

Charles F. Baldwin, Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 3/14/1969
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Baldwin, Ambassador to the Federation of Malaysia from 1961 to 1964 (called the Federation of Malaya until 1963), discusses the Peace Corps in Malaysia, Communism and counter-insurgency, and U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia, among other issues.

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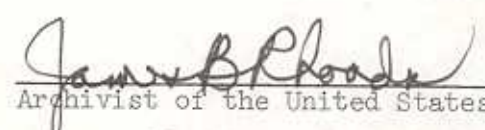
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Charles F. Baldwin



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Charles F. Baldwin – JFK#2

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
52	Singapore
53, 56	World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Federation of Malaysia (called the Federation of Malaya until 1963)
54	U.S. and British military aid to Malaysia
56	Rubber and Tin
57	Fulbright Program and Malaysian educational policy
59	U.S. business investment in Malaysia
60	Peace Corps
62, 65	Relationship with the State Department in Washington D.C.
64	Meeting with other U.S. ambassadors in Southeast Asia
66	Recommendations for Malaysia as a “fallback” should Indonesia become Communist
69	Dean Rusk
71	The C.I.A., Communism, and counter-insurgency in Malaysia
74	Contacts with State Department after resigning as Ambassador
75	Changes in U.S. policy towards Southeast Asia during Baldwin’s career and thoughts on directions for the future

Second Oral History Interview

with

Charles F. Baldwin

March 14, 1969
Charlottesville, Virginia

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: Well, I think the logical place to begin today is, perhaps, to begin in a general way with Singapore's strategic importance within the Malayan community and within the economic structure of Southeast Asia. What is Singapore's basic strategic importance there?

BALDWIN: Well, if you are referring to the economic, and I take it you are, Singapore is, in effect, the New York of Southeast Asia--certainly, in some ways the New York of Malaysia. It is the biggest banking center in that part of the world. It is the great entrepôt of trade for the whole area. At one time 25 percent of Indonesia's imports were trans-shipped at Singapore, and Singapore did virtually all of the processing of Indonesian rubber in processing plants in Singapore. I think it can be argued that perhaps, from the standpoint of Indonesia's future development, this was not altogether desirable. It may be that the cessation of trade which came along as part of the Confrontation--an embargo on trade was imposed by Sukarno--while it hurt Singapore economically, may have ultimately been a good thing, in a way, because it forced Indonesia to do things that Singapore had been doing.

Singapore is a very big trade and financial center. The Malaysian government, before Singapore became part of Malaysia, recognizing its dependence on Singapore, tried to counter it to some extent by creating in Malaya the facilities that they were dependent upon

in Singapore. For example, Port Swettenham, which is the seaport of Kuala Lumpur, was being developed with a loan from the United States, a development loan. The Malaysians encouraged banks in Singapore (including the American banks, the Bank of America and Chase [Manhattan], National City [of Chicago]) to open branches in Kuala Lumpur. The idea of trying to get away from so much dependence upon Singapore, which continued even during the brief time when Singapore was a member of the Federation, before it decided to leave the "Club", will undoubtedly be continued.

[-52-]

To what extent this can decrease the importance of Singapore remains to be seen. My feeling is that the very pragmatic people, mostly Chinese, who run Singapore are going to be smart enough to adapt themselves to the political tides or winds between the two countries until one day they may be reunited, as they should be. In the meantime, Singapore will continue, I think, to play a very important part in the economy of the area.

Singapore and Malaya had a common currency, as you probably know, even when Singapore was a colony. Then the currency was changed by a law with which I am not fully familiar. There's been a breaking away between the two countries, but it may very well be that common need may one day pull them together again.

O'BRIEN: Let me check this just a moment. [Interruption]

BALDWIN: There is another aspect of Singapore that's quite interesting. Singapore, in a way, has become a sort of second Hong Kong in the Far East. Entrepreneurs have come there and invested money. There is a free port area, an industrial area. Singapore has become almost as good a marketplace today as Hong Kong. It hasn't yet reached the great industrial development that Hong Kong has recorded, but there's been a good beginning in that direction.

O'BRIEN: Was there ever any feeling in some of the breakaway parties, I was thinking of the socialists, in the direction of perhaps a unification with Indonesia rather than Malaysia?

BALDWIN: Not of unification so far as I know, although some people may have thought of a union, a political union. I believe that in Malaysia, some of the Malay element have thought of closer identification with Indonesia. As British power is being withdrawn from the area, some Malays have, I believed, looked in the direction of Indonesia toward closer ties with it. There is a common bond. After all, Northern Indonesia, Sumatra is Malay predominantly, while, as you know, Java is Javanese. There are close ties, racial, religious, and even family ties between the Malays of the Federation and the Malays of Sumatra. My feeling has been, and this is only a guess, that a key objective in the foreign policy of Malaysia in the future could be the development of closer ties with their big Malay neighbor to the west--possibly as a kind of anti-Chinese gambit; protection against the energies of the local Chinese, and maybe, looking farther toward Mainland China and

desiring close ties with a nearly and apprehensively nation that in population and resources could become very powerful.

O'BRIEN: Malaya didn't receive much aid from the U.S., but they did get some loans from the International Monetary Fund and International Bank for...

BALDWIN: When I was there, they had a twenty million dollar loan, not from the World Bank, but a loan from the U.S. development loan agency, I think it was. This was a straight loan, and it was being paid off regularly. It was used entirely for port works, highway and bridge projects. But that was aid in the form of an out-and-out loan.

[-53-]

O'BRIEN: Did you ever become involved at all with the negotiations that went on between the World Bank--in regard to loans from the World Bank?

BALDWIN: No, I was not involved except that it was made known to me what was under consideration. The World Bank people and the International Monetary Fund people who came out to make studies would make a courtesy call at the Embassy and talk to my economic people and to me. But we were always careful--and I think that was consistent with the policies and wishes of the World Bank and the Fund--that the Embassy did not involve itself in a policy and operational way in these matters.

O'BRIEN: What explains the lack of actual aid or loans from the United States to Malaysia as compared to, let's say, Thailand or Indonesia?

BALDWIN: I don't know what's happened since I left, but up to that time, the feeling in Washington was that the economic condition of the country simply didn't qualify it as an applicant for U.S. economic aid. There had been talks. In fact, when I was in Washington with Razak [Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein], he had some talks with McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and others in the Defense Department about the possibility of getting some military assistance. That was the time when the Malaysians were frightened by Indonesia. They were aware of their own almost complete impotence, helplessness from a military standpoint. That feeling was accentuated as the confrontation went on, and, as you know, there has been a good deal of talk about it since. But from the economic aid standpoint, the feeling in Washington was that up to 1964 they didn't really need American economic aid. What they wanted from us in the way of aid wasn't grants or even soft loans. They wanted us to be considerate of their two principle commodities and not to do anything that would force down the price of rubber and tin. They felt that if we did that, we would be giving them all the aid they wanted from us on the developmental side.

O'BRIEN: In regard to negotiations for military aid when Razak was here, what kind of response did he get out of the Defense Department?

BALDWIN: Pretty good; if a little on the noncommittal side. He had a shopping list. I

didn't attend the meeting that he attended in the Pentagon, but I think there was some agreement--on needs on certain kinds of material to be furnished on a preferred basis, but the amount was not very important. The Malaysians asked for more than they expected to get and, at that time, they didn't get all they asked for. What's happened since then, frankly, I don't know.

O'BRIEN: Well, in regard to the defense pact arrangement between Malaysia and Great Britain, were negotiations of this nature, lets say in regard to military aid, were these carried on in conjunction with the British? Were the British involved in the...

[-54-]

BALDWIN: No, they weren't involved in the talks; I think Razak kept them informed that they were interested in getting some materiel from us. The British obviously had no objection to that because it relieved them, to some extent, from having to furnish the materiel. I'm not sure they were in a position to give all the things that the Malaysians wanted, including some coast defense equipment, naval craft, and later, I think they wanted some jet aircraft, equipment of that sort that we were in a position to supply. The British were not a party to the talks at any time so far as I know. There may have been talks in Washington, but I knew nothing about it.

