

**Chester B. Bowles, Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 7/1/1970**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Chester B. Bowles  
**Interviewer:** Dennis J. O'Brien  
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**Biographical Note**

Bowles was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention (1940, 1948, 1956); chairman of the Platform Committee for the Democratic National Convention (1960); a Representative from Connecticut and foreign policy adviser to Senator John F. Kennedy (1959-1961); Under Secretary of State (1961); President's Special Representative for Asian, African, and Latin American Affairs (1961-1963); and Ambassador to India (1963-1969). In this interview, Bowles discusses U.S. ambassadors during the Kennedy administration, Bowles' attempts to reorganize the State Department, the Kennedy administration's failure to support liberal reform movements around the world, and Bowles' conflicts with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, among other issues.

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Chester Bowles  
CHESTER BOWLES

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Second of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Chester B. Bowles

July 1, 1970  
Essex, Connecticut

by Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: You were mentioning the Dominican Republic a moment ago.

BOWLES: Well, this was an instance—I don't think it ever got in the papers much, but it occurred in our earliest days—in April or May of 1961. At that time both the President [John F. Kennedy] and Rusk [Dean Rusk] were out of the country, and I was Acting Secretary. The story got around somewhere in the CIA and elsewhere that there was about to be a blow-up in the Dominican Republic and that a lot of American lives were going to be in danger. And Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] came to my office on a Friday night—I think with Dick...

O'BRIEN: Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin]?

BOWLES: Yes, Goodwin and some member of the CIA I didn't know—very concerned with the story. And they wanted to—they thought we ought to do something right away, that the lives of these people (the Americans) would be endangered. I said, "Let's hold a meeting tomorrow at 9 o'clock." So we got Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] down from New York, and others (George Ball [George W. Ball] was there) and Bobby put on very heavy pressure for the U.S. to move in. I thought this was a very dangerous thing to do. We just had the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs, I didn't want to have another one.

And, I didn't think it was really necessary, or at least we didn't have the evidence it was necessary. So I suggested a fleet get about thirty miles offshore, just over the horizon, and lie there, and if anything did go wrong we could always get in there very quickly.

Bobby was pretty upset about it, and he talked to the press in the afternoon, against the general understanding I had that nobody would talk, and everything began to leak out. So I called his brother in Paris and said, "Am I acting secretary or is your brother?" He said, "You are." I said, "Well, will you call your brother and let him know that?" He did. I never held this incident against Bobby, because I thought Bobby was going through a period then when he was learning a lot about the world and had very little background in foreign policy and was just getting his feet on the ground. Eventually I thought he came through marvelously well, so well I would have voted for him for president if he had lived. But at that early period he was all over the lot—as were lots of liberals, I might add—so absorbed with domestic affairs that they knew very little about world politics or other affairs. Yet they carried over into world affairs the same sort of confidence they had in talking about domestic affairs, the same assurance, which they weren't entitled to.

And I think this attitude was one of the problems that got us into Vietnam, the Green Berets and all that sort of thing. They went off on sort of a binge there. I think the historians of the world will blame the Vietnam War to some extent on liberals—like my breed of liberals—I hope not on me. (I think my record is pretty clear) but others who were sort of looking for a chance to prove their muscle. The military were the tough guys, and they always looked on the liberals as being muddle-headed, creeping socialists and all that sort of thing. And so a lot of liberals went to Washington with a strong desire to prove that they weren't, that they were just as tough as anybody. Walt Rostow [Walt W. Rostow] is a good example.

O'BRIEN:           There seems to be a feeling—and I think it's reflected in some of the literature of the time, too—that somehow or other the United States has not identified with reform movements that were taking place, the legitimate expressions of the democratic aspirations of the people—the revolutionary movements of the masses—especially in the developing countries, and that somehow we should. Did you have that feeling?

BOWLES:           Very much. I think we missed the boat. Though I think it's probably too late to do it now. I think that we've run out on this phase in foreign affairs, and the ideas that I had and others had about reform and all that sort of thing were missed. There was some of it done, of course, such as land reform, in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, but we missed it in Vietnam totally. We could have saved the Vietnam situation with land reform and other reforms, but we didn't. Rather, the whole U.S. aid program in Vietnam was more or less in the hands of the politicians. The heart of the matter was the political desks of the State Department who have the greatest day-to-day influence

on the way foreign aid money is used. They looked at it purely as a political instrument—as a means of gaining political advantage—bolstering up this general and obliging that admiral and otherwise affecting the power structure of the country. As a result, a lot of money was put into very bad projects. And Congress just covered their bad projects and would not look into the reasons why they picked them, because the reasons were political, not economic. They were constantly trying to spin off terrible projects that just never came off. That period, I think, was very sad.

I once told the President of the Conference of Afro-Asian Nations held in Bandung in 1955, in April. This conference followed the creation of a whole lot of new nations around the world where ex-colonial countries had become free. I don't know how many of them—dozens, even scores—had by then written their constitutions starting with “We, the people of \_\_\_\_.” India's one of them, for instance—Liberia, the Philippines, many others. This is a reflection of our revolution. The date picked for the Bandung Conference was the 19th of April, the 180th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord—they deliberately picked that day. They read “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” from the rostrum that night. The resolutions could have been written by Jefferson [Thomas Jefferson]. The world was ours then, as far as ideology was concerned, and we threw it away.

And there's a reason for it, too. You see, we moved into the world—and Jack Kennedy's Presidency sort of coincided with it—with this wonderful aura of reform and revolution and all that, and with the luxury of never having been involved in foreign affairs. Throughout most of the 19th century, the British had handled our foreign affairs for us, in effect. They'd provide

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the fleet in the Atlantic, and they'd provide the balance of power in Europe, and we'd just lean on their strength, and on their keeping the balance of power in Europe, and also screening us, largely, from any direct contact or involvement with colonial Asia and Africa. So we could afford, you might say if you're cynical, to be idealistic. And this is given as an excuse for our not continuing this way. I can't see it as an excuse because when, after World War II, we were forced to face political realities in those areas on our own. We on many occasions unfortunately began to play the right side of the fence....

In Africa, for instance, we backed up South Africa over and over again. They practically had a veto power within the U.S. for awhile. They no longer have it now. And Mozambique and Angola—we couldn't say what we really thought about them because of the Portuguese, and our base in the Azores depended on the good will of the Portuguese and of Salazar [António de Oliveira Salazar]. And our idealism, our traditional momentum for reform, has been lost. And it's not retrievable in my opinion as of the next ten years. The best you could hope for is that a new generation will come forth in this country that believes new things, fresh ideas, adaptation of the old, with fresh insights, and that they will apply these things in a new fresh way to a new world.

But we don't want to forget here that some of the things that we—my generation—tried to do were fairly idealistic too; we talked about world government and United Nations and foreign aid, Point Four, the Marshall Plan, and all those things—they were all fresh and new. But even then we always came into conflict with our concern about keeping the good

will of South Africa or Portugal or Salazar or Chiang Kai-shek or Syngman Rhee or Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] or somebody. And I felt this long before I left India. I began to feel this very strongly in '56-'57, and I was reassured about one thing. A lot of the Indian students—and Thais and Filipinos and others—Africans too, I'm sure—were going to study the United States. They were very impressed with our students over here, with their freshness and vigor and idealism, and the fact we were talking freely about things, arguing them, debating them, more than anywhere else in the world. I began to feel that maybe this was a new image of the United States—I hate that damn word “image” but that's the best I can think of—emerged as the country that does tell the truth

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and does try to grapple with its problems.

O'BRIEN: But there was a willingness to think idealistically—you said an “aura of reform”—in the first days of the Kennedy Administration, 1961?

BOWLES: Yes.

O'BRIEN: What happened?

BOWLES: Well, I think that the people who ran the foreign policy just didn't think that way—certainly Rusk didn't, and certainly Acheson [Dean G. Acheson] didn't. I was sort of amused a little bit, because in politics the old saying goes that the two people who have equal influence on a new President are, one, those who came out for him first, and those who came out for him last. The ones that came out for him first are supposed to have had a certain courage that others didn't have, and those that came out last are supposed to be very astute, and to have helped put him across.

The ones that Kennedy listened to most were the people that had never taken any position at all. I have the highest regard and affection for McGeorge Bundy, but I don't know where he stood during the campaign. Dean Acheson was sharply opposed to Kennedy, and condemned him in front of me on many occasions, often rather bitterly. But what was the real problem—it applies to McGeorge Bundy, I think, and to Dean Acheson more than Dean Rusk—was that the people Kennedy listened to most on foreign policy had a European-oriented view. It was developed in the old days when the British ran Europe, balanced the forces of Europe, and where it balanced Europe, and a peaceful Europe, it assured you a peaceful world, because the world was run by Europe. The affairs of India were not handled in Bombay or Calcutta, they were handled in London. The affairs of Indonesia were handled not in Djakarta but in the Hague, and so with France. And so therefore if you balanced up the forces of Europe, you had automatically a balanced world. And Dean Acheson was one of the greatest Prime Ministers Britain ever had, in the sense of the 19th-century tradition, enormously skilled, bright, brilliant, but fundamentally wrong.

Now one example of this—this European-oriented view of Kennedy's advisors—is the jam we've had over in Vietnam. In 1950, we were

very anxious to get the French troops into NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. And the French demanded a price for it. They said, “We will provide twelve divisions only if you’ll support our efforts to maintain our hold in Indochina.” And we blithely made that deal, and we put about two and a half billion dollars into Indochina in return for the twelve divisions that we never got. And this is the kind of cynical, narrow, European-oriented thinking that I thought was so wrong.

Kennedy—Jack Kennedy—used to confuse me on this, because in a sense he understood this better than Rusk, Bundy, Rostow or others in his administration. In conversations he always seemed to respond positively to what I was saying. But yet I think we see now that he sort of backed into this affair in Vietnam. To some degree it was his reaction to the humiliation of the Bay of Pigs, a reaction to Khrushchev’s [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev] attack on him in Vienna, and the desire to be tough and resolute, to prove we couldn’t get pushed around. I don’t think Vietnam itself ever meant all that to him. I doubt that he’d ever have done what Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] did—it was Johnson, of course, who made the big mistake. You can argue that—well, Acheson started the process really with his decision to assure the French troops for NATO. But the sixteen thousand men that Kennedy put in for training purposes, followed by a much larger number of ground troops of course, authorized by Johnson.... It is my guess that Jack Kennedy would have been smart enough to back away from it if he had lived. But I can’t prove it.

