dealing with it. We had a very small meeting in the White House. McNamara, Nitze, possibly Gilpatric, Rusk, Merchant [Livingston T. Merchant], Ball [George W. Ball] probably, if he was around – I don't remember – perhaps one or two other people, and I was there. These were occasions when I was there I used to take notes or something like that, prepare a note for the President, or something. When we prepared these notes we never circulated them; they were kept for his use. And Nitze made a report. McNamara started to

take off from the report and say, you know, let's do this and let's do that and let's do the other thing. And Rusk said, "No, I don't think that's right. I don't think we should do that at all." The President broke out into a loud – well, laugh is wrong. He didn't break out into a loud laugh. He broke out into a big smile and a chuckle. And what was in his mind I'm not sure, because it was in my mind, is, "This is the first time, or about the first time I've ever heard Dean Rusk express himself which such positiveness." And what Kennedy said was, "Dean" – and that is the only time in my experience that Kennedy ever addressed him other than as "Mr. Secretary" in these large Cabinet Room groups – he said, "Dean, that's fine. You just write the record of this meeting the way you want it to come

out and that's the way it'll be," and broke up the meeting. And I think he did want to suggest to Rusk that if Rusk knew his own mind he, the President, was glad to back him up.

And I can remember, for instance, writing a letter to Governor Hodges [Luther H. Hodges] about some formal thing and addressing him as "Dear Luther." And the President said, "No, that's wrong. I don't call him Luther, I call him 'Governor Hodges.' Write 'Dear Governor Hodges.'" And he was formal with people older than himself. He was formal with the women, you know, staff member's wives, and so on. He had proper good manners and they were very attractive.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we can move from this then into some of the matters that you had specifically requested. I think maybe it was brought up earlier, but we can

take them in any order you'd like to as far as I'm concerned.

KAYSEN: Well, let me make a few remarks on several of them. I can start with the Congo. Now, the Congo was a long and tortured thing. I got into it toward the end of the summer of '62. Ralph Dungan had previously been handling it. He just got too busy on other things, and the feeling that more of the foreign policy stuff should be put into Bundy's enterprise. So I took over Africa in general from Dungan, and with it the Congo. And I stayed with it until it went off the agenda early in '63 because there temporarily had been a resolution, the great UN victory of Christmas time, and so on. What

this involved was really my keeping tabs on the situation and arranging for the President to be briefed. This was – if you want to

use modern terminology – there was a great deal of "hawk" versus "dove" talk here. Gullion [Edmond A. Gullion], the Ambassador…

O'CONNOR: What about "hawk"?

KAYSEN: Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams] and the people in AF [African Affairs] were hawks, also to some extent the UN [United Nations] people. They did want more positive American intervention in behalf of the central government against Tshombe [Moise Kapenda Tshombe]. George McGhee was on the whole for conciliation. And he was the State Department Officer who was directly responsible for most of it. So was Rusk. Rusk, and to some extent the EUR [European Affairs] people were very worried about the Belgians, the British, who disapproved of what we were doing. Although Spaak [Paul-Henri Spaak], of course, was very good about it. Kennedy's concern was, you know, "What have we got to intervene for? What's the argument?

Why should we intervene?" He pushed the question of, "Is there evidence of communist influence in the Congo? I can intervene against communists, in effect, but I can't intervene for another reason." He began to worry, and I think quite rightly, that Gullion and some of the AF people were emotionally involved against Tshombe. He was quite detached. On the other hand, as the situation got more and more tangled, looked more and more hopeless as our dollar commitments – and we were financing practically the whole operation – started to rise, Kennedy got quite impatient. And at one point, rather surprisingly, George Ball, who had been more cautious, and Soapy came in with a recommendation to put a squadron of American fighter aircraft into the UN. This followed after the Swedish squadron had been grounded by the Swedes. They were

not eager to have it shooting at Tshombe. You remember Tshombe had some trainers, which he got someplace. And we made an awful effort to get the Philippines, the Iranians to lend two, three, four aircraft to give to the UN. And all we wanted was a half dozen jets. This effort was beginning to succeed but it would take quite a while before the aircraft actually appeared. We had sent a general to the Congo to survey the situation – Truman [Corbie R. Truman] was his name – and he'd given a report. After all this we actually got to the point of discussing whether we should commit six fighters. A strong argument was made by the State Department people that we should do it. And Kennedy, somewhat to my surprise, agreed. I tried to write a paper on,

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you know, just a very neutral paper on the arguments for doing it and the arguments against. And it did seem the strongest arguments for doing it was – the stronger argument – that the UN looked like it might be really defeated, and this would be a very serious problem of course. We had agreed to the commitment. We got Adlai Stevenson down and Stevenson had put in a rather depressing performance in being on both sides of the issue and not being able to make up his mind. Anyhow, Kennedy instructed Stevenson to see if he could get U Thant to agree to this. And then he said, “If U Thant agrees to it, we’ll do it.” But through a variety of circumstances; first U Thant had a cold, didn’t come to the office; Stevenson felt he didn’t want

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to chase him at home. Several days went by and the situation started to change. Then U Thant expressed skepticism of it, and we let it drop.

Now, it’s interesting we’d actually come to the point of a commitment because Kennedy felt that in spite of his inability to justify committing American military force on the usual grounds which is what had been the basis of his reserve throughout the whole discussion, that if it really looked like the UN was going to get thrown out this would be too serious a blow. Another interesting fact – of the Congo but not so relevant to the President – is how incompetent the UN was. They had never run a war. They didn’t understand how you run a war. There wasn’t even somebody, a duty officer at UN headquarters monitoring the communications 24 hours a day. They didn’t

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know what was happening. In fact, the way the UN found out what was happening is our Embassy and military attaches would send in – we’d send up to New York for the mission and somebody in the mission would tell Ralph Bunche what the UN forces were doing there because they simply had no concept of what they were doing. As you know, this delightful Indian general outran his orders and what might have been a disaster was turned into a victory.

