

FOREWORD

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The following conventions are used throughout the transcripts:

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

Names:

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

Preparation:

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the audiovisual research room in the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made.

Papers of John F. Kennedy

Presidential Recordings

Ditctabelts

Dictabelt 13A

Conversation #1: President Kennedy and Robert Lovett

March 9, 1963

President: Hello.

Mr. Lovett: Good morning, Mr. President.

President: Hello, how are you?

Mr. Lovett: I am pretty well, thank you.

President: Oh, fine.

Mr. Lovett: I promised to call you after having read this report.

President: Right. Right. What was your feeling about it?

Mr. Lovett: Well, I thought, uh, I have two strong feelings which I have already expressed to Gene Black and to Dentzler . . . the fellow . . . the boy who is the Secretary of this [Committee to Strengthen the Security of the Free World], I am going to call Dave Bell . . .

President: Right.

Mr. Lovett: . . . shortly. In the first place, I think the report is out of balance. I think it fails to point out that this group believes that aid appropriately given and efficiently managed is not only in the national interest, but also is an element, perhaps, of national security.

President: Right, I agree, that is right. It is really only at the end that says that. I was hoping they could move the end back to the beginning.

Mr. Lovett: I think that we have to state that at the outset. Otherwise, it is going to look like a bunch of hard nose old bastards sitting around and griping.

President: Otherwise, it's really an attack on the program. I completely agree. If somebody would just . . . [tape sticks] even if they, uh . . . would say, uh, as you pointed out, [tape sticks and jumps] if the recommendations are accepted [tape sticks] this is essential.

Mr. Lovett: Yes, and I think there is another thing we might put in there, I think, uh, Dave Bell, [tape skips] because of your previous appointment obviously [tape skips] . . . [tape skips] have seen a great deal of. Recently in addition this too [tape skips]. He made a very favorable impression, I think, on the whole group.

President: Right.

Mr. Lovett: Certainly allowing for reasonable bias on my part, he's made a damn good one on me.

President: Right.

Mr. Lovett: And he has dealt with a couple of very emotional characters on our group with considerable self-restraint and in a very forthright fashion. So I think that it is only fair in this report to point out that we anticipate a higher order of effective management than it has been possible to enjoy in the past.

President: Oh, I see.

Mr. Lovett: I drafted a little language along these lines, which I read to Dentzer, who is serving as Executive Secretary of this group, and he felt that it would meet the approval of the others. I think that will help as a follow on to the other statement which I just mentioned earlier.

President: Right, right.

Mr. Lovett: Finally, my major complaint is there's some adjectives in here that I think can be struck, and I think Dentzer agrees to that. Whenever you get into superlatives, either up or down, it's troublesome. And, uh . . . My main objection is to the so-called secret addenda; the annex. I think that, by it's very nature, is a document, a dangerous document, because it is impossible to control anything that is called secret. When it is written as part of a report which the Congress will at once want to get a hold of . . .

President: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lovett: . . . and the reason that I am against it is not the classification, but because it contains a number of estimates and guesses that can't possibly be substantiated. It will only serve to attract people like Passman and others to call [Lucius] Clay or Gene [Black] or Bob Anderson and myself up and say, "well, you say this can be reduced by a billion eight, now how do you figure it?" There isn't any way in the world you can figure. No way you can guess at that much. Secondly, I think it ought to be clear that anything that we speak of in the way of reduction applies to at least four of us.

President: Right, right, right.

Mr. Lovett: And thirdly, I would settle for a general comment, saying that we shall submit requests later and from time to time on certain classified matters, expanding and supplementing the views of the President's general review. If we want to say that at all. I would have some doubts whether we would want to go that far. But mainly, I'd very much prefer, Mr. President, to just say, "in general, we believe that under proper management and direction, a reduction in 1964 in the order of 400 or 500 million (whatever the figure is), is obtainable."