O’BRIEN: Well, here we have Kennedy, apparently not happy with the way the State Department is being run. He admires McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], because McNamara was able to run the Defense Department.

BOWLES: That’s right.

O’BRIEN: Why doesn’t he remove Rusk?

BOWLES: Well, it’s very hard to remove a secretary of state. I’ll treat this subject very exhaustively in the book I’m getting out now (*Promises to Keep*). It’s a long story, but it boils down to this, that I knew Rusk quite well—far better than Kennedy did. I think in a sort of backhanded way I may have called Rusk to Kennedy’s attention, suggesting that he talk to Rusk. Then I mentioned Rusk’s name, he said, “Doesn’t he work for the Rockefeller Foundation?” This was in, say, November, 1960. And when we were in there—in the State Department—I was determined to make a go of it. And I hadn’t been as disappointed

about not becoming secretary of state as people thought I had. I basically thought of myself as an administrator. I had worked in administration in OPA [Office of Price Administration], and getting things done and policy carried out was always the thing that suits me, as well as the policy itself.

But Dean was unsure of himself, very insecure. And to avoid adding to his insecurities I decided never to see Kennedy alone for a long time, until my relationship with Rusk had settled down. I didn't see Kennedy from November 15th—or 20th, I guess—when I had breakfast with him one morning, until the following July, when I had lunch with him. I carefully avoided seeing him, so Rusk would not be worrying about what we were talking about. I never had an on-the-record press conference in all that period either. I carefully avoided major speeches. I stayed in the background. I kept away from Capitol Hill. I have a lot of friends up there, and they all said, "Where the hell have you been?" I said, "Well, I'm busy," and they said, "Well, you never see us anymore." I had a large group of people there whom I could have used as a source of strength. I realize now this was really very stupid. It isn't anybody's fault except my own. I remember that Adlai Stevenson said, "Just as a squirrel should never get more than ten feet from a tree, a wise politician should never be more than a hundred feet from a microphone." And I made the mistake of getting more than a hundred feet away from a microphone. Therefore, when all the stories began to leak about major changes in the State Department administration, my side of the story—what I'd been doing and trying to do—was simply not widely enough understood to serve as the necessary source of strength to me. It was my own fault. I'm not kicking about it.

O'BRIEN: In terms of organization in the department, how was the decision made to go with the line kind of organization rather than a staff organization?

BOWLES: Well, I felt that two things were necessary. Number one, you had to get different people in policy-making jobs, people you could really trust, that were Kennedy people. As late as April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1961, after we'd been in, in effect, six months, I doubt you could have found five real Kennedy people in the whole damn administration. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], of course, myself—there may have been ten—very few in top positions. The people who would come in were the people who had no previous views at all. I felt this was very dangerous, because I knew that Kennedy had a clear idea of what he wanted. I thought I knew what he wanted; I thought he wanted about what I wanted. But there were very few

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people brought in who believed that. That's one problem. The other problem was Dean didn't want them in. He wanted Foreign Service Officer types, many of whom were brilliant people—I have nothing against them—but they were, on the whole, not the kind that take chances or are innovators.

I'll give you an example. When the Kennedy Administration moved in, I was worried about our German policy. I felt you could read the writing on the wall. We'd been carrying on a policy that was no longer relevant. It had been a policy built when the dollar was almighty—in the early '50's, in the Marshall Plan days—and when the American military power was dominant—when we had nuclear power and Russia didn't have it. Our whole relationship to Europe had been built on these assumptions. Now the fundamentals were changed, and I felt we ought to change with them. And I said, "Sooner or later somebody will come along—whether he'll be French or German or Italian or British—who will denounce

all this—as de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle] did—and say, “This is no go for us.” And therefore we should act first, and we should think through all this business about Germany first and be the innovators.

Finally after much pressure from me and a few others, Dean reluctantly agreed to question the “let sleeping dogs lie” dogma and asked for a review of our German policy in the light of the changed situation. Then what happened was what usually happened when you suggested a new policy. Dean’s request went down to the German desk, where all the men who’d been sitting there for years defending the old policy were asked to go to work to create a new policy. Their first question was, “Why? What’s the matter with the old policy?” “Well, the boss wants it changed. The Secretary of State wants it reviewed.” “All right, we’ll review it.” So they’d make just as few as possible changes and send it on back. And if they’re really frightened and are really looking at it, even then you’re in trouble, because as it works its way up through the ladder of “initial” gathering, it loses a few paragraphs and a few ideas at every level of approval. You end up with something that’s not much. I said policy ought to be made the other way around. I said to Rusk, “You ought to get you and myself and McGeorge Bundy and a few others in a room, and you take one policy and I take another one and Bundy takes a third one, and we follow through and work it out. And then, when we have the choices all laid out on paper, we’ll look at them and maybe merge a couple or put them wherever we will. But then we’ll tell the desk boys to go to work and fill it in. Now it’s the other way around.”

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I think Kennedy was on his way to seeing all this. Our relationship was very curious. He and I were never close friends. I had a great feeling for him—I was very attracted by him, as everybody was. He was a charming, delightful person. We always talked easily together about these things. I always came away thinking he and I were in agreement. I still think we were, because on many occasions he plainly agreed with me. When I told him I had to leave (that was much later—December, 1962), because I was wasting my time, he said, “What do you mean you’re wasting your time?” He ticked off about five things that I’d been for, against the majority of the State Department. And he said, “Now, you came out on top on all of those five.” One example was when we almost walked out of the Congo in 1961, in December. I single-handedly took that issue on and turned it around, and Kennedy ended up agreeing with me. Then I resigned—which I should have done earlier perhaps—he was very good at hanging on to me. I didn’t want to stay in Washington. I wanted to get out. I tried that job he set me up in for a year—as his special representative for Asian, African and Latin American affairs. I knew it wasn’t going to work, and it didn’t. Nobody wanted to make it work, except probably him. And again I resigned, and again he said, “No, you can’t.” I really think he meant it. I think he felt down deep in his heart that he and I had something fairly in common.

O’BRIEN: Well, in the State Department the real problem’s in the geographic bureaus, isn’t it?

BOWLES: My thought there was to move up the assistant secretaries to the rank of

under secretaries, five geographic under secretaries, I believed that would make them the senior person in the meetings with the CIA and the Pentagon and State and AID [Agency for International Development] and elsewhere. So, they would have the right to make decisions. As it stands now, State, CIA, the Pentagon, USIA [United States Information Agency] have more or less equal influence. As a result, everyone makes a huge effort to find middle ground on every question. I always felt that everything was a promise. There would be the five guys there around a table: CIA and Pentagon, State, and so on, the White House, all the elements there. But nobody had any power; therefore, nobody wanted to bother the head guys—either Rusk or the President. So all the pressure would be to come out with something flabby and no clear cutting edge to it, no strength to it. But have you ever had Tom Hughes [Thomas L. Hughes] do this sort of oral history thing?

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O'BRIEN: He's been done. I didn't do any of it.

BOWLES: You should. Tom knows more about this than almost anybody else, in a very objective way. He's very unemotional. Most of us have an angle of some kind, either subconsciously or not. Ball did. I hope I'm not giving you one now, but there's always a danger of doing that. But Tom is in the middle of it all and knows it all and is very objective.

O'BRIEN: We had a hard time. I've seen memos here on this very problem we've been talking about, about getting people to agree to act on the accepted points of view, the Presidential points of view, in the department. It seemed in the geographic bureaus that you had the greatest resistance.

BOWLES: I tried to get Harriman [William Averell Harriman] into the Far East bureau long before he was. I tried to get Harriman into Europe long before he was. Foy Kohler [Foy D. Kohler] became assistant secretary for Europe. Foy is a very fine person, a very able Foreign Service officer. But you can't expect a man of that training to take many great risks. If you're a young Foreign Service officer—thirty-nine years old, thirty-eight—the time in your life you get to be an ambassador is maybe twelve years from now. Now, why should you take a risk and stick your neck out now? There'll probably be—if the Republicans are in now, the Democrats will probably be in by 1980, and you'll be just caught in a vise. And so you therefore duck these things. Most of them do, although not all of them by any means. But the ones that don't duck and are really courageous, don't do very well in the career ladder. I've got several people in mind I could think of. They're not being adequately used now because they were too outspoken. And they were right too (in the positions they took).

O'BRIEN: Did you and Rusk sit down in the beginning and talk over about what you were going to do with the department?

BOWLES: I tried to. Rusk is very difficult to talk to about any new approach. And he would rarely offer anything. So I took to writing memoranda. I wrote two of them to him in mid-December (1960), one on personnel and one on policy making—a review of all our policies, policies

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that had been put together by Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] for a different age, and by Dulles [John Foster Dulles]. And he read them. I don't suppose fifty words transpired between us about those two memoranda directly. There was never any written reply, any spoken reply. He said, in effect, there are a few odds and ends that we don't see eye to eye on, but we'll work those out." But there would be no further response. It was very hard to get through.

I keep thinking how I could have done it differently. One thing I could certainly have done if it were all to be done over again would be to see a lot more of the President—I could easily have done that; I believe he would have been glad to see me—and see a lot more of the Senate and the House. I'd been in the House for one term myself. I knew practically every member of the Senate by his first name, and I rarely went up there except on social events, or to clear some name on embassies. One thing that Rusk left me alone on pretty much was ambassadors, curiously enough.

O'BRIEN: I'd like to get into that, too, sometime today. Rusk chose, as I understand it, to go in a kind of line right down to the geographic bureaus and down to the country desks, rather than having a big staff around him and around you, around the secretary's office.