O’CONNOR: I’m amazed that U Thant would be skeptical about using American force if it was necessary.

KAYSEN: Well, he was afraid. But he was afraid that if you’d get the Americans in you’ll get the Russians reacting. And even though the Americans were in on the good side he just was scared about it. Well, the other interesting point here has got to do with the President’s attitude

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toward the use of military force, which did come out in the course of these discussions. He was extremely cautious. He was terribly conscious of his responsibility as Commander-in-Chief and he wanted to exercise that responsibility in what the military often thought was too much detail. But my own feeling, for what it is worth, is that he appreciated very sharply the great difference between the use of forces in situations in which their purposes were more political than military, and how these forces had to be controlled with great delicacy and detail. This isn't relevant to the Congo but you may remember that at one point we sent a fighter squadron on a set of exercises to Saudi Arabia to kind of remind Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser] that he should keep his promises, which he wasn't

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keeping, in the Yemen. And I remember that on three different occasions the President sort of asked me, called me and said, "We're sending that fighter squadron into the Yemen. What are the rules of engagement? What are we telling them? Who's going to communicate with whom? How do I know?

O'CONNOR: He was that involved?

KAYSEN: He was involved in detail in six fighters because he felt – and as I say we all had this feeling – that this wasn't a conventional military engagement. This was a political maneuver; he wanted this political maneuver to be under his control. He wanted to be sure that there wasn't some Air Force colonel who, with the best will in the world, was responding to something that was different from what the President of the United States intended by this

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use of force. And two of these occasions were in Washington. The third he was away – I'm trying to think. I think it was Palm Beach but I'm not sure. I'd have to check on the calendar as to when it occurred. And, you know, on such occasions somebody – whoever was on duty – would call down and speak to the military aid and say, "Are there any problems?" and so on. I remember talking to Godfrey McHugh, the Air Force aide, and being asked – the President asked me to remind him about the rules of engagement. "What are they and tell me about them." This consciousness of the possibly fateful significance of military force was one of the most striking things about the President's attitude toward his business in this whole area. Did you have any other questions you wanted to raise about the Congo?

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O'CONNOR: Well, I wondered if you were involved at all in the McGhee mission in the Congo?

KAYSEN: Yes, I was involved in…

O'CONNOR: That kind of indicated a dichotomy in American policy.

KAYSEN: No, the McGhee mission was the President's policy. The President's policy was, let's resolve this situation. We have no stake in Adoula [Cyrille Adoula]. We have no stake in Tshombe as an individual. We're interested in trying to get the Congo unified for two reasons. One, to vindicate the UN – or perhaps I should say three – to vindicate the UN; second, because if it's disunified, and especially if Katanga secedes, we will be faced with the economic burden of supporting the rest of the Congo. We were doing it already and it was increasing in cost. And third was the impact of this on the whole African scene.

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But in spite of this third consideration, in spite of the bad reputation Tshombe had among the Africans, Kennedy certainly didn't feel that it was our duty to have a victory for Adoula over Tshombe. He was interested in reconciliation. And whatever way he could get the problem resolved, was in his view, the first priority. I think the McGhee mission expressed that fact.

O'CONNOR: But it ran into conflict immediately with Gullion's attitude and the two of them were at odds.

KAYSEN: I think that's true and I think Gullion was kind of a hawk. On the other hand, it's very interesting – and this is indicative of Kennedy's personal attitudes and also the way he felt business should be run – when the thing was resolved – as it then appeared it was resolved for awhile – he asked me to write

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some letters to various people. I wrote a letter to Gullion; I wrote a letter to McGhee, you know, a sort of congratulatory letter. And this kind of thing the President often did on his own motion. Sometimes one of us would suggest, "You ought to tell so and so he's done a good job." He wrote an extremely warm letter to Gullion. You know, he made it warmer than my draft. I made some slightly sour remarks when I was giving him the draft because I had had lots of fights with Gullion on this question of is he being too tough. The President's response was, "Look. Gullion was the man on the spot. It's been a very heavy load. He's had a hard time. He's come through, and we've come through all right. What are you kicking about?" I think there was some personal relation – you know, Gullion had been out in

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Indochina when he was there – but in addition to the personal relation I think Kennedy never was the kind of man who said, "I felt this. He felt that. I was right. He was wrong. Therefore I'm against him." He just didn't think that way. He wasn't unconscious of the fact that Gullion had been pushing in a different direction. He said Gullion was trying to do his job, had worked very hard. It was an extremely tough job. He'd been in great personal danger and

behaved with bravery and spirit. These were things the President admired, and he wanted to show his admiration. You see, in a sense, I don't think Kennedy was trying to rebuke me, but this relates to my remarks earlier, that in that atmosphere if I were any kind of decent person I wouldn't feel that I could bear a grudge against Gullion

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because I thought he was wrong about it.

Let me mention another incident which may be a little tangential, but it's interesting. There was a point in middle November when Soapy was just terribly discouraged – Mennen Williams. He's an extremely conscientious and earnest man. I think he did a terrifically good job as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. He was terribly discouraged. He felt that Gullion was right; that McGhee was wrong; that Rusk was backing McGhee; that the attention of the Department to the complaints of the Europeans was undermining policy; and that we were going to be in for terrible trouble in the rest of Africa and that he couldn't get Kennedy to see this. He came to see me one day with a letter of resignation. And I had known him, I'd known him a little when he was governor, and we

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he a very good relationship. He's a man I admire and like. This is obviously, by the way, a sensitive item and should be treated as such.