O'BRIEN: Were you aware of any defense arrangements, at the embassy level, between the United States, Britain, and Malaysia for the defense of, let's say, Singapore and other...

BALDWIN: No. There was a kind of tacit understanding—really an unwritten agreement—that the United States was carrying in Vietnam all the burden with respect to Southeast Asia that we should carry at the time, and that Britain would consider the protection of the Malaysian area a British responsibility. That was clearly understood in London, Washington, and in Kuala Lumpur.

O'BRIEN: And in the defense pact that Malaysia and Great Britain...

BALDWIN: It was implicit in the whole situation. We felt, the United States felt, Washington felt, that the presence of our fleet in Southeast Asia, the activity we were carrying on in Vietnam, our bases in the Philippines, all of this constituted a form of protective assistance. The Malaysians accepted it as that. That was the time, also, when Lee Kuan Yew was being belligerent about the United States. He made some public statements to the effect that when the British left, Singapore didn't want the Americans coming in to fill the vacuum. He has followed a somewhat different line recently, but at that time he was rather anti-American. His feeling wasn't shared in Kuala Lumpur where, I think, it was generally understood that they lived under the protective American umbrella. They didn't ask for more specific commitments, although, with the Australians and

the New Zealanders, they presumably felt that there were future ties that could be developed. As you know, they developed those ties with Australia and New Zealand fairly recently.

O'BRIEN: In regard to not only the Tunku [Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj], but also Lee Kuan Yew and other Malayan as well as Chinese leaders in Singapore, did you ever have the feeling that there were perhaps two levels of response to America: one a kind of official, and the other unofficial? In other words, did Lee Kuan Yew ever find it perhaps necessary, in order to maintain his support within his political base, to make certain official statements?

[-55-]

BALDWIN: I think that was true in both countries to some extent. A sort of pulling the Eagle's feathers and getting political credit for it. It was more true in Singapore because of the overwhelming Chinese population there and the fact that even the non-communist Chinese never forget that they're racially Chinese. During the Korean war we were fighting China, and later we were opposing it in a possibility, as a result, some anti-American statements were made from time to time, but it really wasn't a serious development. It never troubled me very much because it never grew to troublesome proportions. I don't think it bothered Washington very much.

Lee Kuan Yew was antagonized from time to time by events involving us. There was the incident of the CIA that you're familiar with; the resentment against what he regarded as unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of his government by an American agency. This put him off the reservation for awhile, so far as we were concerned.

O'BRIEN: There was a real problem in the banking systems of Malaya and Singapore, as I understand. Did the United States ever offer any technical assistance or assistance in the way of economic studies in an attempt to bring these banking systems together.

BALDWIN: I'm not aware that the United States government ever did. I think the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank provided some technical assistance. The Fund people would come out periodically when the bank became interested in some projects in Malay. Experts were sent out. They conducted studies and gave advice. The Bank and the Fund were interested in the problems of both countries and considered them important problems.

O'BRIEN: Getting on to the rubber problem, were the 28-32 agreements ever a formalized kind of agreement, or were they just simply a kind of understanding with no real legal or binding quality?

BALDWIN: What agreement?

O'BRIEN: The 28-32--you know, the price agreements on rubber.

BALDWIN: They were certainly more than tacit understandings; they were producers' agreements.

O'BRIEN: Well, in those years the price of rubber was decreasing, but yet, as I understand, the production of rubber was increasing in Malaya. And there was some resentment on the part of the Malaysians in regard to the sale of stockpile items in the United States. Did you ever enter into those...

BALDWIN: Oh, yes, I was involved. Some of the most serious difficulties we had in Malaya were in this area. In some ways tin was a more troublesome problem, although in magnitude, it wasn't as great as the matter of the rubber price. There was an unpleasantness that had crept into the tin situation, which was really an outgrowth of some remarks made

[-56-]

by Stuart Symington [(William) Stuart Symington] before he became a Senator, when he was, I think, Director of the RFC, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.

O'BRIEN: Right, after World War II.

BALDWIN: Yeah. I was then in Singapore. Symington made statements in Washington to the effect that a gigantic tin cartel was in existence; that it was fixing prices, and the American tin user was being victimized by the development. This caused an outpouring of indignation in Malaya. One result was the first American tin mission to Singapore and the Federation. Tin people there are still exultant over what they claim was the inability of the mission to prove that a cartel was in operation, but the scars of the accusation lasted for a long time. The Malaysians resented it; they thought it was an unnecessarily harsh and ill-founded accusation. It did some damage to our relations.

The stockpile problem was, however, the big problem, both with respect to rubber and tin. It was on my plate all the time I was in Singapore and later, for three years as Ambassador. Periodically, the stockpile would rear its ugly head, and I would have trouble. It always seemed to me to be an excellent illustration of the manner in which our domestic interests and problems can collide with our foreign policy objectives. It followed a sort of stereotype pattern, almost like a ballet, the way the choreography developed. Pressure would be put on by various private interests, or by members of Congress, or officials of the Treasury Department, which looked at the stockpile from the financial standpoint. As our strategic concepts changed, more and more of the strategic stockpile materiel became disposable, and proposals would be made to dispose of them at what were called "concessional" prices. When rubber and tin became involved, a chain reaction of resentment would be set off in Malaya.

O'BRIEN: Did you remember any specific instances in which the Treasury Department or perhaps the State Department clashed on...

BALDWIN: Well, there were more or less continuous differences--I won't say clashes--but a continuous tussle, conflict of interest, between the agencies. The State Department tended to look at the problem, as I did, from the foreign policy standpoint. The Treasury Department and the holding agency looked at it from the standpoint of holding assets which could be converted into money and put back into the revenue channels of the United States government. Excuse me. [Interruption] [Defective recording]

O'BRIEN: Well, let's go back to that Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] thing for a minute. Did you ever have any problems in the Fulbright program, or at least any resistance on the part of the Malaysians to the Fulbright program on the basis that it could have been misused or was being used by...

BALDWIN: No. There was nothing of that kind while I was there. The biggest difficulty we encountered in connection with the Fulbright program was a practice, or a policy, which I had encountered when I was Consul General in Singapore, and which I found still in existence when I went

[-57-]

back as Ambassador, and against which I declared a kind of diplomatic offensive. That was the policy of not recognizing American academic degree.

O'BRIEN: Oh.

BALDWIN: My predecessor, Ambassador Byington [Homer M. Byington, Jr.], had succeeded after a good deal of effort in having developed a list of degrees which would be acceptable in Malaya, but it was fragmentary and a drop into the bucket compared to what was needed. The list contained colleges, some of which were hardly known in our country. I told the Tunku shortly after I arrived that the policy was still in existence and that I thought it was bad for his country--not so much for us, but for a developing country that needed all of the education and training it could get from our educational system. He agreed, but it was like pulling teeth to have it changed.

I don't customarily use conspiratorial explanations of foreign affairs, but I suspected that some of the English who were still being retained on contract under the so-called Export System (hiring former British colonial officials to fill position until Malaysians could be trained adequately) as well as the Minister of Education had a lot to do with the continuance of the policy. While the country was no longer a British colony, the British recognized their idea of developing a lot of Malaysian graduates of American universities.

It still is a problem, I believe, but the situation seems to be improved. I made a little headway in my efforts to have it changed. I understand my successor also made some headway in having the doors farther opened. It was a serious handicap for young Malaysians who found no advantage in coming to the United States to acquire a medical degree when they couldn't practice medicine unless they went to some Canadian, Australian, or British medical school for a year and received training that they didn't need. The same was true of law and other professions.

O'BRIEN: Were there any suspicions on the part of the Malaysians that some of the grant scholars, not only Fulbright but others, were using the grants as cover for perhaps the CIA?