BOWLES: We weren't using people that were already there, like McGeorge Bundy, George Ball, myself, to discuss things. I don't remember a single time when we really got together, took our coats off, and sat around for an evening and talked about foreign policy. And yet that would have been the way to milk everybody's minds of good ideas and fresh ideas. I was certain that we had come to what should be a watershed in American foreign policy. Our policies were all an outgrowth of World War II and the Dulles age. Herter [Christian A. Herter] had improved on them, and Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] had improved on them in '58, but hadn't really changed them fundamentally. And what we should have done—it should have been the first order of business—would be a complete reevaluation. Are we right in Europe? Are we right in Asia? Are we right in Latin America? That never occurred. I tried like hell to make it occur.

You see. Rusk once said to me—a couple of years ago, he talked

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about 'shaping Asia policy'. And I said, "Dean, you're not shaping Asia policy. Asia policy is being shaped by events." This was the almost invariable pattern: a crisis occurs, and everybody stays up all night and fires off cables around the world and worries like hell. This goes on for two or three hectic days. You come up finally with some answers as best you can,

some agreed reaction, and the crisis passes. Another crisis occurs two months later, then the third and fourth, and after you have about five crises, you have a policy. “Right now,” I told Dean, “foreign policy is not being shaped; it accumulates.”

Now I think this is a terrible indictment of something, because, by God, human beings ought to be able at least to think out where they’re trying to go. And Dean and practically everybody else had sort of a contempt almost of my efforts to try to think out Asia in different terms. I saw an Asia where Japan, India and Australia would work closely together. India would get more on her feet—which is a questionable possibility, but I think it could have happened, still can happen. That would have been something we could have supported and then backed up. Instead, what we were trying to do was run an anti-communist coalition out there, made up of a lot of mini-nations that we were trying to get more of less to put into the deal, and nobody ever really challenged this. When I tried to challenge it, I was not listened to by anybody, I think. [Interruption]

In Africa, there is an important example, I think, of how Kennedy could—and did—listen. Nkrumah [Kwame Nkrumah] was really the first personality to emerge out of ex-colonial Africa as the new freedom began to open things up. And one big project there that had everybody’s attention was the Volta River project. It was hydro-electric power and also navigation and also irrigation. And Barbara Ward Jackson’s husband, Sir Robert Jackson, was working on it—had been for five or six years, so I knew a good deal about it, as did Kennedy. The time came for us to put the money up. About that time Nkrumah was making every mistake he could make and saying everything wrong he could say and doing all he could to irritate us, and it should have been very easy just to turn this whole project down. Kennedy was strongly urged to do so, but I argued very hard against it and said that we were doing this for the people of east or west Africa—not for politics, but for the people in west Africa. “It goes far beyond Nkrumah. Nkrumah won’t be there forever. The dam will be.” And Kennedy would see a thing like that, where very few others would. And he got a businessman from Chicago, I can’t

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remember his name, a Republican—he sent him down there to look at it and study it, very sure that the man would come back and say yes, you should go ahead. And he would turn around and say, “Well, I don’t know much about this, but this Republican businessman tells me this is a good thing to do, so I’m going to go ahead and do it.” Purely building up his cover. Well, the report that came in was negative—that it would be the wrong thing to do. I thought, well, that’s the end of that. But Kennedy called this man in and said, “Look, I’m going to go ahead with this anyway. Will you please keep your mouth shut and bury the report.” And the man did. But this took considerable courage. And we went ahead with the Volta River project, and after five years, as you might have suspected, Nkrumah wasn’t there any more. But the Volta River project is there.

O’BRIEN:           When did you realize that the operation in the White House was going to go the direction that it did, and that Bundy was going to have a lot more to say about foreign policy questions?

BOWLES: I really began to suspect it very early. I didn't think it was a mistake particularly. As I say, the President really does conduct foreign policy. I thought I was glad to see McGeorge Bundy come in, I think about January 15, 1961. [Interruption] You asked me....

O'BRIEN: Yes, the direction in which Bundy's operation went.

BOWLES: I said I thought that we—by the middle of January, 1961, we were pretty sure what was going to be important, at least I was. As I have said, I think Rusk was very insecure there. You've got to realize that. He had no political experience, he knew no one on Capitol Hill, he was afraid of Capitol Hill, and he knew no press connections at all, almost none. He didn't know the President at all well. And he worried about all these things. Therefore, when McGeorge Bundy came into the White House, Rusk was naturally upset. And to his credit he succeeded in not showing it.

O'BRIEN: In terms of the channels of communications in the executive secretariat, do you get any help from people like Brubeck [William H. Brubeck]?

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BOWLES: Yes, I knew Brubeck, and I think I introduced him to Rusk. And Luke Battle [Lucius D. Battle] was the person who went to Vietnam with Rusk. And Luke, by the way, was in the middle of all this conflict between Rusk and myself, and all these efforts I made to try to communicate with Rusk were made with the help of Luke. I used to show him memoranda before I sent them. He would say, "Don't say this, say this." He was extremely loyal, though, to Dean, a devoted friend of Dean's—and also, I think, of me, too. He was sort of the person who tried very hard to build a bridge between us and get communication going.

O'BRIEN: Well, in the Bay of Pigs, one of the things I was curious about was that you come into it in March, when Rusk goes off to—I believe it's...

BOWLES: I was not much into it, or informed about up to then—a little, but not much.

O'BRIEN: When do you first hear about it?

BOWLES: Oh, I suppose it was in January that I started to hear—I began hearing stories about it. And Dean probably mentioned it to me then.

O'BRIEN: Did you take it—how seriously did you take it? Were you afraid that it was going to go....

BOWLES: Well, I was led to believe it was going to be a minor affair—a raid of some kind. Very few people knew how big it was. In any case, I objected

to the CIA approach to sort of raiding down there. Castro's [Fidel Castro] success in taking over Cuba was thought, a good deal our own fault, that is, in large measure due to our own mistaken support of the reactionary Batista [Fulgencio Batista]. Our mistakes had helped create Castro. I didn't think we could sort of cleanse ourselves running around cursing Castro. I had no use for him—the way he was operating, but it was a natural result of what we had done.

All through the winter the “raid” was talked about. I still, as I say, don't really know how it all began. I can't believe that the President went off on his own on it so much. And I can't put together the fact that on Tuesday before the thing happened—the bombing started on Saturday—Rusk came back from a meeting saying, “Don't worry about this. It isn't going to amount to

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anything.” I said, “What do you mean, ‘amount to anything’?” He said, “Well, it just won't amount to anything.” I said, “Will it make the front page of the *New York Times*?” He said, “I wouldn't think so.”

O'BRIEN: “I wouldn't think so”?

BOWLES: That's right. How do you explain that?

O'BRIEN: Well, when you first hear about it, how is it described? Basically as an infiltration, as kind of a guerilla operation?

BOWLES: Yes, a guerilla affair, which, of course, it wasn't.

O'BRIEN: When do you first begin to sense that it's going to be something different, that it's going to be a rather large scale....

BOWLES: It's hard to remember the dates—I suppose in February. There were people against it—Ed Murrow [Edward R. Murrow] was against it, and Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner]. Ed and I used to argue very strongly in all these meetings against it. Most of them didn't know—Stevenson really didn't know. George Ball had some slight knowledge but not much.

O'BRIEN: Do you have any contact with the CIA people—people like Bissell [Richard M. Bissell, Jr.] for example?

BOWLES: Then? Yes, he was an old friend of mine. I was a member of the committee of—whatever they call it—the 303 Committee—which passed on all these various things. This was never thrown up to us in that form. Curiously enough, I had tried earlier to hire Bissell. I had a job open as my deputy under secretary for political affairs—a very crucial job. And I'd known him for a long time. This was before I realized how involved he was in the Bay of Pigs. We used to borrow him—we'd

known him over a long period of years. And I didn't agree with Dick on everything, but I thought the things I didn't agree with him on I could work out with him. He knew Washington much better than I did. And Allen [Allen W. Dulles] didn't want to let him go, naturally, and we argued it out and argued it out.

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Dick wanted to get out. He was really eager to come. Finally, I lunched with Allen Dulles, and Dulles agreed. And then the President called me up and said, "I hear you're trying to get Dick Bissell." I said, "That's right." He said, "You can't have him." "Why not?" He said, "He's going to take Allen Dulles's job on July first." So poor Dick might have been spared this Bay of Pigs horror. He could have gotten out in January, three months before it happened. But he was responsible for a lot of that stuff. The CIA is a curious organization. As you know, they do some terribly good things and very suave things. They're on the right side of a lot of issues and then they're terribly on the wrong side of others: Laos, Indonesia, Bay of Pigs.

But Dean told me one of the last times I saw him while he was Secretary, in 1968, that the Bay of Pigs plan had originally been for a guerilla operation, as I mentioned earlier, but it then turned out to be a frontal operation. They landed in the wrong place, where they couldn't possibly get to the hills. Dean told me this about two years ago. I hadn't know this. The original thought was to land near our own naval base there, Guantanamo, so that if they were defeated, they could move in there.

The main conclusion I draw out of all this is that the Kennedy people rarely operated from basic principle, but rather from an often brilliant pragmatism. Now I think an executive running a big operation—whether business or government or whatever it might be, a university—has to be able to answer most questions yes and no fairly fast. He says, "No, we never do anything like that. Yes, we always do something like that." Really, 85 percent of the things that come to your desk you have a quick yes-no answer to, so quick your staff doesn't bring them to you after awhile.

Now, if you're any good, you've got to be sure these automatic red and green lights are still reasonably accurate. If you just freeze on a whole lot of principles that are not relevant any more, obviously you're doomed. But if you keep examining them and changing them and modifying them, this means that only ten, fifteen percent of the questions that come to you really have to be wrestled out.

With the Kennedy administration in the early stages, particularly as regards foreign policy, there seemed to be no principles of that kind operating. I marvel that they even considered the Bay of Pigs. I think that when Allen Dulles walked into the

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President of the United States' office and said, "I've got an idea for overturning the government of Cuba with a surreptitious landing of eleven hundred people," he should have been thrown out of the office, by either Eisenhower or Kennedy. There's no damn excuse for spending valuable time arguing about such a proposal, much less doing it. They should never even have discussed it seriously.