O'CONNOR: Well, this whole transcript will be treated as sensitive. There are too many spots in it to break it up.

KAYSEN: Yes, yes. I talked to him and tried to persuade him that he shouldn't write such a letter to the President. I think the point that made him feel this way, I mean that did persuade him after awhile, was the fact that it was unfair of him to put a greater moral load on the President in this situation; that the President already had a very large moral load, you know, with respect to the situation; and that Soapy's quitting would be just an additional burden. Again, I think this argument was effective, not because I'm such a persuasive

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person, but because of the kind of man Kennedy was. Now, they'd been political rivals and so on, but the…. And Kennedy often thought that Soapy's arguments were wrong. But he treated him with great respect. He treated anybody – he had great respect for the political process and the democratic process, great admiration for it – he treated anybody who was a successful elective official with a special respect, because he thought this was a very tough competition and anybody who could win it deserved, you know, that kind of treatment. And I mention this to make the point about the influence of his personality on the way things ran.

O'CONNOR: There's one other point I'd like to ask you before we get off this. And that

relates to the U Thant plan for reconciliation in

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the Congo. Now, that took place, was written before you became greatly involved, but I've heard some people comment that that was really not U Thant's plan at all, but it was an American plan given through Thant.

KAYSEN: It was essentially…. I think that's an essentially correct statement – that it was drafted in Harlan Cleveland's [James Harlan Cleveland] office jointly between Harlan Cleveland and the African people in the State Department, and sent out through Stevenson and sold to U Thant. Of course these plans are pieces of paper, and Tshombe was saying he was adhering to the plan, why didn't Adoula; and Adoula was saying he was adhering to the plan, why didn't Tshombe, and so on. But of course Tshombe wasn't doing anything about the key provisions, about the central government officials, taxes, etc.

[END SIDE I, TAPE II]

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KAYSEN: I think the civil defense issue has a certain interest. It was the first thing I did when I went down to Washington. In fact, I went down there as a consultant, starting in the middle of the second term before I finished my academic year here. I started going down there weekends and spring vacation and more days and so on, so that by the middle of March I was actually working down there as much as I was up here. The President had asked the question, "Given the fact that I am responsible, is there anything sensible that can be done in the area of civil defense?" And if so, how much would it cost and what would it be like?" By "sensible" he meant sort of putting the country underground. My first job was to work up some kind of a program in connection with other people, especially Adam Yarmolinsky in the Pentagon, Elmer Staats in the Budget Bureau, and with a

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lot of technical help from the people in OST [Office of Science & Technology] – Vincent McRae and Spurgeon Keeny. We worked up this notion of a shelter program, a combination of shelters in public buildings and some incentives for private shelter buildings. Then the idea of putting out the pamphlet came out. That was an idea that came out in the Defense Department. Kennedy got interested in the pamphlet. The first version, which was written by a *Life-Time* team was absolutely horrible; you know, filled with grizzly pictures and what not. We stopped that. We got a somewhat rewritten version. McNamara's idea – and I think it was McNamara's idea – was to send one out to every household. After a lot of thought…. Even after the pamphlet was revised some of us felt that it would be very scary. And the idea of sending

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one to every household didn't appeal. Partly this was the result of the President's mention of civil defense in the Berlin speech. His first mention of it was in the special message to Congress in May. But that was blanketed, of course, by the commitment to go to the moon and the discussion of the Defense budget. And the fact that he said he was going to recommend a rational civil defense program didn't receive any attention. But when he mentioned civil defense in connection with the Berlin speech, you remember, that set of a panic. I think that experience convinced him that, you know, it wouldn't be a good idea to get people too excited. The President kept trying, although the program never got any place because Congress refused to get any serious amount of money for it. He worked quite hard on

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Congressman Thomas [Albert Thomas] on this subject. He was chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee for Independent Offices. Even though it had been moved to the Defense Department, the appropriations had traditionally been handled by that committee. Originally, of course, it was in the Office of Emergency Planning. I might note parenthetically that the first price of having a civil defense program was to make Frank Ellis a federal judge, because the first recommendation of my group was to take the program away from Frank Ellis because he didn't run it well.

Kennedy kept trying and I think he kept trying because he really felt that if we ever needed it we should have it, and that he would be seriously deficient if he didn't try. It was clear to him that the program was highly

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unpopular; it was clear to him that he was making trouble for himself by trying to push it. There were people who wanted nothing, and there were people who wanted a great big program. I heard him express on many occasions this sense of, "People aren't interested in it now, but it'll be awful if they ever happen to need it and I've not done anything about it." And he felt this was kind of a disappointment. There were several occasions – governor's conferences and a couple of other occasions – where he tried to revive interest in it. We worked fairly hard at getting an Assistant Secretary for Civil Defense, Steuart Pittman. And in general I would say a good deal of energy was put into this program, although the results were very meager. The energy just reflected this sense of "I'm responsible and how can I not do anything about it?

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How is it rational to spend so much money on deterrent forces and not try to do something about it?"