BALDWIN: I didn't encounter that at all.

O'BRIEN: Was there ever any attempt to negotiate PL 480 programs with ...

BALDWIN: PL 480 came into the situation in a rather interesting way. Malaya was one of the first countries to be involved in the triangular relationship in the use of foreign exchange. The plan involved India. Indian rupees were used to pay some of the transportation costs of Fulbright people--PL 480 money, local currency, counterparted and accumulated in India. That was the principle PL 480 development during my tour of duty. You see, Malaya was a relatively prosperous country. The very nature of the country and its needs didn't make it a logical candidate for PL 480 aid. India needed wheat and got PL 480 wheat. Malaysia didn't need much wheat

[-58-]

and was able to buy Australian wheat and pay for it and concentrate on rice production.

O'BRIEN: In regard to the Pioneer Industries program, did you have much involvement in this?

BALDWIN: Yes, from time to time. One kind of involvement was meeting businessmen who came out from the United States to explore the possibility of opening a plant. My economic counselor and commercial attaché did more of that work than I did, but I would almost always meet and talk with them about policy, personnel policy, whether their board of directors should contain local people and so on. Actually, there wasn't extensive American involvement in the program up to the time I left, although some American companies opened plants under the agreement. It was a foresighted, imaginative kind of program and did attract a good deal of interest.

O'BRIEN: What American companies moved in?

BALDWIN: Well, Colgate. I remember Colgate Palmolive. Peet [Inc.] was one. There was a Chicago dairy products company.

O'BRIEN: Not Foremost [Dairies, Inc.]

BALDWIN: Foremost did put up a milk processing and ice cream plant. There were one or two canning factories, there was a box factory. But as I said, few American companies started new enterprises while I was there.

O'BRIEN: Did ESSO [Standard East, Inc.]...

BALDWIN: ESSO had come into the area before. Mobile [Petroleum Company, Inc.] came in while I was there. Shell [Oil Company], of course, was in on the ground floor and was in a pretty strong competitive position, but Standard came in; Mobile came in; and I believe Texaco [Inc.] was coming in. By comparison with the British economic interests in the country, ours were quite small but were increasing.

O'BRIEN: Did any of these American companies come in under the Guaranteed Loan Program?

BALDWIN: I can't tell you that definitely, but I believe a few did. However, most of our companies were large companies. Given the nature of the economy of Malaya and the fact that under the agreement with the Malayan government there was no problem of repatriating capital and taking out earnings, there was really no reason why they should need a loan guarantee.

O'BRIEN: Well, let's pass over to the Peace Corp program. Did you experience any difficulties with the program?

[-59-]

BALDWIN: Not at all. When I was in the Department being briefed before leaving for Malaya, I saw a telegram from the Kuala Lumpur Embassy indicating that the government, a few days before, had notified Ambassador Byington of its interest in what they had read about the Peace Corps program and wanted more information. Byington had reported this to the Department. The message was one of, I think, only twelve, ten or twelve; such voluntary expressions of interest by foreign governments.

I was at the White House seeing the President [John F. Kennedy] that day, and I asked him if he was aware that the country to which he was sending me as ambassador had been one of the first to express interest in his Peace Corps program. He was extremely pleased. He asked if I had told Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.]? I replied that I had informed Shriver that morning. The President said, "When you get out of Malaya I hope you will tell the Tunku that I'm very pleased indeed that he is interested in what I think will be a very important program."

Time passed. Shriver came out on his first round-the-world trip of exploration. I had a long talk with him about matters which I considered important in connection with the advent of the program in Malaya. I stressed the desirability of starting off on a small scale. I told him I didn't want more than thirty people in the first group of volunteers sent out. We received, I think, twenty-eight or twenty-nine, as I recall it. We built up slowly. When I left, there were some two hundred and seventy volunteers operating in Malaya and in Borneo.

O'BRIEN: What did that first group do?

BALDWIN: Well, they divided just about as the whole Corps was then divided: about 40

percent nurses, or nurses and other workers in the field of health, mostly nurses; about 40 percent teachers, predominately English teachers, but some teachers in civics and elementary physics and mathematics, basic elementary school studies. The rest was a mixed bag of mechanics, engineers, road builders, and what not. Those percentages held pretty constantly during the two years that I had personal experience with the Corps in Malaysia. It was very successful there.

I tried insofar as possible, to keep hands off the Peace Corps people--to refrain from interfering. I had a compact with my Peace Corps supervisor that while I recognized my responsibility as Ambassador for the Peace Corps activities, I felt it was desirable to play down as much as possible the official aspect of the Peace Corps to emphasize the people to peoples aspect. We carried out that policy. While I provided office space in the Embassy chancery for the Peace Corp for awhile, it later moved out of the chancery completely. This was a part of the agreement between me and the Peace Corps supervisor, that they should function physically outside the Embassy. It was a desirable arrangement.

Every Peace Corps group was entertained the day after their arrival by my wife [Helen Baldwin] and me in the embassy residence. We had a reception to enable them to meet not the American community, but the Asian community. While we always invited a few prominent people from the American community and a few people from the embassy, most of the guests were Asians. The parties gave volunteers a chance to meet the Asians promptly. This developed

[-60-]

lasting friendships in some cases.

We had a very effective working arrangement for the Peace Corps with the Malayan government. An official in the office of the Minister of Education was named liaison on Peace Corps matters. He was the channel through which we received the needs of the government and worked out details. The Malaysians were extremely helpful in providing facilities, teaching facilities, language teaching facilities at the University of Malaya.

On the occasion of Shriver's second visit, after the Peace Corps had been established several months, nearly a year—and by agreement with Shriver—I had not made an appointment for him to meet the Tunku again. He had met him the first time and we knew the Tunku would be very busy presiding at the annual UMNO Party conference. But the Tunku learned that Shriver was coming, and I received word from him in no uncertain terms that he wanted to see Shriver.

I took Shriver to the Party convention. The Tunku and Razak in their Malay costumes came from the meeting to meet with us in a private room. The Tunku explained that he particularly wanted to see Shriver, although he was very busy as head of his Party, to proffer his personal thanks for the wonderful things the Peace Corps was doing in Malaya. He said, "I feel we don't help you enough; we don't contribute enough to this wonderful enterprise." Shriver said, "On the contrary, you've been very helpful with housing and many other things." The Tunku said, "No, there must be something more." An idea occurred to him while we were talking. He said, "I have it. We have a very fine documentary film organization in this country, which we inherited from the British. It was used for propaganda purposes during the Twelve Year War. How would you feel about our making a documentary

film of the Peace Corps and its work in Malaya?" This pleased Shriver very much. The Malayans produced the film, and it was a good one. It was widely used, I'm told, by the Peace Corps in other countries and in the United States for recruiting. This act of the Tunku indicated the feeling of cordiality and appreciation and gratitude about the Peace Corps.

We had virtually no Peace Corps failures, only one or two minor misfits who were handled with no problems at all. No serious problems. Up to the time I left the country, after nearly two years of experience, the Peace Corps was virtually an unqualified success.

O'BRIEN: Where were their activities in Malaysia?

BALDWIN: Everywhere. Some of the Peace Corps volunteers served in remote kampongs (villages), and curiously and interestingly enough, they were the ones whose morale generally was the best. We had to keep some of them in the cities because the Technical Institute, for example, which was in Kuala Lumpur, needed electrical engineers and other kinds of engineers. So we had between fifteen and twenty volunteers in Kuala Lumpur, some in Ipoh, and some in Penang, but they were really less happy because they were living comfortable, normal lives than the ones who were adventuring, so to speak, in the villages with the local people.

[-61-]

O'BRIEN: Was there any opposition in the spectrum of political parties in Malaya and Singapore?