O'BRIEN: I understand the CIA had done a special estimate prior to the Bay of Pigs—I think it's in February—assessing the reaction to this in Latin America, and it was a very, very negative thing. It indicated that the reaction to it would be very, very bad, and in fact they made a recommendation against it. Did you at any time see that, or did that come up in any of the discussions that took place?

BOWLES: There may have well been factions on it—there always are. One faction says one thing, and another, another. I have a letter I wrote to Rusk about it. It was a statement: "I want to see the President if this isn't effective." I saw Rusk on a Friday night when he got back from abroad and told him about this meeting on Tuesday. I said, "I think you can kill this thing if you take a firm stand on it, if you agree with me. But if you can't, I want to see the President. I mean, here are the reasons I think it's crazy." And Rusk saw me after the meeting and said, "Well, don't worry."

MRS. BOWLES: And he never took the letter.

BOWLES: No, he sent the letter back to me. It's got D.R. in the corner in tiny initials.

O'BRIEN: Well, after you once get a pretty good grasp of what's going on—and, of course, you are against it—who are you talking to? Do you talk to Goodwin at all, or Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], anyone on the White House staff?

BOWLES: You couldn't talk to anybody for awhile. It was a highly emotional Situation. Over at the White House about everybody was deeply frustrated or else off balance. You see, here were the Kennedys who had never made a serious mistake in their public careers, who had never been wrong in anything....

O'BRIEN: Yes, but I mean prior to that. Did you talk to...

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BOWLES: Oh. I talked to Ed Murrow, I talked to McGeorge Bundy about it and Jerome Wiesner, and of course all my old associates like Abe Chayes [Abram Chayes] whom I'd finally persuaded Rusk to hire as general counsel, and to Tom Hughes who was then Deputy Director of [the Department's Bureau of] Intelligence and Research. They all knew my views well. There were a few people you did talk to. For instance, I knew Stevenson very well but somehow it would never occur to me to talk to him. It seemed to me it was up to the President to talk to him. I'd love to have done it. And Stevenson was very upset with me because I hadn't done it, later. "Why didn't you tell me this? I could have helped you." Probably he's right. Probably it was carrying discretion too far.

I never really got a clear idea how Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] stood on it. That instance I told you about in Ros's office, when I—McNamara dropped by to join us for lunch

there, and I said, “Will this work without American troops?” Bob McNamara said, “It would be very doubtful.” That’s my memory. I think it’s accurate, though. But in view of what we know now, it doesn’t make sense.

O’BRIEN: A little bit before, we were talking about the rumor that you and Bobby Kennedy had had a discussion about the Bay of Pigs afterward.

BOWLES: The only time I saw Bobby Kennedy during this period was at a series of big meetings in the President’s Cabinet room immediately after the failure of the landing was clear. They had a series of three or four meetings right afterwards, as you know. They were emotional affairs. But even then the people in those meetings who were upset about it—about our having gone into the operation in the first place—were pretty limited; a dozen—not that many, six. Sorensen, I think; Dick Goodwin didn’t say very much—I think he was all right, Stevenson, of course; Ball; myself; Ed Murrow. That’s about it. The rest of them were talking very wildly. They felt badly hurt, they wanted to retaliate, they wanted to strike back—even normally sober people. I made a statement at each meeting on why I considered the invasion, itself, a mistake, and why we should keep cool and not consider counterattacks that would only make a bad matter worse. As for the others—in my book I’m not putting any of this “who said what” business in—and my publishers are very angry about it, because they say you should put in what

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everybody said. I say you can’t do that. You’re in a meeting in the White House, and a crucial decision is to be made, and if everybody’s going to write a book about where everybody went wrong, five years later, nobody will ever again speak his mind. You have to have the feeling you’re going to get up and speak and say what you think and turn out to be wrong, and that’s your right. And therefore I’ll be less interesting, but more, I think, decent. So I’m simply writing that a wild series of meetings occurred, at which some wild things were said, and the first meeting was bad, and the second was worse, and the third was a little better, and the fourth was a great deal better.

O’BRIEN: Well, you know, you have a legal restriction on this. If you care to put any of those things in, we can do it, and you have complete control over the use....

BOWLES: No, even with such restrictions, I don’t want to mention anybody by name, like Bobby. In reading over drafts of my book, my friends accuse me of being much too mild, of not being tough enough on the people with whom I had differences. But I feel there’s been too much of that. I think journalism has gotten to a point right now where it’s just.... Unless you’re attacking somebody, calling him all kinds of names, it isn’t any good. I haven’t done it.

A friend of mine, John Blum, who is a professor of history at Yale, read one of my book sections and said, “My first instinct was that your critics are correct; you’ve not been

tough enough. “But,” he said, “I was thinking about it. I think you’re right. It will be a relief to see something that is not high key and shrill and extreme.”

I state flatly over and over again where Rusk and I disagreed. But the big thing there was, we had just two different ways of looking at things. He was trying to see ten years ahead and trying to figure out what the forces were that were gathering, how we could move in with those forces and become a more integral part of a moving world. And his tendency was, wait till something happens and then try to fix it. He would, of course, say that’s an unfair statement. It is unfair, really. He would say there was no way you can effectively cope with tomorrow’s problems until tomorrow comes.

In Southeast Asia, for instance, I used to talk about a neutral

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Southeast Asia, one we could support as a neutral area. I went to lunch at the State Department one time with Dean and also Alex Johnson [U. Alexis Johnson]. I talked about this neutral area, and Alex said, “Do you realize that, inadvertently or not, you’re talking just the way the Communists talk about Southeast Asia? It’s exactly what they want.” This was the mood during this era.

I sketched out a whole program for Southeast Asia, based on Wilson’s [Woodrow Wilson] Fourteen Points, pointing out that those Fourteen Points had given us a political objective for the struggle of World War I, and that the struggle had taken on meaning only when those Fourteen Points were enunciated. World War I was no longer just a battle to maintain the colonial power of Europe, it became a battle for the freedom of Europe. A lot of those Fourteen Points, of course, were not possible to do, and a lot of them we never tried very hard to do, but, nevertheless, they gave us a set of guidelines.

I feel the same way about Vietnam. We need to spell out why we’re there, what we want for the people, what kind of a future we want to see them have, if we could ever help bring it about. And the American people and the people of Indochina are entitled to an answer.

Well, Rusk thought this (my proposal for a kind of Fourteen Points for Southeast Asia) was a good idea. I said, “Let me go out there and see them, and talk with them, and come back and you make a speech.” This was March, 1962. And Rusk thought that was a good idea. Kennedy thought it was a great idea. So we prepared cables to each country in the area, describing the purpose of my visit and setting up the various dates. I had thought we had pretty well eliminated the “Old China Hands” group who still thought that Chang Kai-shek should rule all of China. But there were a few left and they proceeded to bore in on me. Within a month they had wrecked the whole thing. They postponed it—they were always smart—they would never kill anything but just postpone it. So the chance was gone, you see.

Now the thing I don’t understand is why Kennedy let them get away with it. My memoranda was on his desk. He had read it, he had talked to me about it and approved. Now why wouldn’t he say, “Goddamnit, this is right, let’s do it”? Well, I can’t understand why Kennedy didn’t take an idea, that kind of proposal that he’d liked and approved and see that it was followed through. There were no lack of ideas. They were there. But he didn’t, and I don’t know why. He didn’t seem to want to overrule the

organization. In spite of being very critical of the organization—the State Department—but he didn't want to say no to it.

When I was about to go to India—in 1963—the Chinese war with India was just over. India had been badly shaken by it. Russia and China were increasingly at odds, or came to be. I was convinced that this gave us a whole new opportunity in Asia, with everything coming unhitched, a chance for new policies, new relationships, and so on. Moreover, India at that moment came to us and said, “We're prepared to arm ourselves to defend ourselves against China. We want your help and assistance, and that of the British.” And we gave them some—a program of help quite modest by our standards of military assistance to other nations—a million a year for five years.

In April of 1963, before I left for India, we met in Kennedy's office. Rusk was opposed to it. McNamara was opposed to it. Phil Talbot [Phillips Talbot] was opposed to it. Bob Komer [Robert W. Komer] was with me. I don't know which side Mc Bundy was on. But I said, “You're crazy not to do this. They'll go to Russia just as sure as fate. A hundred million dollars a year for five years will help us build this whole area up against China. And it's very vulnerable, with Burma very soft and fleshy. India is a big country. They've got a military tradition.” And all they could think of was Pakistan. Kennedy said nothing. I spoke very bluntly and very strongly, and I said, “If we don't do this right, they'll go to Russia.” Rusk said, “They won't.” Phil said they wouldn't. McNamara said they wouldn't; they'd never go to Russia.

So the meeting was over. I thought I'd lost. Kennedy called me into his office to see him. He said, “Now look, Chet, I agree with you. We should do something. But I don't want to buck the two Secretaries.” He did this several times. “You go out to India and see what kind of a proposition you can get out there.” He gave me a report on it. “Come back in November. We'll see where we stand.” Now this was curious, because why didn't he settle it then and there? He wanted to settle it my way but didn't want to say so. Now you can't say he lacks courage—he had plenty of courage—but he didn't like conflicts of that kind.

I came back in November—it's really quite a story—I had a memorandum with me that I showed him. I said, “The Indian government wants this very much. They're prepared to do several things. They're prepared to put a ceiling on their own equipment and try

to get an agreed ceiling on a level of armament with Pakistan so there can't—won't be any danger of upsetting that situation.

In regard to Southeast Asia—this sounds amazing now, but it's true—the Indians said, “We will work in general with you politically in Southeast Asia.” I said, “Well, suppose the Chinese should move into Southeast Asia en masse, what would India do?” Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru] answered, “We couldn't help you militarily because we have no capacity. But we'd do all we could.” And I said, “Well, would you allow us to use the Andaman Islands, for instance, as a backup area? Would you offer us the use of Calcutta as a backup port?” “Yes.” Then Nehru said to me, “What do you mean by ‘work with us politically’?” I said, “I visualize your people and ours around a map—a table—talking about future

possibilities of South Asian defense and economic growth.” And he said, “I see no reason why we should not do this.” “Okay.”