A couple of amusing incidents…. One amusing incident – which I think of as a real Kennedyism – arose in connection with the pamphlet. I was going over the pamphlet with him, which he insisted that we do word by word. He wanted to be sure of what was said, and this again reflected the Berlin incident, the feeling that was terribly sensitive. At one point there was something about simple remedies for burns. It said "putting grease on a burn." He said, "That's wrong. You should put cold water on it." I said, "Well, I'll check that with the Surgeon General, Mr. President." He said, "Listen, I know." So we went on. I called the Surgeon General and explained what it was all about. He said, "Well, the President's

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right, but in fact that's rather advanced medical practice and most doctors still use grease. My recommendation would be that the pamphlet should say either grease or nothing, because if it says cold water it's going to stir up a lot of fuss." I told this to Kennedy at the appropriate time, and he said, "Look, cold water's right, isn't it? It's going to say cold water," which was kind of funny.

The other incident was the first time I saw Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] in operation. It was Thanksgiving of '61, and part of the Defense Budget was discussed at the meeting with civil defense. Steuart Pittman was up and he said something. I said something. And just when the discussion was started the President interrupted us and said the wanted Bob to be present, would somebody find him? Bob was outside – it was a rainy miserable day – in a red sweatsuit

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playing football with some of the kids and a couple of his sisters. There was this spectacle of Bob Kennedy leaping over the parch rail in this dripping red sweatsuit – we were all rather properly dressed in the Washington way even though we were in Hyannis Port. He came into the meeting and he made a terribly passionate speech about civil defense and self help and everybody ought to build a shelter in his back yard and so on, and the end of which the President said, "Thank you Bobby," and that was the end of it. [Laughter] Not another word was said about his speech, which I thought was quite entertaining.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was the balance of payments. This was a problem with which the President was occupied, and in the judgment of some of his professionally knowledgeable advisors, over-occupied for the whole of his term of office.

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O'CONNOR: Does that include you among his professional advisors?

KAYSEN: Yes. The people who thought he was over-occupied with it included the professional economists who were around, Heller, Tobin [James Tobin], Gordon, Bell, and myself. It's hard to tell whether this was because he was personally fascinated by the problem; whether – as Sorensen once said to me – the President felt that one of the few things that could really be viewed as a national catastrophe would be

having to devalue the dollar, and that he just didn't want to do it because he thought it would be an enormous political defeat; whether because he'd made such a strong pledge and criticized Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] in response to the size of the deficit, it's hard to tell. But he certainly was fascinated by the subject and spent a lot of time on it. It was an important subject and it deserved a lot of time, but he spent more time on it in

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some ways than he spent on subjects that might have been equally important. It's a long and complicated story and I don't want to try to give a chronological account because I really don't think I could. I'd have to have documents and what not. Just let me mention a few highlights. I'd say this is a story in which there was a continuing struggle between a group of White House staff officers, helped by George Ball; and the Secretary of Treasury and the Under Secretary of the Treasury for Monetary Affairs, Bob Roosa [Robert V. Roosa], backed by, sometimes fronted by Bill Martin [William M. Martin, Jr.], the Chairman of the Board of Governors. Roosa and Dillon started out with the position that it was a vital American interest to maintain the dollar as the world's leading international currency, maintain it at it's present par value, and do this without significantly limiting United States unilateral powers of decision in respect

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to international monetary policy. Now, I realize that putting the thing this way is not the way Dillon or Roosa would describe it, but it's the way what they were trying to do looked to us – this group I just mentioned. Now, these goals were really inconsistent. Once we were in significant deficit we couldn't do all these things. Now, I think that there are two ways of looking at this struggle. One way, in a sort of objective sense is to say that if you saw what the United States was doing and saying, then in a rather short period a small group of White House advisors, with the help of the Under Secretary of State, made a tremendous impact on the United States policy, and pushed Dillon and Roosa a very great distance from their original position. And I think objectively speaking that's true. If you see what Roosa said, shortly after he re-

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signed from the office, in his little book and a couple of speeches; if you compare that with the kind of thing Roosa was saying at the initial discussions on this subject, the shift is tremendous. On the other hand, from our point of view as participants and our contemporary viewpoint, we always felt that these fellows were dragging their heels terribly. Paul Samuelson and I – who feel that we jointly share, fifty-fifty, the responsibility for making Roosa Under Secretary of the Treasury for Monetary Affairs – used to meet, so to speak, for the purpose of kicking ourselves very occasionally. Paul Samuelson, of course was drawn on very heavily by the President's economic advisors during the campaign, and he continued to be drawn on for a number of subjects during the Administration. He was called down several times to participate in

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discussions on the balance of payments. He was also called down more frequently to participate in discussions on tax policy, budget policy; but these were matters in which I didn't participate directly, although I might have discussed them with close friends like Tobin and Heller. But I was in the balance of payments situation directly. In the middle of '62 the President created a Cabinet committee on the balance of payments and made me the executive secretary of it, Dillon the chairman. And that committee and a corresponding working committee of assistant secretaries, which I also sat on, was supposed to be dealing with the problem continuously. Before that the President had created a gold budget proceeding whereby each department submitted to the Director of the Budget an estimate of the expenditures abroad that would involve claims on foreign exchange, and these had to be separately reviewed. I

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was involved in that procedure. I was involved in a procedure which went on for three months or four months before we finally let it drop – though the gold budget kind of took it over – of examining separately the foreign overseas dollar commitment of each foreign aid expenditure, and getting a Presidential approval for those bigger than a certain amount. All these procedures were in part the President's own sense of concern with the problem, in part a response to the urging of Dillon. As we saw the situation, Dillon was doing two things. He was trying to hue to the sort of international banking community sense, both in Europe and in Wall Street, of what was right, which was to balance our account, and soon; and to put the responsibility for doing this on everybody else in the rest of the government and to protect as far as possible the private sector. And in fact, the sequence of events was we had this very tight set of rules

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on aid. We got McNamara trying to save money on the military budget – that is, not dollars, but foreign exchange. And he was doing this in some cases that cost two to three times in dollars, so that jeeps were being sent from Japan to the United States out to Hawaii to be repaired, and things of this sort because this would save foreign exchange.