President: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lovett: Rather than try to be specific country by country. Now, Lucius isn't going to like that. He likes to get into country by country, but I defy him to tell me how much he can take out of Vietnam or Korea is pretty easy, relatively. Because you can deal with the number of personnel and apply the formula to that. But you can't do it in the Congo, you can't do it in the majority of the places that we are concerned in. You can't do it in South America. I just like to use a general figure. And I am going to try to . . . I'm gonna talk that out with Dave, and then I am going to get a hold of Clay and try to talk it out with him. Gene Black is in agreement with me, whom I talked to this morning, and he thought it was a hell of a good idea. And the point I am trying to make on it is this. It is perfectly possible for us to get together and arrive at a table of life expectancy on a life insurance basis. But it is very difficult for anybody to tell me what my life expectancy is, or yours, or anybody else's.

President: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lovett: So you can deal in general terms on the basis of an average [portion garbled], whereas you can't identify them item by item.

President: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lovett: And a lot of the scar tissue I have acquired over the past years has been trying to do it the other way.

President: Right, right.

Mr. Lovett: So those are the two main areas, Mr. President, that I find lacking here in the report. First one, I think, is serious, and the second one, I think, is probably a personal feeling as much as anything else. I am sure that Herman . . . feel as I do about trying to be specific. Say a million eight you can cut out of country X. Well, I wouldn't have the faintest idea that it's a billion eight.

President: Well, I must say, I think a . . . looking at the report, I am interested and concerned about what would be the newspaper sort of stories out of it. And I do think it is, uh, what would be the Congressional reaction. The way it was and the reason I was . . . called you was it was obviously be billed as an attack on foreign aid and the whole emphasis would be negative. So that I think if we could get . . . they have some good statements about foreign aid at the conclusion. So if they could start off with a discussion about why this program, under the limitations that you suggested, why it is essential to our security, I think that would be the most important thing. The other thing it is on the question of the money, I think that it ought to be generalized, because, uh, and in addition, I think it would be somewhat harmful if the whole lead of the story was that the Clay Committee suggest a half billion dollar cut. That would . . .

Mr. Lovett: God knows how we can keep that in some sort of, uh.

President: Well, I think the language you used was better than the language which was that you believed that a cut of a half a billion dollars it is obtainable. And I think if it could be put without saying we say that you can cut it a half billion dollars. If you put it in more cautious language . . .

Mr. Lovett: I think that it has to be put . . .

President: Then the lead, uh, the headline wouldn't be just the fact, uh, with all this emphasis on economy, they will just pick it out. And if all we get out if it is a story we can cut a half billion. I think if you could say that that's obtainable would put in more moderate language and not make that the great sort of story out of it.

Mr. Lovett: Good, I am going to talk to Dave Bell as soon as he gets back in his office. And see whether this is the figure which it is in his view.

President: Right, well, I think that he thinks that they can take a half billion out of it. Then if you went for that, and if we could state that anything seriously below that would . . . would take meat off the bone . . . that's right . . . would adversely affect our national interest. Then we will have some protection against the kinds of cuts they are talking about. Which, as you know, goes a billion and a half now.

Mr. Lovett: My problem it is going to be with Lucius.

President: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lovett: Because he it is very emotional about this. And having worked with him for so many years, I know how . . . he gets. I am going to try to get him to see my point of view, which it is we are much better off generalizing than we are to try to be specific. Because if they ever get him up on the stand and try to nail him down as to how he it is going to do this, he is going to be in a hell of a fix. [words lost]

President: Right, okay, good. Thanks very much, though. I think both of those will be very helpful.

Mr. Lovett: He is planning a meeting I think the 15th, which I will not be able to attend, and I've got really to get away and get some sun in order to have this nose heal, so that I can start breathing normally again. But he is talking about one on the 15th. And I think if we remove this annex, why, he has got no problem of getting a generally agreeable report.

President: Right, good.

Mr. Lovett: At all events, I will try.

President: Well, thanks and awful lot. Bye.

Mr. Lovett: Bye.