BALDWIN: No. The Tunku had given the program his blessing, and that counted a lot. I don't recall any serious opposition at all. Occasionally, if the allegation was made somewhere that the Peace Corps was being used for intelligence purposes, someone in Malaya might pick up a story of that kind, and it might be carried in one of the local papers. But it would be denied promptly by the government and by me and with good reason because it was not true. Certainly, it wasn't true in Malaya.

O'BRIEN: Let's pass over to some of the administrative things in regard to the embassy and your relation with, primarily, Washington. Would you care to evaluate the so-called Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] changes--it's sometimes called the Bundy-Rostow [[McGeorge Bundy; Walt Whitman Rostow] changes in foreign policy management--in regard to a more small White House operation rather than the use of the National Security Council operations coordinating Board?

BALDWIN: I dealt with this mechanism when I was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. The NSC [National Security Council] in the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration was a potent maker of foreign policy or a crystallizer of foreign policy. I had a feeling that the change in operating technique was pretty largely a shift from one method of functioning to another without any very great difference in policy-making efficiency. The NSC operation was, perhaps, a bit more cumbersome. Concentration in the White House of more of the decision-making process had

advantages and disadvantages. I think the disadvantages are the reason that President Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] has been reverting to the old procedure which is perhaps more in keeping with his somewhat more cautious approach to foreign policy problems. He has a more deliberate approach than the more dashing approach of the Kennedy Administration.

I wasn't always happy with my relationship with the Department when I was ambassador. When Roger Hilsman, for example, was Assistant Secretary, I had a feeling that Hilsman either wasn't aware of or didn't wish to follow the time-honored and effective and necessary practice of an assistant secretary for a region of maintaining close, frequent, and informal exchanges of views with ambassadors in his area. My efforts to have this kind of communication with Hilsman were not very successful. I would write letters that were not answered. I don't know whether this was general or whether it was simply the fact that I was not in a crisis country and there was no great importance attached to what was happening in Malaya--at least until the Indonesian crisis began. Even then, I had a feeling that the cards were being played a little closer to the chest in Washington than I, as Ambassador, considered desirable.

O'BRIEN: Do you think Hilsman had a pretty good understanding of the politics of Southeast Asia and the structure of Southeast Asia?

BALDWIN: I don't know. Very frankly, in the light of some of his later writings, I have had doubts as to whether he had an understanding in depth of some aspects of the area. I think he understood a

[-62-]

good deal from his personal experience--particularly about guerilla warfare. I had some misgivings about--what should I say--the depth of his understanding of his understanding of Southeast Asia as a whole.

O'BRIEN: Have you had a chance to read his chapters in *To Move A Nation*, which cover Malaya?

BALDWIN: No, I have not. I should have read it. I was discussing him last night with one of his colleagues at Columbia, Philip Mosely, Dr. Philip Mosely. But I have not read the book.

O'BRIEN: How did you get along with Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] when he was....

BALDWIN: I've known Averell Harriman for twenty-four years, and I have a good deal of admiration for this motivated, dedicated, stubborn, [Laughter] effective, well-known man. I had nothing but the happiest relations with Averell until I found it necessary, occasionally, to send in a critical dispatch about our attitude toward Sukarno. One of Averell's characteristics was absolute complete total, and unswerving loyalty to John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

It was a wonderful thing to see: this man, old enough to be his grandfather, so dedicated and so loyal to the President. We were all loyal to the President, but Averell's loyalty was the kind that just tolerated no criticism. He would be very resentful if anyone criticized a policy that emanated from Jack Kennedy personally.

The Indonesian policy, of course, came from Kennedy. Harriman regarded himself as the architect or at least the surrogate, in a way, for the policy in the State Department. When the time came when I considered it desirable and necessary on a few occasions to say, "Now, look, this objective, I think, could be achieved just as well without seeming to be genuflecting in the direction of Sukarno. Maybe a little tougher line with Sukarno would earn his respect and be less objectional to some of his neighbors, particularly the Malaysians." I found later that Averell Harriman didn't like this, but I didn't learn until later. He didn't write me about it. But I was aware that such expressions seemed to fall on rather unresponsive ears in the Department, and Harriman's were among them.

O'BRIEN: You saw him then...

BALDWIN: I saw him.

O'BRIEN: ...during his frequent trips to Southeast Asia.

BALDWIN: He didn't come to Malaysia while I was there.

O'BRIEN: Oh, is that right? I thought, perhaps, he might have.

BALDWIN: Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] came once to a conference in the early days of the Administration when he was still Under Secretary of State. Averell may have come after I left--but I'm not sure--but he didn't

[-63-]

come when I was there.

O'BRIEN: How about Hilsman? Did Hilsman ever come out when McConaughy [Walter P. McConaughy] was Assistant Secretary?

BALDWIN: No, he didn't. Did I tell you yesterday that Dean Rusk said that he wanted frequent meetings of ambassadors?

O'BRIEN: Right, right.

BALDWIN: We never had any officially.

O'BRIEN: You said you had one.

BALDWIN: I organized that one myself, informally. I used what lawyers call *ultra vires*

powers to do so.

O'BRIEN: When and where did this take place?

BALDWIN: It took place in Singapore, and it was produced by the confrontation between Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines. I had recommended very strongly to Washington that Jones [Howard P. Jones] and Stevenson [William E. Stevenson], Ken Young [Kenneth T. Young] and I should meet at least every three or four months quietly and with no fanfare, no agenda, no publicity to talk about the problems of our areas. That was exactly what Secretary Rusk had told me he wanted when I went out. I regarded my suggestion as consistent with his policy. My colleagues agreed; they wanted to have the meetings, but we never got approval of proposals for them. We were always told there wasn't funds: that the Department couldn't pay the cost of the meetings. It seemed to me that given the small cost of bringing together four ambassadors, each of whom had his own air attaché and air transportation, made it ludicrous to say that we couldn't afford the conferences, but we didn't get any encouragement from Washington.

Finally, after having been turned down several times on this, I did a little organizing. I wrote to my three colleagues and suggested that we meet in Singapore. We did. They all found occasion to take a trip, boarded their air attaché planes, and descended upon Singapore. We had a secret two-day meeting in the Consulate General, and we talked. I thought it was very helpful, very productive. I was able, for example, to explain some things to Howard Jones about the Tunku's attitude that Jones obviously never learned about from Sukarno. I was able to tell Bill Stevenson, who was the Ambassador in the Philippines, that the Tunku wasn't a trouble-maker. Stevenson was not a career appointee. He seemed to be resentful that the Tunku dared to do anything that would disturb President Macapagal [Diosado Macapagal]. I was able to clear up some of the misunderstandings. And the others were able, in turn, to clear up some of the matters that I was confused about. Ken Young, I think, found it useful, looking at the situation from Bangkok, to see the problems more closely. So, the meeting was significant. We should have had more of them.

[-64-]

O'BRIEN: Were these major issues at hand at that particular meeting?

BALDWIN: The Confrontation was the major issue.

O'BRIEN: Anything else in the way of overall problems of Southeast Asia that came up?

BALDWIN: The attitudes toward Vietnam, which were obviously a matter of interest, were discussed. Also the destiny of ASA, as it was called in those days, the Association of Southeast Asia, in which all of us were interested. While Indonesia was not a party to it, Jones felt, as we all did, that a Southeast Asian association without Indonesia would resemble a performance of *Hamlet* without "the gloomy Dane."

O'BRIEN: How did you get along with Walter McConaughy when he was Assistant

Secretary? Did you get pretty good...

BALDWIN: Oh, very well, indeed. Walter and I were old friends. We'd worked together in FE [Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs]. I'd been Deputy Assistant Secretary when he was in charge of the Office of Chinese Affairs. I was fond of him; we had complete rapport.

O'BRIEN: Going back to Hilsman, did you ever have any major conflicts with Hilsman or with his people in the Southeast Asia...