Now, the President knew what was going on. I think he fairly soon came to an understanding of the proposition that these restrictions amounted to some kind of a partial re-evaluation – which is the way an economist would describe them – that we had several foreign exchange rates; one for the military budget, one for the aid budget, one for private investments, and so on. However, he was persuaded by two considerations not to follow the line that the staff and Ball were pushing. Dillon and Roosa were saying, in effect, two things. One, "We have to defend

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the dollar and the way we want to defend it is to our national interest. The other thing they were saying, which was operationally more important in practice, was, to leave it to us. It's none of your business. You fellows stay out of it." And that really was a very important part of it. "Ball, you stay out of it, this is my business. You White House fellows stay out of it, it's my business," and so on. What we were saying is that, in fact, the international monetary system isn't working right; that we should have larger international monetary reserves, and we should be able to borrow them more freely. Now, I think it would be dull to go into great technical detail on all the alternatives. There are lots of documents on that. I think the interesting thing to add is that this struggle was joined very early. I can remember that in August, '61 – before Dillon was going off to the meeting of the International Monetary Fund of the Inter-

national Bank in Vienna to negotiate what came to be known as the Vienna Agreement, the supplement to the general agreements to borrow, a Paris Club – a meeting in the White House, two meetings. One, in which Gordon, Bell, and I argued with the President that the amount of money that Dillon was asking for, the drawing rights, as too small and the rules under which we could draw were too restrictive, and that we shouldn't agree to this. We at least persuaded the President to talk it over with Dillon and us. And we had such a discussion. The end result of it was the President listened sort of in his usual fashion and said, "Well, Doug, you're running this operation." And I think the basic principle which the President decided was the principle of, "Well, Doug, you're running this operation." In fact, at one time he said to a group consisting of Sorensen – who was pretty much in this. I'm trying to think and – I'm

not sure whether it was Sorensen, Gordon, and me, or just Sorensen and me – he said, "I know, you fellows think I ought to fire Doug, and you might be right. But I'm not going to fire Doug, and while he's Secretary of the Treasury he has to be the fellow who ultimately is going to decide these things." This, by the way, was – I can remember when this was. It was Walter Heller – now I remember better – it was Walter Heller, Sorensen, and me. This was the following year before the bank fund meeting which was in Washington. We had agreed on a set of rules covering what Dillon and Roosa would say. We'd had a meeting, Ball, Dillon, Roosa, Sorensen, I, Heller, some other people. And the problem was this. The British were going to bring up some proposals for reforming the international monetary system. We wanted to be sure that those proposals weren't killed by

Dillon or Roosa saying, "Oh, this isn't very interesting." So we worked out a set of ground rules. Then Roosa did something which Heller and I, and I think Sorensen, but I can't speak for him, interpreted as a piece of cheating, dishonesty. And I personally have held it against Roosa ever since. And I hold it against him violently. I know him very well. He used to work

for me in World War II – old friends. Roosa had distributed a pamphlet, an excerpt from the *Philadelphia*, I think, *Federal Reserve Bulletin* – a little article he wrote. And the article was a violent article saying things in it, which in our judgment no officer of the United States Treasury should have said in any circumstances whatsoever. The article said such things as it was against something that are called gold guarantees which Tobin among others had been pushing. And Roosa's article said gold guarantees are no good, the

United States' word wouldn't be believed. After all, we devalued in 1934 and why should anybody trust us again, which we thought was scandalous. And this article was mailed to every delegate and every staff man on every delegation of the IMF [International Monetary Fund] meeting, and it was being mailed at the moment we were sitting in Dillon's conference table having the meeting. When we confronted Roosa with this he said, oh, he'd forgotten all about it, and that this was just a private expression of views. Well, we were just furious. And Heller and Sorensen and I took this pamphlet into the President, and, as I said, we didn't know quite what we were saying. We were saying, "Fire Roosa and Dillon," and he pointed out to us that we were saying that, and he was going to do no such thing.

O'CONNOR: What was his reaction to the pamphlet though?

KAYSEN: He thought it was very bad; he was quite annoyed.

Now, I don't know whether he ever said anything to Doug Dillon or not; and it would be in the nature of the case that if he did say anything to Doug Dillon he certainly wouldn't let me know about it, and I doubt that he let Sorensen know about it. He certainly wouldn't let Walter and me know about it.

Now, that was the sharpest confrontation. And, of course, this did have the effect of killing the climate. Now, after that Kennedy's attitude changed and Dillon started to get pushed more. He moved faster and so did Roosa. Now, it's also true that Dillon was under pressure because he made some promises and some forecasts and they hadn't come true. And as time went on Kennedy got more and more receptive to what we were saying, "we" being the critics, and less and less convinced that Dillon was right.

O'CONNOR: He took the step that you had recommended in '63, didn't he? Essentially taking credits

from the IMF?

KAYSEN: Oh yes, but Dillon and Roosa kept moving along the path that we were recommending but they were moving slowly and bit by bit. These Roosa

bonds, the swaps, are in effect gold guarantees. And we were talking about a big plan for gold guarantees; he was having little ones. The real issue came to be whether there should be an explicit, high level negotiation in which the President threw his weight in with the European heads of government or whether this thing should be worked out among central bankers and Secretaries of the Treasury. It was naturally Dillon's preference and Martin's preference for the latter. It was this issue, rather than the substance of a particular plan, that was always the issue. At one point in the fall of '63 after the IMF meetings – was it the fall? – we had a special mission to go around Europe because we told the

President we didn't think he could trust Dillon's judgment as to what the Europeans were willing to do. And Ball made very violently the point that Dillon was only reporting what the European banks said, and that you had to ask what the European heads of governments and politicians would say if we pushed them on a political level, not through the banker's channel. So we sent a special mission around, but…

O'CONNOR: Who was in that mission, do you know?