I came home elated and immediately saw Kennedy. He was really pleased. He said, “Now your next job is to go out and bring Rusk and McNamara as close as you can to agreeing with you. You don’t have to get them in full agreement, but just get them as close as you can. And then we’ll have a meeting. When are you going back?” I told him Wednesday of the following week. He said, “How about a meeting Tuesday afternoon, at my office, 2:30. And bring them together on it as close as you can, but we’ll settle it, and my way.”

And he died that Friday. So the whole thing was killed. And if we’d been able to get the agreement then, the history of whole area would have been different because India would worked with us at that stage. Russia would have pulled away. I think that Russia would not have put equipment in there. Her relationship with India would not have been good.

Incidentally, I did the whole thing again with LBJ. I tried to get LBJ to go along. He wouldn’t. He said he would look at it himself—which was neutral, I guess—in June or May. A lot of the materiel offered in April wasn’t what the Indian government wanted—old planes and trucks, and no tanks. So the money was there, but the goods weren’t there. So I tried to work on this in a way that would bring us in better agreement.

India sent their top military people over in May. Chavan [Yeshwantrao Chavan], their top military minister, came over, and we

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went through the same series of meetings. And finally, after a tedious effort, State and Pentagon agreed on a program. And the meeting was set for Thursday noon, May 28 or 29, 1964, in Johnson’s office.

And at 6 o’clock in the morning the telephone rang. “Nehru is dead. You should take off right away in the President’s plane within two hours for Delhi.” I got hold of Mc Bundy, and I said, “Mac, this is terrible. We’ve got to get approval on this thing. We’ve got to approve it tomorrow. You have a new government there, replacing Nehru, and they’ll be shaky. They’ll be very reassured by this.” He said, “I agree with you. If you’ll write a cable back from Madrid, where you’ve got to stop to refuel, saying that Rusk agreed on this with you, or if I can get McNamara in Rusk’s absence to agree, the instructions will be on your desk when you reach Delhi.” And I never did get Rusk to talk about it all the way to Madrid.

And obviously, as I knew they would, the Indians went to Russia, and now you’ve got a Russian-armed India. I think that’s a terrible, incredible blunder. Backing Pakistan is like backing Belgium against Germany, like backing Mexico against the United States. For better or for worse, India’s going to be the major power in that area—not Pakistan. Incidentally, I might add just a note for your broadcast. They (the Nixon Administration [Richard Milhous Nixon]) are planning now to go ahead, I understand, with more arms to Pakistan. I just read the story the other day. Incredible, fantastic stupidity.

O’BRIEN: Well, you became quite concerned about Afghanistan too, earlier than that, in 1962, didn’t you?

BOWLES: Yes. You see, the Russians brought pressure to bear there—an area which

had always been involved in British-Russian conflict. The Paks were at odds with Afghanistan, and the Paks—although our good allies, so to speak—closed their border to Afghanistan, so that the Afghans couldn't get out except by going through Russia or parts of north Iran. I proposed that we help build a new port in Iran, with a rail connection with Kabul, so that the Afghans could get out around Pakistan.

But Russia's in now in a big way, and it's going to get bigger, I'm afraid. But this is a big sleeper. You see, all this is

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happening, and I know it's happening. And you can't even talk about it because it isn't an "event," it isn't in the headlines. The Russians are going to move more and more vigorously across Asia. They're going to surround China. They're going to try to do what we did in a different way.

Japan will be another target for both China and the U.S.S.R. The Soviets may be expected to offer them help to build up the Siberian area industrially. They may even offer to give back the four islands they took over in 1946. There's agitation against us in Japan already. The Japanese will be continuously a friend to us, but they'll be closer to Russia. The present conservative government will probably be turned out in Japan in the next five years. It's been there for twenty years—you can't stay on forever. It's bound to move sometime. When Japan does move, it will move to the left.

Eventually Thailand will also start talking to Russia. The Philippines will start talking to Russia. Even Taiwan will start talking to Russia. This is all in the cards and bound to become more apparent in the next five years. Now why the hell can't we at least decide there's one chance in five I'm right, or one chance in three I'm right—I think there's two chances out of three I'm right—and start now to plan, start to think it out.

I sent a cable—a letter—to Rogers [William P. Rogers] the other day, the day Sihanouk [Prince Norodom Sihanouk] was overturned. I said, "This is a serious loss for us. Sihanouk is no communist; he's the one man who could keep Cambodia steady. My suggestion is to get the Prime Minister of Singapore, Kuan Lee [Lee Yew Kuan], who is really neutral, to call a meeting of the Asian nations—Indonesia, Japan, India, Burma, Thailand—first, to get a cease-fire; and second, to develop the bones of a peace settlement; and third to figure out what is needed from us and other big nations, including the U.S.S.R. and China—for progressive development in the area."

My point was for a conference where Russia's not invited, we're not invited, and China's not invited. A pure and indigenous Asian conference, called by Singapore. I get a letter back from Rogers saying that this sounds interesting and promising to him. And next thing I know they've asked Djakarta—they got Djakarta to do it. So Indonesia called it. It's bound to fail. Why? Because right now Indonesia is in negotiation with us for six hundred million dollars. She's in hock to the World Bank. Everybody knows she does almost anything we tell her to do. Yet the

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proposal almost succeeded. India almost went. Japan did agree tentatively to go. If this had been done properly, handled in a lower key and more skillfully, it might have produced results.

The only hope you've got is to get those countries involved, and get them building something of their own. Now the Russians are going to try to do what we failed to do: build a containment policy and lead Asia, dominate it and be the big cheeses. It isn't going to work for them any better than it has for us. But in the meantime, they're going to scare the hell out of us, at least some of the times in the next five or ten years.

O'BRIEN: Well, now you were talking in terms of development of regionalism back in the early '60's as well.

BOWLES: That's right. I tried very hard to do it then—to create a constructive relationship with India and other South Asian countries. But as long as we were willing, under pressures from the Pentagon and the more sterile members of the Foreign Service, to pay this outrageous price for that base in Pakistan—in Peshawar from where the U-2 took off, to cater constantly to the Paks, do anything they wanted us to do, to act as if India and Pakistan were relatively equal, we lost the influence we might have had in India. Pakistan is a divided country. It's important, but not as important as India.

Again, I think Kennedy saw what I was talking about. I think he understood it better than anybody else, but he wouldn't do anything about it. He wouldn't come down hard on my side and say, "Now Bob, you're wrong, and Dean, you're wrong, and let's do it this other way." He would hope that it would work out my way.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, I wonder if we might turn to the ambassadors, as well as some of the other State Department people that you recruited. You recruited a number of the ambassadors, and then, as I understand, you also did an evaluation on all of them in 1963. Let's start in this same South Asia area of the world. There are a couple of ambassadors there, and I don't know whether you really were responsible for their selection or not, but they're all Foreign Service types: McConaughy [Walter P. McConaughy] and Steeves [John Milton Steeves]. How did they work out?

BOWLES: I got Steeves out of East Asia. I had the very highest regard for Steeves, but my concern was that he belonged to the old Chiang Kai-shek group under

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Robertson [Walter S. Robertson], headed by Parsons [J. Graham Parsons]. Steeves and McConaughy were totally committed to the Taiwan-first policy, and as long as this was the case I knew we never could have a realistic East Asia policy. They were totally committed to the old policy, and so I wanted to get them out of (East) Asia. I asked Kennedy to send Parsons to Sweden, and Steeves to Afghanistan. I wanted to send McConaughy to Africa. All three were able Foreign Service officers and I always felt Steeves as much the brightest and

ablest of the three. But, my concern was to get them all as far away as I could from where they could do the most damage. I couldn't get the Africa post through for McConaughy, so I settled for Pakistan for him on the grounds that he'd at least be away from East Asia. Well, I had him in my hair then. He wasn't a bad person. Steeves was a very good person. I don't know Parsons. But Steeves was very good, and Steeves was very bright, but they were so emotionally involved in the whole China thing that they couldn't think in fresh terms.

Now on recruiting nearly all the ambassadors, Rusk gave me pretty much *carte blanche*. Kennedy took no interest at all. He never tried to impose political people on me, except two or three times. He wanted a political ambassador in Israel and got him. He turned out to be pretty good. I said, "Don't send a political ambassador to Tel Aviv. That's not fair to the Israelis, and we got a man who is still there." I can't think of his name—it begins with a B.

O'BRIEN: Oh, I've heard this but...

BOWLES: He's still there. He's been there eight, nine years, and he must have done awfully well.

O'BRIEN: Barbour [Walworth Barbour].

BOWLES: Barbour. Now, Kennedy sent Gavin [James M. Gavin] to Paris—that was his appointment. He sent a friend of his, Smith [Earl E. T. Smith], I can't remember his first name—to Switzerland over my entreaties that he not do so, because Smith had been to Cuba under Batista. And Switzerland was handling our affairs after the Castro debacle. I know the Swiss would be upset about this, and Kennedy didn't believe me when I said it, so he sent him anyway. The Swiss practically turned him down.

Then Kennedy did something very petty, which was very much unlike him. He issued an order through Rusk that nobody was to go to the

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Swiss embassy—stay away from the Swiss, make them suffer, make them sweat. And this was very unlike him. I suppose anyone is entitled to get petty once in awhile.

But the only other person whom he took any interest in was the ambassador to Ireland, McCloskey [Matthew H. McCloskey, Jr.], who was a Democratic politician from Pennsylvania. And he sent him there, and he did a very good job. The rest of them were entirely my doing, with approval by the President always, also approval by Rusk. But Rusk never held me up on any of them. We had a lot of good ones and one or two lemons.

O'BRIEN: Well, sticking in the Far East for a moment with some of the ambassadors, how does Reischauer's [Edwin Oldfather Reischauer] appointment come about?