BALDWIN: No. This is moving into the personal area, and it may not be germane to the purpose of your inquiry. My feeling of grievance, really, about Hilsman, is a result of the fact that I resented what might be called the "silence" in Washington about matters of interest to the Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur. For example, I wrote Hilsman two letters, the subjects of which are really not important, containing recommendations about matters which I thought should be moved as fast as possible into the upper echelons of policy consideration in Washington. Months passed and I received no reply. Then after I had submitted my resignation, and it should have been well-known that I had done so in the Department, I had a letter of almost fulsome praise from Hilsman thanking me for the extremely interesting idea; and another letter asking my advice as to the time when the Baguio conference of ambassadors should be held--what time in April it should be held. (My resignation was to be effective in February). This didn't seem to indicate a very close bond.

I felt handicapped by this lack of cooperation. Later when I returned, I talked to Averell Harriman and Dean Rusk about this. They seemed unhappy about it, too, and said they hadn't known that I wasn't kept fully informed about the trend of thinking in the Department. I wasn't. That, I think, was wrong. I don't know the reason for the communication gap and I don't particularly care now, but it wasn't good administration.

O'BRIEN: Well, if you care to discuss it, what were you recommending at this point?

[-65-]

BALDWIN: On a trip to Washington I had some disagreement with Walt Rostow when he was head of the Policy Planning Staff over one proposal. I had suggested that it might be a good idea to consider the importance of Malaysia as a possible "fallback" position if our Indonesia policy should fail; if, despite our efforts to prevent the communist takeover of Indonesia, there should in fact be one. My suggestion was not a reflection on Howard Jones' indefatigable work; it was no reflection on the benefits we gained by training Indonesian army officers or on the other facets of our Indonesian policy. It certainly was not criticism of our basic objective in Indonesia. It simply reflected a belief that, in the area of foreign policy, when you set an objective, you should have a fallback position like a good general in the field. I suggested that a logical fallback position could conceivably be Malaysia, even from a military standpoint. There were advantages. The British had bases, and there were airfields. Malaysia was a friendly country. The Federation

might turn out to be an important development. Therefore, Malaysia and our relations with Malaysia should perhaps be given a little more consideration than they were receiving among efforts to keep Sukarno as friendly as possible.

Later, I found that my suggestion met with an unenthusiastic reaction in some parts of the Department--not in all. Rostow said to me in Washington that he couldn't get very excited about the idea. He was rather skeptical about the concept of a fallback position in foreign policy. I replied that it seemed to me that his view was a bit like criticizing a pilot who took off from New York with London as his objective but selected Paris as an alternate landing place in an emergency. Rostow said, "Well, if we adopt a fallback policy with respect to Indonesia, it will be interpreted as disbelief in our ability to make the policy succeed." I said, "Walt, that strikes me as errant nonsense. It's like saying that a field general who has a fallback position doesn't want to take his first objective." Rostow didn't agree but did recognize that in view of the nature of the confrontation, it was natural for the Malaysians to feel that they had a real grievance, that they were being kicked around by a bully. That was their feeling, and I must say it was difficult to disagree with them about the way they were being treated. They were small and weak, and the intentions of Sukarno were quite obvious. Despite his denials, he resented the planned absorption of the Borneo territories in the Federation of Malaysia. He resented the British presence for obvious reasons. But everything he did tended to force the British to stay. All of his actions, in effect, guaranteed continuation of the British presence.

All of these things, it seemed to me, were creating a Malaysian psychology which should be taken into account in Washington policy making. I never criticized for a moment the desirability of keeping Indonesia out of communist hands, but occasionally I found fault with some of our methods. This was the unanimous embassy opinion. I would never submit my recommendations without having a country team meeting and letting my advisors function as they were supposed to function. They all felt as I did. And I might add that I learned later in Washington that within six weeks after my

[-66-]

successor arrived, his reports back to the Department were conforming closely to the reports that I had been sending back.

O'BRIEN: Then at the White House level there was a preoccupation with Sukarno?

BALDWIN: Very much.

O'BRIEN: Was this, do you suppose, based on the assumption that Sukarno was a kind of wave of the future and that eventually Indonesia would serve as some kind of a counterbalancing force against either a unified Vietnam or...

BALDWIN: I think that entered into Washington thinking to some extent. Nobody could study Southeast Asia without recognizing the tremendous importance of the nation of Indonesia. I think, also, that a strong influence on our foreign policy thinking was created by Howard Jones himself, our Ambassador. He had labored for years--

at first against great handicaps in Washington because high officials seemed unwilling to pay much attention to Indonesia. His job then was to ring the bell so loudly that officials would begin to listen. Later his efforts put him into a position of closeness to Sukarno and, it seemed to me, strengthened his conviction that we simply had to keep Sukarno's friendship because he was, in effect, Indonesia. That may be a gross over simplification of Jones' position, but it seemed to me at the time to be a dominant theme.

Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], I think, carried back from his first trip to Indonesia the feeling that Sukarno's good will was essential and that getting and holding it should receive our top priority attention.

We in Malaysia had the feeling, from time to time, and so did the Malaysian government, that in this preoccupation with central policy, which was unobjectionable, Malaysia was sometimes lost sight of. In fact, on one occasion when I was back in Washington, a very high official of the State Department--not the Secretary--said to me, "Why don't you keep this Tunku fellow from getting off the reservation? He's a troublemaker, isn't he?"

This, I think, tended to be the attitude in at least some areas in the Department. "Who is this little fellow that's annoying Sukarno and acting as an irritant?" The Malaysians, of course, felt that they were the ones who had the grievances and were being mistreated.

O'BRIEN: How did you get along with your desk officers? Did you feel that they gave you cooperation?

Cuthell, who

was reputedly a capable man in many ways, seemed to be more in agreement with and more willing to accept the "be nice to Sukarno" policy than we were. Bell [James D. Bell], who succeeded me and was the principal desk officer, was cooperative. I can't say that we had a continuous flow of close and intimate letters, but I had no

[-67-]

complaints about responses.

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

O'BRIEN: Well, as you look at the people on the Southeast Asia desk in regard to Sukarno, how did Parsons--well, of course Parsons was a carryover from the Eisenhower Administration--how did he fit into this? Was he basically a pro-Sukarno type?

BALDWIN: I don't think the issue had developed at that point. I don't recall ever having had any discussions about this with Parsons. The confrontation, as you said, had no crystallized at that point.

O'BRIEN: Well, about Walter McConaughy?

BALDWIN: He didn't either.

O'BRIEN: It really came after Harriman?

BALDWIN: It really came after Harriman, but there was a concern in the Department about Indonesia when I was Deputy Assistant Secretary. We had trouble trying to get Mr. Dulles to focus on Indonesia in those days. That was one of the reasons that the West Irian problem was pushed aside, swept under the rug, for so long partly because it got us in trouble with our NATO friends, the Dutch. The problem in those days was to get high officials in Washington to recognize the importance of Indonesia. When they did realize it, as so often happens in Washington, the pendulum swung the other way. When they realized that we could be outflanked in Southeast Asia by communist domination of Indonesia, everyone got very excited. Jones' appeals to pay attention to Indonesia produced very emphatic and very high level results.

O'BRIEN: How about the other people in the Department within the Assistant Secretary's office, people like the economic advisors, Robert Barnett [Robert Peterson [Avery F. Peterson]...

BALDWIN: Bob Barnett. He took the job that I had occupied. He was very understanding, very good; so was Peterson. The commodity people were, I thought, extremely good. They grasped very quickly the political implications of the economic life of Malaysia, which was a basically important element. They could see that at the time I had nothing but complete and whole hearted cooperation from them.

O'BRIEN: How about people like Anderson, Daniel Anderson [Daniel V. Anderson], and Koren [H.L.T. Koren]?

BALDWIN: No complaint at all. Everything was fine so far as they were concerned. I think my feeling about Hilsman was basically one of being handicapped by a lack of closer correspondence and

[-68-]

communication. The same thing may be said with respect to Cuthell. I didn't realize until later, when I came back after I'd resigned, that there had been some elements of opposition to some of my views and the views of my staff that I should have known and didn't know.