KAYSEN: The mission was John Leddy for the Treasury, and he was in the Treasury but he was really sympathetic to this, and somebody from State – I'm trying to think whom – I can't remember. And the mission went around, but it reported in a rather inconclusive way. There were, you know, the President put in his Frankfurt speech a paragraph about the international monetary mechanism which I had written, which Dillon had objected to. And I had a phone conversation, I

remember, with Sorensen from Germany, talking about what Dillon's objections were. The President overrode them, and soon. There were various signs that he was moving. One of the signs was that in the beginning of '63 he asked Dean Acheson to look into the problem. And he gave him very full power, and he got Acheson to produce a report. This report was numbered copies one to twelve. The President sent a letter out with it that was the strongest letter I've ever seen, saying, "Here are the twelve people who have copies of this report. I don't want anybody else in the government except somebody on this list to see it. If you think somebody else should see it, please communicate with me. Unless you have my personal permission you may not show it to anybody." And I was handling all this. Now, Acheson got Tobin, he got some help from me, he talked to McNamara, to Dillon. He wrote a report which

came out very strongly for the Ball position. By the way, this is one of the few occasions that I saw the President mad, and he stayed mad. We had a meeting to discuss the report. Acheson made a very strong, vivid, Achesonian presentation. And the President thanked him and said,

"Well, we have to think about that." Acheson said, "There's nothing to think about, Mr. President. All you have to do is decide. Here it is, and why don't you decide?" And the President flushed, and he said, "Yes, I understand. Thank you," and he broke up the meeting. I was talking to him afterwards and he said, "It's a long time before Dean Acheson's going to be here again." He was really mad. This is one of the things on which he was most sensitive, challenges to the authority and dignity of his office. And that's the way I felt he took it. I think, for instance, this was very relevant to how he reacted to Roger Blough.

O'CONNOR: That wouldn't prejudice his feeling regarding the position of the paper would it?

KAYSEN: No, he just was mad at Acheson. And he thought this was pretty offensive. I think everybody around the table was startled. Sometime in the summer of '63 we had a meeting which he asked me to arrange on the balance of payments which lasted from 10 to 1:30. Now if you know anything about the President's schedule…

O'CONNOR: …it's a long, long…

KAYSEN: …for him to spend three and a half hours with nothing to decide – this was just a discussion. And Samuelson, Tobin, it was in the summer because Tobin had left the government already. Samuelson and Tobin were there, Gordon, Heller and I, Dillon, Roosa, Martin, McNamara. And we spent three and a half hours in a seminar. It was an interesting seminar. Ken Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] was there. I carried on a correspondence with Ken from India. Ken was offering his advice,

rather wrong advice on this. And we had a certain amount of fun with that, including some entertaining letters that the President wrote. One – Ken has it now – I wrote a long letter for him for his signature and he knew that Ken would know that I had written the letter, and he scrawled on the bottom, "For somebody who learned all the economics he knew from Russ Nixon [William Russell Nixon] and got a 'C', this is a pretty good letter, don't you think?" But this seminar – to get back to the seminar – went all around the subject of whether our present policy was right; what our bargaining leverage was; whether we could devalue; whether the threat of devaluation would be really sufficient into scaring Europeans into doing what we thought they should do, and so on. And it was clear to me after the seminar that the President had, you know, essentially absorbed the viewpoint that his staff people had pushed. That

doesn't mean he would have done very much that was different at the time. I think Bob Roosa would have left the government in any event. It's silly to speculate about whether Dillon would or wouldn't or what that would have meant. He asked me to write him a memorandum explaining how we could devalue – the technical word for what we could do is "float", not devalue – that is, not fix a new par of exchange which requires congressional legislation, but simply without changing the par value stop buying and selling gold at a fixed price, which is within the President's jurisdiction. I remember writing him a memorandum on this and explaining what his authority was, including, you know, getting the statutory thing and he went over it with me once in the morning. It was very interesting because this was the morning after the meeting I just described.

Galbraith had said something in the meeting which was wrong, and in as gentle a fashion as he knew how Tobin corrected Galbraith and so on. The next morning the President had this memorandum and he said, "Let's go over this again." We went over it again. He said, "Ken was wrong, wasn't he?" "Yes sir." "He should have known better, shouldn't he?" He said, "I can do this myself." This is a conversation which is very vivid in my mind. I said, "Yes sir." And he just took the memorandum and put it in his desk drawer, which is something he used to do with papers he wanted. He would throw other ones in the "out" basket and let Evelyn take them away. He put this one in his desk drawer. And I went away with the feeling that, you know, some day Kennedy's going to decide to do that. Of course that's obviously sheer speculation. But no doubt in my mind that

he had learned a great deal and that he moved in this direction. On the other had, I think he always assigned this question more importance than it deserved in the judgment of the economists.

O'CONNOR: You mean you thought the question would eventually be solved without any major reforms or major changes in policy?

KAYSEN: Who, we did?

O'CONNOR: Yes.