BOWLES: Well, I was anxious to get somebody there who was not a Foreign Service officer with the old viewpoint of Asia. And I knew Ed Reischauer from

Harvard, and my assistant Jim Thomson [James C. Thomson] also knew him well. I asked Jim, when he was going up to Harvard the next weekend, to just talk to him to see if he was at all interested. Jim told me on Monday morning he thought he was interested, but he wasn't sure. Ed's wife is Japanese and at first she wasn't certain. I cleared Ed with the President with great ease. Rusk sort of shrugged his shoulders. I got Ed down and talked to Rusk.

Everything went fine, until the Foreign Service sent all kinds of emissaries to Rusk to lobby against Ed. This was a great mistake, they said; it would be resented in Japan that Ed's wife was Japanese. And the appointment was help up, and Ed got mad and upset and wouldn't touch it and backed away. I had to get Ed down again and soothe him off. I went back to the President and said, "Now look, you've got to really stick with this thing." So he did. Ed went. He did a very good job—extraordinarily competent.

I would just point to one thing. I think it's more my fault than Ed's. I was eager to get him concerned with developing some sort of a liaison between Japan and India. My theory of Asia has always been that Japan and India are the two anchor lines. Ed had never been to India. You see, you have very few experts in this country on Asia as a whole. You have East Asia experts—China and Japan. You have South Asia experts, but very few who have studied Asia as a whole entity. In the State Department there's

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an East Asia bureau where the line stops between Burma and India. Any country west of that line is considered in the Middle East, and is under a separate bureau. I felt that you ought to get an all-Asia view, and I thought Ed and I could work it out. He came to me once in India for about ten days, but he didn't know the country very well, and he was occupied. In Japan, however, he did a hell of a good job, I think.

O'BRIEN: Well, Japan is moving in the direction of strong economic growth, aren't they, during those years?

BOWLES: Sure.

O'BRIEN: Did we have any programs that encourage that?

BOWLES: Not enough. On my first visit to India in '51, the whole dollar situation was very different then. I mean, we wanted to give these guys dollars. And so we were constantly urging—trying to buy equipment for our foreign aid programs in Japan and in Germany to strengthen their economies. In that period we got the Japanese in India a good deal. We do our purchasing there, particularly in fishing, and also in industry. But not nearly enough had been done. If we'd taken just ten percent of what we spent in Southeast Asia and spent it in making a sure thing of the Indian economy, which you could have done and fed the flow of trade to Japan and India, we could have done this easily—and hopefully—bring Australia if possible in on this too—you would have had a whole different Asia.

O'BRIEN: On some of the other ambassadorial appointments, how about Nolting's [Frederick E. Nolting, Jr.] appointment to Vietnam?

BOWLES: I didn't have anything to do with that. That was Rusk's.

O'BRIEN: That was a Rusk appointment, more than anything else.

BOWLES: Yes.

O'BRIEN: How about people like Baldwin [Charles F. Baldwin] to Malaya?

BOWLES: I knew Chuck personally. He had resigned from the Foreign Service but was agreeable to taking on the Malaya assignment. I sent a man to Burma.

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O'BRIEN: Everton [John S. Everton].

BOWLES: ...Everton, who turned out to be only fair. I thought he was probably better than the department thought he was. He spoke Burmese, and he was earthy, and sensitive to the very sensitive Burmese. But I had no way of judging—I had no contact with him. They'd tell me he wasn't as good as I thought he was. Bill Stevenson [William E. Stevenson]—was a fine choice—a real good one for the Philippines, where he and his wife did a very good job. For Thailand, I picked, oh....

O'BRIEN: Ken Young [Kenneth T. Young]?

BOWLES: Ken Young. Jones [Howard P. Jones] was already in Indonesia. We kept him there.

O'BRIEN: He becomes a little bit of an embarrassment, doesn't he?

BOWLES: Well, he's so sure he could work with Sukarno. He tried and failed. But I respected him for making the effort. There were a great many young people that we sent to Africa that were very good. When we got to Washington, when the Kennedy administration came in—the previous administration had decided on seven ambassadors for Africa, that is, to the new countries there. They—the department people—had all their papers ready, and came to me and said, "Now don't bother with these. They're all set, and you've got a lot of things on your mind. Don't worry about them." They said, "We did this deliberately, because we think these young, hot-headed African leaders would like to have a sober, white-haired, old American Foreign Service officer that they could talk to all the time and get their advice." You know, it was just incredible.

And I stopped these guys practically as they were getting on the plane and sent down instead Bob McIlvaine [Robinson McIlvaine], who was a Republican, and I had a hard time

getting him through—thirty-five or forty years old. Bill Handley [William J. Handley] was at that time about thirty-eight years old. Philip Kaiser [Philip M. Kaiser].

O'BRIEN: How about Gullion [Edmund A. Gullion]?

BOWLES: Gullion—I had a hard time getting him to decide because—I later learned—he was just getting married. He was holding me up. He wouldn't say yes or no. I guess

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because of the bride in the offing. So he finally made up his mind. But then Kennedy knew him too, and that was always remarked.

Everybody was busy with other things. At first it (recruiting ambassadors) was kind of a two-day wonder—everybody wanted to get in on it. But it's a pretty hard job, just interview and call and check references. I was glad to do it. I thought it was important.

Another thing I thought was very important was to set the ambassador up in a position of real authority, which I had done when I was in India, you see, the first time. Because I wasn't a Foreign Service career ambassador, I thought I'd just be a victim of all of the members of my staff who were answering back to Washington. So I told Truman [Harry S. Truman] I wouldn't take it. He said, "Well, you pick the staff. You pick your people, and I'll back you up. Anybody you want to pick, you do it." I did, and it worked. They were all working for me, and we had a wonderful morale, and I think a pretty good record.

So I got Kennedy to do the same thing as a matter of official policy, and he immediately picked it up and said, "Fine. Go out and negotiate a letter with all the various agencies." Which you just couldn't do. They didn't want to give up their prerogatives. And finally I said, "This isn't going to work. Let me write a letter. I'll make it as uncontentious and uncontroversial as I can. And we'll send it out over your signature. If they kick too hard, we can handle it later." And we did. And that started a whole series of memoranda interpreting what this meant.

It worked very well because, you see, with the younger ambassadors particularly, they were eager to take charge there, organize and administer the whole progress. The old-timers were not. The old-timers didn't want the Peace Corps in their hair. They didn't want the USIS [United States Information Service] in their hair. Their thinking was: "Some Peace Corps volunteer goes out and gets caught in some drug raid, and I, the ambassador, get the blame for it. The hell with it, keep it away from me. The USIS puts out some silly statement. I'm expected to be responsible for that too. No. Promotions will be delayed. I'll have errors on my record for failure to assist programs on which we have no experience, no background." Your older people were very reluctant to take responsibility. But they did take it.

It worked in various ways in different countries. In some countries it was very good, in others, it was less good, depending on the

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ambassador. Then there was the report to which you refer. I thought it only fair, if we were going to put AID [Agency for International Development] and all these other people under the ambassador, that they should have a right to criticize the ambassador once a year and say what they think of him, from AID's point of view, or USIS's or CIA's. So I went around all over Washington and collected opinions of all these ambassadors and put them all in a book.

Now the thing that amused me about this—amused me and irritated me more than anything else—was the charge, made by various people in the department who were resentful or critical of my efforts to “change everything around,” that I didn't know how to administer anything, that I wasn't interested in administration. Administration has always been my greatest interest. Getting something moving, getting something to happen, is what I like to see.

But the trouble is this—this is a sad thing to say—but if you told me tomorrow I could go in the State Department with full power to do any damn thing I wanted to and complete authority, I would not know where to start, with all I know about it. That shows you how tough a job this is. Because the habits of mind, the mind-set, so to speak, the desire not to take risks, chances, the difficulty of getting creative ideas through, the number of clearances you have to have.

There's some awfully good, terribly good Foreign Service people. I had a staff in India that was really, really outstanding. Morale was high. You wonder sometimes if this government isn't too big for us to run. I know damn well this world is too big for us to run, or even affect very much.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, passing over to some of the Latin American ambassadors, there are some Foreign Service people, and then....

BOWLES: The best ambassador there was a Foreign Service officer, Freeman [Fulton Freeman].

O'BRIEN: Freeman, in Colombia.

BOWLES: And he was good for one major reason: he knew nothing about Latin America. Latin American ambassadors by and large have been ingrown, Latino-speaking people

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who were.... Latin America is a very ingrown place, you know. And we had a whole staff of specialists in Latin American affairs. And the smartest thing you could do would be to take all the Latin American ambassadors and send them to the Middle East, and take all the Arab-speaking ambassadors in the Middle East and send them to Latin America. You'd improve the services in both areas tremendously. As it is now, they (the area specialists) are both terribly ingrown. Now, Freeman's experience had been basically European, although he'd been a bit in Asia. He proved extremely good in Colombia. And we had some other good men. In Chile...

O'BRIEN: Oh, Cole [Charles W. Cole].

BOWLES: Charley Cole. Charley was very good. I wouldn't say he was brilliant, but he did a good job. I think that Jim Loeb [James I. Loeb] was extremely effective in Peru, and was very badly treated. We urged him to be tough and to be for reforms against the old guard and reactionary people. When he did that and got in trouble, we pulled him out. I got him to go back in, to go to Kenya—no, to Guinea. Also, we brought in one Puerto Rican. I had Freeman bring some Puerto Ricans—we had two in, both quite good. They were a little bit resented by the department, of course. One went to Venezuela; the other stayed in the department. But there were quite a bunch of good people.

O'BRIEN: How about Martin [John Bartlow Martin] in the Dominican Republic, and Thurston [Raymond L. Thurston] in Haiti? Did you know if...

BOWLES: Martin, I think, was good, indeed. Thurston I remember just casually. I don't remember him well.

O'BRIEN: Well, you had some problems, too, in finding an Assistant Secretary...

BOWLES: We sure did.

O'BRIEN: Woodward [Robert Forbes Woodward], for example, doesn't work out very well. What's wrong with Woodward?