O'BRIEN: Well, getting to Secretary Rusk. You've known him for a good many years and worked with him in a very close capacity back in the late Truman [Harry S. Truman] Administration, as well as your role as an Ambassador, of course, when he was Secretary of State. Do you see any changes in Secretary Rusk over those years?

BALDWIN: Yes; of course, anyone will change who has been as harassed as Dean Rusk was--after eight years of taking a terrible pounding.

O'BRIEN: How about the period from, say, '52 to 1960?

BALDWIN: I left the Department in '55 and didn't come back until '61. During the intervening period, I saw Rusk occasionally at social events, but I had no official contact with him. I don't think his basic policies changed. Rusk was a man motivated by a very deep conviction that aggression was a basic problem of the world. He has said to me personally, and I've heard him say it publicly, that he saw aggression lead the world into a great war, and that it would never happen so long as he had any opportunity to prevent it as Secretary of State. He regarded the world in that light. He regarded his job, I think, even more than Dulles did, as a kind of holy responsibility to try to resist aggression. I agreed with his views about aggression. I think that aggression in one form or another is a great danger that our younger generation of scholars and students very often lose sight of. They didn't see the results of aggression as our generation did.

Rusk was a very cautious man. He played his cards very close to the chest. He was not an extrovert, and it was sometimes difficult to find out how he felt about things. He was reserved to a degree. Sometimes one felt that, while he was always polite, he was less interested in one's own problem than he might be. But when you realized that he had all the problems of the globe to worry about, his manner was easier to understand. I didn't have daily contact with Rusk and wasn't in a position to know him well, but I have a feeling that history will give him high marks as Secretary of State.

O'BRIEN: What were his strengths as an administrator?

BALDWIN: I don't think he was a particularly great administrator. I don't think a Secretary of State needs to be. You see, in a small sense, an ambassador and, in a large sense, a Secretary of State has a structure laid out for him where the role of the administrator is clearly defined. The DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] is the administrative officer of an embassy, and the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration is the top administrative official in the State Department. That is as it should be. The Secretary of State should be left free to devote more time than he has now to policy matters of vital and deep importance, and an ambassador similarly.

[-69-]

This doesn't absolve an ambassador from the responsibility of paying attention to the administration of his embassy. As I have always been interested in administration, I didn't have to force myself to pay a good deal of attention to that aspect of mine. The action officer was my DCM, but I knew everyone in the embassy. I went through the Embassy the day after my arrival and met everybody, even the cleaners, the chauffeurs; and the messengers. Whenever possible, I met with them. We would have them at the embassy residence for a party and for Christmas presents. I think this is important, but the basic nuts and bolts work of administration should not have to be performed by the top man. A Secretary of State could be a very bad administrator and an outstanding Secretary of State if he has a good deputy who will do his administrative work for him.

Rusk was that way. I don't think Rusk either had much interest or much time and attention to devote in the nitty-gritty of administration. His temperament placed him in a kind of Jovian position in the Department. Dulles was even more so.

O'BRIEN: As Secretary of State, what did you consider his weaknesses? Did he have any?

BALDWIN: I've never known whether it was his weakness or the weakness of President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] that caused Dean Rusk, in the Vietnam matter, to keep repeating the same kind of rather stereotyped explanation; of making the Vietnam issue look like only a crusade to preserve the freedom of fourteen million people instead of placing it in a broader setting. It seemed to me, and I think to other people who worked in and lived in and studied Southeast Asia, that our own involvement should have been described as an effort to hold back the turbulent, revolutionary fervor in China, the most populous and the largest nation in the world; to try to hold back the tide of expansionism, to give the new nations of the area a period in which they could stabilize themselves and learn to exist as new and independent nations without being engulfed by--I don't like to use the term communism; it isn't as simple as that--but by overwhelming power. I've always felt--I've felt more and more, recently, that this problem placed in the White House a vast educational responsibility, which I don't believe was adequately discharged. The educational job has to be done primarily by the President, but it can also be done to a lesser extent by the Secretary of State. And yet, Mr. Johnson's explanation for a long time was an oversimplified explanation. I think this accounted to a considerable extent for the credibility gap. It weakened the confidence of the people and their trust in the President and in Secretary Rusk because, to some extent, he did the same thing. I've never known whether he did it because he had to; because he was ordered to; because he sensed it was what he was expected to say; or he himself didn't fully recognize the tremendous importance of educating the American public in the intricacies of our foreign problems. If it was the latter, then I would regard it as a defect--too much self-confidence.

[-70-]

O'BRIEN: Did you ever have any contact with the so-called counter-insurgency groups that were formed--sort of ad hoc groups between the CIA and the State Department in relation to particular nations?

BALDWIN: I was...

O'BRIEN: Did they have any contact with you or...

BALDWIN: I had contact with them occasionally when I came back on consultation, both in the CIA and in the Department, but mainly to talk with them about my experience years before when I'd been Consul General and Malaya was in the throes of a communist uprising, the so-called Emergency. I also met with them when there were infiltrations across the Borneo border, there was interest in talking to me about what the

Indonesians were doing and how they were doing it. The British, of course, had better information on that, and my military people obtained and reported much of it. So my contact with these groups was sporadic and not in depth.

O'BRIEN: They did become very interested in the Malayan experience...

BALDWIN: Yes, they did.

O'BRIEN: ...because of its success.

BALDWIN: I'm afraid our interest in the Malaysian experience--the official especially the military interest--was belated. It didn't occur fast enough. For example, the introduction into the Vietnam strategy of the strategic hamlets concept which was a by-product of the new towns, new village program which was first successful in Malaysia. I don't know to what extent we could have dictated the situation in those days when Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] was in power, and his powerful brother Ngo Dinh Nhu was also a power. Ngo reputedly wanted to use the strategic hamlet program--largely or partly at least--for political buildup, a kind of Asian Tammany Hall operation. If that is true it may have contributed to its lack of success. But I believe a more careful study and more emulation of the way the British handled the problem in Malaya could have been very helpful in Vietnam. Certainly the knowledge that the British gained during twelve years of jungle warfare against the communists in Malaya could have been of value elsewhere in Southeast Asia. I don't believe we paid enough attention to that for awhile.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever see any evidence of any direct aid or involvement of either the Russians or the Chinese with the Malayan Communist Party or the insurgents?

BALDWIN: I was told when I was Consul General in Singapore that there was a compact, if not in writing, at least an understanding between Chen Pling, the head of the communist party, and Peking that the Chinese would keep hands off the actual operations which the MCP [Malayan Chinese Party] would direct, with the provision that the Chinese would have

[-71-]

some involvement in the educational penetration, the penetration of schools. Excuse me.
[Interruption]

As a matter of fact, I understand that captured documents confirm the existence of such an arrangement. I don't know the extent to which the Chinese became involved then, but later, when I went back as Ambassador, there was the student trouble in Singapore and the obvious Chinese involvement had increased--that a fairly close relationship between Peking and the communist leaders in Singapore had developed.

O'BRIEN: Did the CIA ever become involved in the political parties, any of the political parties in Singapore, or the youth movements, or the labor movements?

BALDWIN: Do you mean the utilization of people for CIA purposes?

O'BRIEN: Well, not only that, but perhaps funding, some financial support.

BALDWIN: The CIA worked very closely out there with the British, as you may know. There was no need to penetrate each other's organization because their interests were in common. I was told that the CIA had some political party contacts.

O'BRIEN: Which of the parties, do you recall?

BALDWIN: No. These contacts, if they existed, were made when I had no authority over Singapore. When I went out as Ambassador, I kept hands off Singapore, which was still a colony. We still maintained the Consulate General. There with which my Embassy cooperated but did not direct. As a matter of fact, my first involvement in the area with the CIA then was when I passed through Singapore on my way to Malaya to present my credentials. A dinner party was given for me and my wife by the consul general. I noticed that our host seemed very distraught. I learned of his discussions with Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister, concerning the possibility that if an aid program of a certain size were given to Singapore, an American who was accused of trying to "penetrate" the government and who was being held in custody could be released. He asked my advice because I had no authority, but I expressed a personal opinion that the proposed "deal" would be unwise.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any other insights into that particular Singapore incident with the CIA?