KAYSEN: No. We thought that it would need a major change in policy. But, for instance, I once heard Kennedy saying in connection with a discussion of whether to give nuclear assistance to the French – this was one of these rambles in the evening about seven o'clock – he said, "Well, you know, we used to have two things, the bombs and the gold. Now we're losing the gold and we still have the bombs." I mean there was this element in his attitude which, to some of us, was not very rational. Now this

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may have been a correct political judgment. There's an essay of Keynes' [John Maynard Keynes] which Keynes wrote in 1934 called *Auri Sacri Fames*, *The Hunger for Sacred Gold*. It's about old and the international payments. It's a very interesting essay. I remember getting a copy of this and putting it in the President's weekend reading. We used to assemble stuff for him. He read it. He made some comment. It was perfectly clear he understood it, but I think there was a certain dual aspect. On the one hand, I think he followed the intellectual arguments that his staff people were making; on the other, he had this more primitive and less rationally analyzed feeling that gold was an important symbol of power and therefore a gold loss was a serious matter. So that in addition to the proposition that Dillon was the Secretary and if Dillon was running the operation you had to follow Dillon or

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fire him – you could push him as far as you could push him, but that was a different matter – there was, I think, this divided feeling in this respect. And it came out in funny ways. I can remember an occasion when I was giving him a briefing paper about a visit of three people from the Council of Ministers of the Common Market, Rey [Jean Rey], Marjolin [Robert Marjolin], and somebody else. And I'd gone over what they were going to talk about. The usual briefing paper you prepare. These were the kind of meetings I would sit in on because I handled almost all the foreign economic policy in the White House. I had argued with him that he shouldn't discuss the balance of payments issue with them; that from our point of view we're talking Kennedy Round. It was a poor argument to say that we wanted to cut tariffs because they'd give us a trading advantage and improve our balance of payments, even if we believed it. And I told him that. I'm

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perfectly sure that he understood the argument. He discussed the balance of payments. It was very much on his mind. I wrote him several times a memorandum which I argued with him – and he once told me he was tired of hearing this – I wrote him a memorandum saying, you know, "I want to return to the point that I made last night, and if you're tired of it, throw this away." He would listen. But as I say, there was this divided feeling about it which was interesting. Now, this is a very complicated subject and I think it was – we all thought it was extremely interesting just to watch him go at it.

O'CONNOR: Do you think the steps that he took in '63 reflected your influence, the staff's influence, or Dillon and Roosa's influence?

KAYSEN: Oh, I think it reflected the staff's influence. But the staff was pushing Dillon and Roosa. I mean, Dillon and Roosa moved a lot. You remember

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my description of saying that an objective observer looking at this argument would feel that the staff had done quite well because they pushed Dillon and Roosa very far. And I think that this reflected their sense, especially Dillon's sense, of where the President stood. My judgment of Dillon is that he was a man with no firm views of his own on anything, a very clever, very quick, very adaptable man whose main interest was sort of, you know, being successful. And he understood that being Secretary of the Treasury, being successful meant tuning himself in on Kennedy. The intellectual conviction was provided by Bob Roosa, and that where you could press Dillon he would bend. And Bob was pressed partly by arguments, partly by events. Martin, by the way, in these discussions showed up as a man of such stupidity that even those of us who had spent twenty years thinking he was stupid were surprised the depth of his

shallowness.

O'CONNOR: He apparently didn't have much influence on Kennedy in this matter.

KAYSEN: No, no, except that Kennedy recognized that he was a political force. Walter Heller made a very strong argument that Martin shouldn't be re-appointed. But Kennedy did re-appoint Martin. Kennedy felt that by re-appointing Martin he would have sort of better control of his behavior than if he were an outside critic. It's a question as to whether this was a correct judgment or not. I think Kennedy himself wondered about he judgment.

Just another odd bit. On three occasions with respect to three different people, Martin, Foster, Clay, I've heard Kennedy say essentially, "I'm so busy thinking about covering my right flank that I don't know whether I will get anything done." Those words were used about Foster.

Wiesner and I had been pushing Foster and complaining a lot to the President about how slow Foster was moving on disarmament, and how Foster was picking unnecessary fights with the Pentagon, and all that. And he said this – when Clay produced the first draft of the Clay Report – it's a miserable document; the published document was miserable, but the first draft was much worse – I remember Dungan, Bell, and I took it into the President. We'd been working on it. Ralph and I had been working on it with Dave Bell. And he looked at it and he said – I think the words were, "That son of a bitch Clay. I should have known better….

O'CONNOR: That's what a lot of people were wondering…

KAYSEN: …I should have known better. But I thought that six weeks exposure to Dave Bell and he'd learn something about it and we'd get a good

report out of him. But I should have known

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better." That was very characteristic. He had, I think, one of the themes of his whole presidency was this fluctuation between the feeling that, you know, you couldn't deal with the business community, that they were irreconcilable and difficult on the one hand' the feeling that they ought to be susceptible to reason and if you will approach them with reason they will receive you. You know, you have the Yale speech which was the expression of the second sentiment. You had the outburst about – alleged outburst – about Roger Blough which was the expression of the first. And I think there was…. In fact, just to ramble a bit about this matter, it strikes me that one of the characteristic qualities of Kennedy's mind is that he did hold somewhat opposite points of view in suspension, and he wasn't dogmatic on one thing, and so on. It was a quality which was very attractive. I re-

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member a comment he made about LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay]; that he admired LeMay, that he didn't have LeMay around for policy advice. He didn't think much of the kind of policy advice he was going to get from LeMay, but he had the man around because he knew how to run the Air Force, and if we ever needed an Air Force you'd want a man like that to run it. And it takes a great capacity to be able to separate these two things about the same man, and to be fighting with him about policy and yet talk like this about him. Not only talk like this, but feel like this about him. This was one of his most striking capacities.

O'CONNOR: Just one other thing if you're through with that business, that I want to mention.