BOWLES: Weak, attractive, decent, professional, but not the kind of person who could be counted on to press for hard reform or.... You see, I think the only way we could

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possibly have done what we wanted to do in Latin America, and in some other developing countries, in that period was really to encourage social revolution, and identify ourselves with it. Most of the landowning, rich people were mad at us anyway. Now Jack Kennedy was not up to that. He might have come up to it, but you couldn't just patch up this and patch up that and please Rusk and please Standard Oil and please somebody else all at the same time. You just had to bore in and say that we were just not going to fuss around with helping Latin American leaders who are not concerned about their own people. It would have taken a lot of courage, but not a hell of a lot, I don't think. For instance, we mentioned Mozambique and Angola before that. I at one time came up with a proposal that made everybody jump a little bit. I said, "Why don't we buy the Azores and pay Salazar for them—a billion dollars—on the condition that he'd get the hell out of Mozambique and Angola and invest the billion dollars toward building up his country." Well, as you can guess, that didn't go over very well, so I said, "Let's loan them a billion dollars, half a billion dollars, and let's persuade the European nations to loan them another half billion. And with that billion we can say he did

benefit the Marshall Plan. He can modernize the basis of his country's railroads, its steel, and so on, assuming, of course, he gets out of Mozambique and Angola."

And they said, "Do you think he'll take that?" I said, "I know he won't take it. He won't sell it. But at least we'll have let the young people of Portugal know there's another alternative. There's another way out. There's another way to a future for a modern Portugal. Why should we sit and tolerate their staying on as last guardians of the white man's supremacy in Africa, the poorest, most beat-up capitalistic nation on the face of the earth—in Europe? The most incompetent and most out-of-date. Now why the hell do we have to tie ourselves to that?"

But you're just talking to the wind when you talk like that in Washington. I really feel that we could and should have—not manage a revolution, but encouraged such things as land reform, the revision of taxes, education, etc. Just say, by golly, we don't help countries that don't do these things to help their own people. It's too late now. We didn't take it. A good part of the reason was that we didn't understand it very well, I'm sure.

For instance, the key to all this is land reform, and I think

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Kennedy understood that. But the two nations in the world with the least understanding of land reform are the Russians and the Americans. The Russians are still influenced by Marx [Karl Marx], who said that agriculture wasn't important. Moreover, they don't want small landowners who'd be a big political force. And we think only in terms of mechanical combines and other big farm equipment. If you want to wreck the Indian economy, make them a present of five million tractors, or a million. It's surprising. You'd throw eighty million people out of work. You'd have a revolution inside of two years because the machines would do the work that the people need for employment.

Now land reform should go rapidly, but machinery should follow slowly, and should come only as you get alternative employment for people. Japan has done that. We did it there—a curious paradox. We did it in Taiwan, did it in Korea. If we'd done it in Vietnam, we'd have saved ourselves a lot of problems—and the lives of young Americans.

But I always identified in my own mind all through that period with the feeling of really adapting these revolutionary concepts of ours. We are a country of revolution. But it seems almost wholly unrealistic to talk about it now. The chapter's closed. We missed. Now the question is: can this new generation of our young people emerge with new values, new principles, and new ideas ten, twenty years from now, and present to the world a new America, with new vision and new standards? They might.... I frankly don't know.

O'BRIEN:           Certainly there's a good deal of idealism in the New Left.

BOWLES:           Yes. And they'll come up with ideas that are different. But I really think Kennedy was the last big chance we had—our generation—for this kind of a real revolution in our relations with the world. For whatever reasons, he didn't see it. Yet he said on many occasions that he wanted me to do this. He wanted me to take that job—Asia, Africa, Latin American affairs. If he were sitting in this room now, he

would say, "I want you to take it because you understand this." Yet he never gave me one assignment in the job. Every assignment I ever did, I invented myself.

O'BRIEN: Okay. Now you've got Dick Goodwin.

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BOWLES: Yes. Dick is generally, I think, on the right side.

O'BRIEN: Generally on the right side of things. Okay. Now Goodwin's considered—at least there are some people in the department and in the White House who want him as assistant secretary for Latin America. Now what happens to that? How does that get derailed? Rusk?

BOWLES: Rusk didn't want anybody like that. I think it would have been a courageous and important appointment. He was young and you could say he had experience enough. But I didn't come up with anybody very good in Latin America. I mean, I tried very hard to find the guy I could be sure of. I wish I could say I had just the guy who could have done it, and I failed to get him. I can't tell you that. I never did have just the right guy. Part of it was because I knew the kind of guys I'd have put down there wouldn't be people they'd accept, I suppose. Dick was—this was new to him when he started, but he grabbed on to it very fast. Woodward was, of course, impossible—and a very nice guy.

But you've got—you're going to have a bloody revolution in Latin America because the land all belongs to the big, rich, dominant group. You know—a funny thing on this subject—I told Kennedy this, and he was impressed with it, but again he didn't do anything about it. I wanted to make a speech one time in Mexico City, a very strong speech on land reform and change. And the ambassador there was then....

O'BRIEN: Oh, it was Mann [Thomas Clifton Mann], wasn't it?

BOWLES: Mann, yes. Well, he saw the speech, and he practically went pale, he was so terrified of it. What I said was that America—the U.S. and Mexico—each in its own way—has been a revolutionary power. We have much to bring to Asia, to Africa, to Latin America as a whole. And my speech spelled out land reform, and it spelled out all this. It spelled out a new division of labor, a new division of income, of capital, a total change and total restructuring in these countries. It got an eight-column headline in the principal Mexico City paper. I saw the President of Mexico the next day. He threw his arms around me and said, "This is it. Is this what America really wants?" I said, "I think so."

And I was reading the other day a memorandum written by the local

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USIS there describing the warm and enthusiastic reaction to the speech, and the USIS was totally baffled by it. Their memo said, “We can’t understand it. Nobody has ever said anything in Mexico that has had this effect.” This was ‘62. The reason was simply that nobody from the U.S. had ever said that kind of thing before.

I went on to Bogotá. I spoke along the same liberal lines to some 600 businessmen. I said, “The only thing you have in common with the landlords of your country is the fact you buy your clothes at Brooks Brothers and send your kids to Princeton. Otherwise, the land owner is your economic and political adversary. The peasant is your ally. He wants to read, he wants to write, he wants to buy things, and he wants to live better. He wants all the things you’re capable of producing for him, and the land owner wants to prevent him from getting these things. Because once he has those things, he’s going to be in unions, strike, and raise hell demanding more money. They want to keep him ignorant, backward, and you should make your alliance with the peasants.” I got a terrific response.

But you couldn’t shake the State Department, and you couldn’t shake the White House, and you couldn’t shake Kennedy. I say this with sadness because I believe Kennedy came the closest to knowing what I was talking about as anybody. I may have done it badly, I may have put it badly or fumbled the way I did it. But I know I was right in my ideas. There was a big chance in the early ‘60’s for a true-blooded revolution in Kennedy’s eight years if we had identified ourselves with it.

The Russians were very worried about this. I wrote a book called *New Dimensions of Peace* one time, about four revolutions: the Russian, Chinese, American, and Indian. And the Russians deeply resented this book because it borrowed the word revolution and used it, tied it to America. When I went to Russia in 1957, they were just reviewing the book. And they had a long, long series of reviews—one of twelve thousand words—and just tore it apart. This was a thing they feared. But all this is over the dam now. To go out now and talk this language would be ridiculous. It can never be recaptured. We need a new form.

O’BRIEN:           The people involved in the Middle East affairs are a kind of closed group too, aren’t they?

BOWLES:           Terribly closed, very closed. The man we sent to UAR [United Arab Republic], Badeau [John S. Badeau], was, I think quite good. He wasn’t a great brilliant success,

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but he spoke fluent Arabic, and he had a lot of confidence in himself. I was there one time for about two weeks with him negotiating with Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser]. He had hardly seen Nasser—I think he was afraid of Nasser. But he was in all this conversation with me, and before he got through he had his confidence and was talking well and effectively. I think he turned out all right.

O’BRIEN:           How does Talbot come into the picture, Phillips Talbot?

BOWLES:           Through me, and I was wrong, I think. I say that with a good deal of

personal affection for him, and respect. He was marvelously well equipped. He had his doctorate degree in South Asia studies in the early 1940's; he had spent a lot of time in India and Pakistan. At the time, as a matter of fact, now that I thought of him, he was in India on a trip. With Rusk's approval, I sent a cable to him. He immediately accepted.

And from that point on he and I were on opposite sides of the fence. I didn't pick him to agree with me, but I was sorry because he took the Pakistan view very much. And I don't quite know why. He'd been to Aligarh, which is a Muslim university. But he was the one who always in the crunch, when I was just about to get something done, on Indo-Pakistan relations, would do it in. I know it was very painful to him, because he's very fond of me and felt very anxious to do what I would like to have done, but just his whole conviction was the other way. I don't blame him for it, but I did appoint him, did get him in there, and he did stop everything I wanted.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about some of the Foreign Service types that were appointed—people like Hart [Parker Thompson Hart] and Jernegan [John D. Jernegan]?

BOWLES: Who?

O'BRIEN: Hart. Parker Hart, and John Jernegan.

BOWLES: I remember them both favorably. I don't remember them well. Where was Hart, in Saudi Arabia?

O'BRIEN: Hart was in Saudi Arabia, right.

BOWLES: He was very good.

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O'BRIEN: One I'm curious about is Macomber [William B. Macomber, Jr.], assigned to Jordan.

BOWLES: Well, you see, when I was in Congress, Macomber was the Republican assistant secretary for congressional affairs. And I was working on the aid program with Dillon, and Dillon believed much as I did about it.

Therefore, through Macomber, we worked out a quiet little association, regardless of the partisan side of it. And when we (the Kennedy Administration) came in, I thought it was a shame to lose Macomber. I went to Kennedy, and I said, "Let's keep him as assistant secretary for congressional affairs." Kennedy said, "Oh, that's kind of unusual." I said, "Well, maybe it is." And Kennedy said, "Why don't you talk about it to Bill Fulbright [J. William Fulbright]?"