BALDWIN: Nothing, except that it seemed to have been bungled very badly.

O'BRIEN: In what way?

BALDWIN: It certainly was not well executed. It apparently was detected very easily and quickly by the counter-intelligence people in the

[-72-]

Singapore government. It seemed a stupid thing to do. I'm not familiar enough with the details of the operation to know much about it.

O'BRIEN: What was the background to that?

BALDWIN: I don't know. It was conceived, I have heard, or at least operated from Bangkok. It was done from outside Singapore.

O'BRIEN: You don't have any idea what they were trying to do?

BALDWIN: They were reported to have been trying to develop contacts inside the PAP [People's Action Party] who would be sources of information. That was the kind of thing that, on the surface, might seem to be a rather natural intelligence function. Singapore was a hot-bed of communism. In those days, Lee Kuan Yew seemed to be friendly with the communists. There were said to be close connections between him and some of the communist leaders in Singapore. The CIA apparently was trying to find out as much as possible about the situation, but the effort backfired.

O'BRIEN: PAP had a very delicate balance then, didn't it, between the communists and...

BALDWIN: It did at one time, although later--the last time I talked to Lee Kuan Yew was at a private luncheon with him shortly before I retired as ambassador. I'll never forget the conversation. As we walked to the door of his private dining room to say good-bye, he said, "You know, some people still say I'm a danger because I have pro-communist leanings. Little do they know I couldn't have close relations with the communists even if I wanted to." He added, "They'd like to get me out under any circumstances."

O'BRIEN: Did you have full knowledge of the activities of other agencies operating in the country, like the CIA, USIA?

BALDWIN: I did indeed. One of the first things I did upon arrival at my post--partly as a result of what I'd heard in Singapore--was to call in the CIA head of station, and discuss with him the instructions I had been given in Washington and a letter which was being sent to ambassadors by the President to clarify their powers. I explained that I wanted him to understand that I was to be privy to all of his operations unless he could convince me that there were reasons why I shouldn't know about them--and I doubted if he could do that in a country like Malaysia which was friendly. So far as I know, I was kept informed. The CIA work there was pretty largely liaison work with the Malaysian intelligence people and the British intelligence people. The clandestine and operational side was very limited.

O'BRIEN: How did the country team operation work for you?

BALDWIN: Very well. I know that it's become fashionable to say that this is an outdated mechanism. Perhaps it is. It wasn't in my embassy. It may have been more difficult for Ken Young in

Bangkok with about twenty-two hundred Americans under his supervision, or Bill Stevenson with sixteen hundred in Manila, to make the country team operation successful than in my smaller embassy with a compact staff. But I couldn't have done without it.

O'BRIEN: When you decided to retire, I suspect that the problem with Hilsman was a major factor. Was there anything else that contributed to your decision?

BALDWIN: No. As a matter of fact, when I got back to Washington, I talked to Dean Rusk about reports that I had ruffled feathers in the Department. He appeared to be, and I think he was completely surprised. He said he knew nothing about it at all. He was good enough to add that he wanted to make one point very clear and that was that if I had any feeling that I was ending a long career culminating in an ambassadorship with anything except a highly satisfactory record, he wanted to do everything he could to allay any such feeling. He said that if there was any feeling on my part that there were people in the Department with whom my communication had been inadequate, he was personally very sorry. If he'd known about it, he would have done what he could to correct it.

O'BRIEN: Did you take the matter up with anyone else?

BALDWIN: I took it up with Averell Harriman. Averell laughed and said, "One or two of your embassy's positions about the Sukarno thing kind of irritated us." I said, "Well, Averell, I wrote to you about the matter in a letter which you never answered. I suspected that there were currents in the Department that I should have known about, but didn't know about. I remember saying in my letter that my conception of an ambassador's duty was to report what he believed to call the shots as he saw them. If that wasn't the way the Department wanted ambassadors to function, I'd better be told about it quickly so that I could find something else to do." And I added, "I thought that of all men, you would be most likely to agree with that." Harriman said, "I answered that letter." I said, "No, you didn't." He said, "I did." And I said, "No, you didn't." And so we left the matter there. [Laughter]

O'BRIEN: Did you see President Johnson?

BALDWIN: No, I didn't attempt to. I'd always felt that one should not bother a President unless there was something important to talk about. I was leaving. There was nothing in the situation in Malaysia that I knew about that had not been reported. My reports were there. I left word at the White House that I knew the President was busy and that I'd be available if he wished to see me.

During the couple of weeks of my debriefing in Washington, there was an extraordinarily heavy schedule of visitors at the White House. There were a couple of chief of state visits. The President was extremely busy. I consulted people in the Department who were in touch with the White House. The word came back that the President would be delighted to see me if I wanted to see him, but that he had nothing in particular to talk about. I sent word back that I would be delighted to see the President

for personal reasons, but I had nothing to bring to his attention, and therefore, we could both assume the call was made [Laughter] without its being made.

O'BRIEN: When you look back at this from the perspective of a person that's been involved in the Far East and Southeast Asia for a long time, a good part of your life, do you see any fundamental shifts in policy, American foreign policy in regard to Southeast Asia, between, let's say, the Eisenhower Administration, the Kennedy Administration, and the Johnson Administration?

BALDWIN: I think so, but I can't say that I see it so much in terms of administrations. To me, what has occurred has been simply the evolution of policy in an area where there had been a vacuum of policy, perhaps, for good reasons. Before World War II all of Southeast Asia except Thailand consisted of colonials, the whole area. If we had trouble in Southeast Asia we went to London, the Hague, or Paris--to the metropolitan powers. We didn't take it up in Djakarta or in Saigon or Singapore. As much of Asia was being run by absentee landlords, so to speak, there was no compelling reason--or we didn't think there was--to evolve policies for the colonies which later became nations.

When suddenly they became national entities, nation states, we had to evolve policies almost overnight. I think it is not surprising that, as we didn't have full-blown policies for all purpose, the policies which were developed weren't always completely satisfactory. There is also the fact that Europe was presenting a practically continuous major crisis for us (the Middle East trouble hadn't begun). We had two wars in Asia which should be alerted and did, I think, alert the policy making branches of our government to the fact that we were a Pacific power, and we would have to be increasingly concerned with Asia, a fact which hadn't penetrated to the people. But when we confronted those new problems, we had to evolve policies on a more or less play-it-by ear basis. I think that was primarily the reason for the change in attitude. Our focus shifted.

I have referred to Mr. Dulles in the days when we tried in the Department to get him to think more about Asia. He was worrying about the European defense community, NATO, Germany, the problem of European economic and political stability, the Russian threat. Asia was a secondary area of interest to him. And in the mind of Robertson [Walter Robertson], who was charged specifically with responsibility for handling Far Eastern affairs--the primary interest was Formosa and Chiang Kai-shek. It was difficult to get him to focus very much on other areas, such as Southeast Asia.

Then, as we were beginning to develop a broader spectrum of perspective of the Asian situation, Vietnam caused us to focus on one crisis. We do this so much. We tend to concentrate so much on the crisis we're in that we forget the others. I suppose it's inevitable; I don't know that much can be done about it.

But, as I said, I believe policy changes occurred less as a result of any administration change in Washington than as a result of evolutionary processes. I can think of one important

exception--not just as Asian policy but one that very much affected Asia. That was the Kennedy policy of national independence, to accept decisions taken independently by another government even if we didn't like them. The Dulles policy of "stand up and be counted" was not popular with many Asians. They liked the Kennedy policy which helped to improve our image in Asia.