KAYSEN: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Somebody told me you were involved in the controversy – if it can be called a controversy –

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over the BNSP [Basic National Security Policy]. In fact that you named it, or that you were the one that named it the "bean soup."

KAYSEN: The "bean soup?" I think that might have been Bundy. It sounds more like Bundy. No, I think it was me as a matter of fact. Bundy started to call it the "boon soup" and I called it the "bean soup." Yes, just about my second assignment after I finished with civil defense, and before I started liberating Okinawa from the army, something at which I failed, was to look at the "bean soup." Now, Harry Rowan, who was then in the Defense Department, was rewriting the military section of it. And he and I worked jointly on rewriting the military section of it. But Walt Rostow, who

was in the State Department – no, Walt was still in the White House then. Walt was more ambitious. He wanted to rewrite the whole thing. And then this effort started, and we started first on the military portion. Walt moved over to the

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State Department. He continued the effort. And he wanted to rewrite a grand document. My reaction to it was that it was all a lot of nonsense, and that we didn't need it; that there was some virtue in the military part and the military part, which was used as guidelines for military planning and so on, could be sent around by McNamara; that the notion of a document which uttered a few sentences about everything in the world signed by the President was silly, and we just didn't need one. Walt didn't like this at all. There was a certain amount of tension between us about it. I remember Walt went and had tea with the President and with the draft of this. It was characteristic of the President that he had Walt to tea and spent an hour with him, listened to him, and so on. Then I was supposed to present to the President a memorandum on this thing and what he should do with it. I went and saw him and

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our discussion – and I quote, I think, its entire substance – was this, "Have you read this?" he said to me. "Yes." "Have you read it all?" "Yes." I asked him if he read it. He said, "Well, I read some of it. Walt writes a lot of words, doesn't he?" And that was the end of it. He just wasn't interested.

O'CONNOR: Well, it sounds like it would be in an opposite direction from his…

KAYSEN: Yes, it was.

O'CONNOR: …basic attitudes and his formal attitude.

KAYSEN: It was. And we did rewrite the military section. That was quite important, because the Eisenhower document said, "Our main, but not sole reliance will be on nuclear weapons." And we wanted to get things out of this so that the military couldn't quote these things, and so on. And the general judgment of people in the Pentagon, which looked right to me, was that if you simply rescinded it and put nothing in its place you'd

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still have it. So we rewrote – mainly written by Harry Rowan, but I got into the act a good bit, and I suppose McNamara worked on it too – a document on the military part of the BNSP which then McNamara sent around over his signature as a memorandum to the Chiefs and the commanders of unified and specified commands, and that was desirable. But all these discussions of what our interest in Burma was and blah, blah, blah, blah.

O'CONNOR: So that never came out then. That was…

KAYSEN: That disappeared. It never had any stance.

O'CONNOR: Okay, that's it, unless you want to comment on your attempt to liberate Okinawa from the army.

KAYSEN: No, well, this was rather interesting.

O'CONNOR: That was the time you had in connection with Ryukus?

KAYSEN: Yes, this was the Ryukus task force. George Ball happened to stop from the Ryukus on his way home from a meeting in Japan. I'd been with him at the meeting. It was an OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] meeting in

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June or July of '61. And he stopped on the way home from the Ryukus. I went home a different way. He stopped in the Ryukus. He came back and talked to me – and I may say he's somebody I'd known pretty well before, and we were friends – he talked to me, and he said he though the situation in the Ryukus was very bad; that it was a big irritation with the Japanese; that we were being very oppressive in ways that were indefensible and unnecessary; something ought to be done about it. Well, I talked to him, I'd talked to some of the Army people, and I went to Bundy with a proposal that I organize a Ryukus task force and take a look at it. He said, "Well, you see if the President thinks it's a good idea." So I drafted up a proposal and went to see the President about it. And it seemed that Bobby had been in Japan and heard a great deal about

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the Ryukus and so he was very receptive. I got an inter-departmental task force of which I was the chairman. I got some people; we went out there, and what not. I did get the President to sign off on an executive order which changed a number of things. But it was over great resistance from the Army. And I had to call in McNamara to get the Chief of Staff of the Army sat on. It was extremely difficult, and we were handicapped in the end because we needed more money. The appropriation was part of the aid appropriation. Although it was part of the aid appropriation, which made it very hard to get, we relied on getting the high commissioner, General Carroway to come in and testify for the appropriation before Passman [Otto E. Passman]. Carroway knew that we relied on him so our room for maneuver was narrow. The President didn't want to – no that's wrong – the President asked me. This

is something I did wrong. One of his first questions when I came home and reported to him was, "Should I fire Carroway?" And I gave him the reasons for thinking it would be better if we didn't. I think I was wrong. I was interested that this was his first question. But I was wrong. If we had a better high commissioner we would have made faster progress. And the Army, you know, was very reluctant about giving Carroway orders. And I was pushing all the time. These were questions like civil liberties, the extent to which we prevented Okinawans from traveling to Japan, censorship questions. And there were some government organizations questioned, the extent to which the opposition party was communist, and things of this sort.

O'CONNOR: Well, you were concerned primarily with easing the rule on Okinawa then and not with eliminating it as a military base.

KAYSEN: Oh no, when I used the word liberating I was

being facetious. No, I started with the proposition that we were going to maintain a military base, but I did get the President to put in a communiqué that we looked forward to the eventual reunion. Well, there's a lot on Okinawa but, you know, the President had a passing interest in this. Partly because he was interested in Japan, partly because Bobby had told him that when in Japan Okinawa was mentioned more than nuclear weapons. But, it's an interesting part in my education which had so much to do with other things.

O'CONNOR: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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