O'BRIEN: Do you feel that during the Kennedy Administration major decisions were being made between places like Djakarta and Washington, Kuala Lumpur and Washington, Manila and Washington, rather than through the European desks, particularly in regard to Malaysia because of your contact with them?

BALDWIN: You mean that Far East policy was being made more by the Far East bureau than by the Department's specialists on Europe? Yes, I think so, definitely. Although it happened belatedly, I think the fact that we took the stand we did on West Irian (West New Guinea) exemplifies that. I had attended conferences in the Department on that issue when it seemed the European bureau almost always prevailed because of the Dutch involvement. A change came, but it was very late. I think the timing of our ultimate action was unfortunate. By the time we got around to agreeing with the Indonesians, the value of the gift had been diluted. If we'd done it earlier, I think we could have capitalized on it politically much more effectively than when it came from us rather grudgingly. It seemed to many Asians to have been forced, partly by Soviet moves, their gains in Indonesia, and by the desire not to have another war in Southeast Asia. The smart Indonesians believed that we did it primarily for those reasons.

O'BRIEN: Did you see any important shifts between the Kennedy Administration and Johnson Administration in policy toward Southeast Asia?

BALDWIN: No, no, I didn't--except, as I told you, that there seemed to be some toughening up in the policy of Johnson with respect to Sukarno. There was definitely that change, which in a way, I think, reflected the temperament of the man--perhaps a little tougher fibered character than Kennedy--and also the fact that Bob Kennedy's influence had decreased. Policy towards Thailand didn't seem to change except as it became collateral to our Vietnam policy. That, of course, assumed a larger shape under the Johnson Administration. The attitude toward Thailand, as part of the whole problem in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, developed as a by-product of Vietnam.

O'BRIEN: Well, in retrospect, now, getting back to yourself, did you change your attitudes and views towards Southeast Asia and towards Asian and American policy during the years that you were out of office or out of foreign relations?

[-76-]

BALDWIN: I don't believe so. Maybe that is a reflection on me. Perhaps it could be called rigidity of mind. I'm sure that some of my younger friends here in the

University, graduate students or some of the younger professors, might consider it rigidity of mind. To me, Southeast Asia with two hundred and fifty million people and vast resources is a very important factor in world affairs. As a Pacific power, it seems to me that we have to take this into account.

I've always felt that Southeast Asia has great importance to India and Japan for obvious reasons. You know the reasons: Japan primarily from a standpoint of trade; India from a standpoint of political stability and some population relationships. Southeast Asia seems to me to be one of the important strategic areas of the world, and I think who hold it, or dominates it, is a matter of great importance to us. I felt that way when I was recommending policies with respect to Malaysia; I felt the same way with respect to Vietnam. I think, perhaps, if we had acted differently in 1946 and 1947 with respect to the French and their commitments to Ho Chi Minh, the future with respect to Vietnam might have been different. But that is wisdom after the fact.

O'BRIEN: Do you feel that the dominoes theory has some validity?

BALDWIN: I think it has complete validity--not, of course, in a literal sense, because nations aren't dominoes. I don't believe Thailand could possibly stand up against a unified Vietnam's pressure, regardless of China's actions. And China has already made threats against Thailand. Of course, China makes many threats that it doesn't carry out. But if we pull our presence out of Southeast Asia, I think it's at least arguable that the Chinese attitude toward Southeast Asia might again be what it was in the time of the Mings and earlier when a condition of suzerainty was demanded and obtained by the Chinese. It might have been wise for us to take the gamble on Ho in '46 and '47 and maybe again later when Ho Chi Minh was appealing to support us to support his demands for French concessions. It might have been a gamble that would have paid off. But again, that is wisdom after the fact. Once we became deeply involved in Vietnam, there didn't seem to be much that we could do except try to carry through.

President Kennedy never said anything to me that would in any way give reason to believe that he felt differently. I have always felt, and this is pure surmise, that he might have escalated faster than President Johnson did, and I believe he would have "sold" the Vietnam policy to the people more effectively than did President Johnson. Whether that would have brought the Vietnam issue to a more successful conclusion, is problematic. I suspect it might have because I've always felt that Hanoi's ace in the hole, and it's been a strong card, was a deep conviction that the American people wouldn't support a long Asian war. And Hanoi was prepared to fight a long war. I believe that has been confirmed. But if we'd gone into the conflict in a way which convinced them that we were determined to bring it to conclusion favorable to us--a military victory if necessary--my feeling is that we would have gotten negotiations more quickly,

[-77-]

and I believe they would have been fruitful negotiations. Now I don't believe they will be.

O'BRIEN: Well, you covered a good many things, and I've run out of questions. Do you

have anything that you feel should be added?

BALDWIN: No, I don't think so, except perhaps something which can perhaps be inferred from what I just said: I think that our experiences in Southeast Asia, especially in Vietnam, should convince us of the tremendous importance of an enlightened public opinion to support our foreign policy. Churchill [Sir Winston (Leonard Spencer) Churchill] understood this when he talked about "blood, sweat, and tears." It took courage to do that, but it also acknowledged that a major national effort has to have strong public support to be successful. I think Vietnam is proving that. With respect to our Asian problems, I'd like to see much more effort by the President and by the Secretary of State, particularly by the President--I have hoped President Nixon would do this--to explain the importance of Asia in terms Americans can understand and relate to their own security. That is one thing which is important.

With respect to lesser details, administrative details: I think there should be more frequent small, regional, informal meeting of ambassadors, not big conferences like the annual show at Baguio with a big agenda and planeloads of people flying out from Washington. That is all right, if it has to be done, but I'd rather have less of that and more small, informal meetings for chiefs of mission, possibly with someone flying out from Washington very quietly to participate, and with the meeting conducted on a very informal basis. I think that kind of cooperation would pay off tremendously in the execution of our foreign policy.

O'BRIEN: Well, thank you, Ambassador Baldwin, for a very informative interview.

BALDWIN: Very good to talk with you.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

[-78-]

Charles Baldwin Oral History Transcript—JFK #2
Name List

A

Abdul Rahman, Tunku, Putra Al-Haj, 55, 58, 60,
61, 62, 64, 67
Abdul Razak, Tun, bin Hussein, 54, 55, 61
Anderson, Daniel V., 68

B

Baldwin, Helen, 72
Barnett, Robert W., 68
Bell, James D., 67
Bowles, Chester B., 63
Bundy, McGeorge, 62
Byington, Homer M. Jr., 58, 60

C

Chen Pling, 71
Chiang Kai-shek, 75
Churchill, Sir Winston (Leonard Spencer), 78
Cuthell, David, 67, 69

D

Dulles, John Foster, 68, 69, 70, 75, 76

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 62, 68, 75

F

Fulbright, J. William, 57

H

Harriman, William Averell, 63, 65, 68, 74
Hilsman, Roger, 62, 64, 65, 74
Ho Chi Minh, 77

J

Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 70, 74, 75, 76, 77
Jones, Howard P., 64, 65, 66, 67, 68

K

Kennedy, John F., 60, 62, 63, 73, 75, 76, 77
Kennedy, Robert F., 67, 76
Koren, H.L.T., 68

L

Lee Kuan Yew, 55, 56, 72, 73

M

Macapagal, Diosado, 64
McConaughy, Walter P., 64, 65, 68
McNamara, Robert S., 54
Mosely, Philip, 63

N

Ngo Dinh Diem, 71
Ngo Dinh Nhu, 71
Nixon, Richard Milhous, 62, 78

P

Parsons, 68
Peterson, Avery F., 68

R

Robertson, Walter, 75
Rostow, Walt Whitman, 62, 66
Rusk, Dean, 64, 65, 69, 70, 74

S

Shriver, Robert Sargent, Jr., 60, 61
Stevenson, William E., 64, 73
Sukarno, 52, 63, 64, 66, 67, 74, 76
Symington, (William) Stuart, 57

T

Truman, Harry S., 69

Y

Young, Kenneth T., 64, 73