So I talked to Bill, and Bill said, "Oh God, no. You can't do that. He's all right. I agree with you. He's done a good job, but we've got to have a Democrat in there." So we

did. And I then went back to Kennedy and said, "Now, let's hang on to him." So he sent him to Jordan. Now he's got a good new job. I don't know if he's all that good, but he had been very honest with me and very honest with the program of AID. I think I was probably right. I think over 75 percent of our ambassadors were Foreign Service officers.

O'BRIEN: Yes.

BOWLES: But the point is that the ones that we picked were not business types or tycoons or people who had been paid off for their political support. There was none of that. And it was pretty nonpartisan. I never asked Charley Cole how he voted, or Bill Stevenson, or Ed Reischauer.

But I think a new sort of a semi-pro type has been developing that will come forth, people with jobs in universities, business, labor—you know, people like yourself who are moving in and out of government. Their minds are free and open, they are not beholden to anyone, and can afford to take strong positions. They have a lot to offer government. And they're expendable, and Foreign Service people aren't.

I'll tell you one thing I tried to get with Kennedy's approval, but without his support. I said, "I want to take these new rules of ours about the embassies and hold a series of seven or eight

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conferences around the world. And I'll bring along with me AID people, USIS people, CIA people, and so on. We'll sit on one side of the table, and the ambassadors will sit on the other side with their wives. I want their wives there because their wives are the people that sit next to the Foreign Minister at dinner. They ought to be damn well intelligently informed about what our policies are. There may be some hush-hush meetings they can't go into, but, in general, I want them there, and the administrative people, and others.

So we held about six of these in Africa, East Asia, the Near East, etc., and they lasted three days each, four days. They were a great success. We'd say, "Here's the basic Kennedy policy for the world." I laid it out as I thought it should be. I hope it was Kennedy's policy—I'm not sure it was, but I hoped it was. And I would say, "Here's the AID program." And they would tell that story. "Here's what the Labor Department does, the Labor attaché, the agriculture attaché, USIS, the Peace Corps." They would ask all these questions. Here were the instruments each ambassador had to deal with.

And we had a special meeting for the ambassadors with the CIA with nobody present except myself and one or two others. And we told them, "You are in charge of the CIA. It's your agency. You tell them what you want. I want to be sure you know everything that's going on."

I'm not sure all this always happened, but this is the way we set it up. I never got to Europe. The old European hands tell you they didn't need this. They know all the answers over there. But the point is that Kennedy never insisted they should. Kennedy should have said, "This is a good program and go do it." I would begin to do those things, and I'd go do them myself, but you never had the feeling that anybody was behind you.

When I went out of town, John Rooney [John James Rooney], inspired by some people in the Department... (A lot of people were out to get me because I had gotten rid of so damn many of these ambassadors I forced out—they were all after me.)... Rooney had a hearing. He said, “What’s this junket that Bowles is going on?” And the department people who were there didn’t fight them. Rusk never put up a word. I was out of town, out of the country. They more or less just let it stand on the record that this was a junket. Kennedy never said, “What the hell?” You never had any feeling that anybody was supporting you on these things.

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Now I’m not a crybaby about it, because, good God, in politics, to put it politely, you’re supposed to work things out and make things function. I didn’t go back and say I lacked this before or I failed because of that. I failed to do a lot of things because I wasn’t smart enough to figure how to do them. But as a matter of fact, I think Kennedy wanted all these things, yet he never said he wanted them or fought for them, or pushed, or assisted. I still think he was headed for being one of our great Presidents. But I still think it’s my fault I didn’t find, failed to find, some way to tap this amazing potential that Kennedy had.

I remember when we came back from Africa in ‘61, the administration was trying to get out—it was time to get out of the Congo. The Pentagon were scared stiff of this—another war. And actually, the way to avoid a war is to back up the U.N. There are no American troops there. There are a lot of Indians, there’s a Sikh battalion, there’s a Gurkha brigade, others, Ethiopians....

The Pentagon was scared stiff of the mercenaries. I said, “How ridiculous. I’ll bet you there’s a phrase in their contract—small print—that says, ‘I agree to fight, but on condition that I don’t have to fight more than a thousand yards away from a bar.’ These fellows aren’t fighters. They’re just there for five hundred bucks and a drink. And if you can visualize them ambushing Gurkhas in the jungle, I can’t. They’ll run like rabbits. They’re there for the money.” The Pentagon was absolutely shocked. Kennedy laughed at this, you know.

And then after the meeting was over, I was practically the only one there that spoke for this, except Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams] and Wayne Fredericks [J. Wayne Fredericks]. And Kennedy said, “I’m with you.” But it was never made easy for you. You always felt that you were on the outs, you were an outsider proposing foreign strange things, unwanted things, a disturber of the peace, a shaker of the established order. Yet Kennedy was better than that. He should have created a revolution.

O’BIEN: Well, consider this, do you feel that—let’s Schlesinger’s book, which indicates that Kennedy was really very highly dissatisfied with the State Department—do you feel that...

BOWLES: He was, but he didn’t do anything about it. And I should have kept him informed. He should have found out about the situation there from both sides. Somebody made the

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crack one time that Kennedy's idea of administration was to call Bobby and say, "I want three things done by Tuesday." He was not interested in the procedures by which you got things done. He was bored with them. As a result, it was difficult or nearly impossible for him to move into situations where he could have tipped the scales toward a much more favorable performance.

I suppose there's a lot that will come out some day that I don't know about, but you had sort of three groups around Kennedy. You had one, the old Boston pros, who didn't like Republicans, but just a little above Republicans in their list of people were the so-called liberals. We were just a little bit better, not much. And the liberals, most of them, had no program. They wanted power and to ride around in big shiny cars, to have the white telephones. They had no philosophy particularly. They were generally liberal. That was the thing you did to get along.

The second was some of the jet set group. They were fun, charming, Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] and Jack were great to be with; it was good to be seen with them. And they looked on people like Stevenson and myself as traitors to our class. We were "liberals"—a horrible thing.

And thirdly there was another group which, I think, Ted Sorensen would more identify with than anybody else, who really understood this thing. They were a minority at first, but I think if Kennedy had lived, they would have been a majority. I give Ted the credit here. I never knew Ted very well.... Never knew him intimately. I guess very few people do, probably. He never was any great help to me, directly, but I always had a feeling that he was a really genuinely liberal person. Arthur, of course, was, too. But not many. Now, why didn't Kennedy have liberal people around? He understood these things.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, it's very...

BOWLES: But he didn't do anything about it.

O'BRIEN: It seems to be very fashionable in 1961, well, the term tough-minded, you know, is used quite a bit—for people to be both liberal and tough-minded. Now is this because of the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] years in the fifties?

BOWLES: Yes, I think so. Walt Rostow is a good example. Many of the crop of liberals who trooped into Washington following Kennedy's election wanted desperately to prove

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that they were not woolly-minded people who were "soft on communism" and so on, and that they understood all about military affairs. Walt Rostow is a classic example of that attitude.

In a curious way, the liberals—I hate the word because it gets so oversimplified—are to blame for a lot of things. Back in 1954, Dulles [John Foster Dulles] was searching for a cheap way to defend the country. He came up with a program which would give us a bigger

bang for a buck, “massive retaliation at a time and place of our own choosing.” That was in January, 1954, I think.

I wrote a vicious article attacking his position saying that it was crazy. You couldn’t stop an insurrection in Northern Greece by bombing Moscow—that in the pinch we weren’t going to do it—everybody knows we weren’t going to do it. I called it a ridiculous folly—which it was.

But then what happened was the military did a very rational, realistic thing. They said, “If we can’t have that, then how do we handle an insurrection in Northern Greece?” That’s when we should have said, “If we can’t use nuclear bombs at the drop of a hat, how can we handle an insurrection in Northern Greece—or anywhere else? Should we do it at all or how far we can go in that sort of thing?” In other words, our first order of business was to decide what wars we should fight and what wars we should not fight, where were our interests abroad and how can we best defend them. We could then fit our defense structure to our policies and not go beyond our capacity to carry them out. But nobody really answered these questions. As a result, the military with our blessing built the flat tops and built up the divisions and so on.

So they built this capacity to fight anywhere in the world. If we hadn’t had sixteen, eighteen, twenty divisions, we never would have been in Vietnam. But we got them because we talked the country out of massive retaliation and talked ourselves into something different. None of them saw this very clearly, and we should have seen it. We were, in a sense, the authors of this big rise in the military because Dulles was right, in a sense. You’ve got to find a cheap way to do it, or else you’ve got to change your policy.

Now what we should have done—there are three possibilities. One, is massive retaliation, two, a buildup of the military and really trying to handle three or four wars at once, and three, defining what your policy is, how far you’re going to go in supporting people, on what grounds, what basis, and cutting your military

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cloth to fit that particular need. That’s what we should have done.

So when the Kennedy people got to Washington, they were all full of belligerence and “We’re not going to let the Russians push us around, we’re just as tough as anybody.” And I think Kennedy had a lot of it—this attitude. However, I am sure that if Nixon had been there, my God, the situation would have been worse, no doubt about that. But nobody will ever know that. If LBJ got five hundred thousand troops in Vietnam, Nixon would have gotten eight hundred thousand and probably bombed Hanoi in the bargain. But he can, if he’s skillful, get out of it on just the basis of its being a Democratic mess he inherited. He’s been slow to do that.

In 1961-62, we didn’t see some of these issues very clearly on the military side. One time when Rusk was away, I was acting secretary—this was in May ‘61—and there was great pressure to bolster up Laos with American ground forces, against a take-over by the Chinese wing of the Communist Party. I was horrified at it, and I went to the Pentagon people, and I said, “Now, what is your contingency plan? How are you going to do this?” Well, they were vague about it. I kept insisting.

So they came up with this program: you land two hundred fifty thousand troops, two hundred thousand, on the coast of Vietnam, proceed across Vietnam into Laos. I said, “Do you think you could do that without disturbing China, that she’s going to accept two hundred fifty thousand American infantrymen on her border? Is two hundred fifty thousand troops enough in those circumstances?” “Well, of course, we wouldn’t want to fight a ground war.” “What do you mean?” And the answer comes out, “A nuclear attack on China.”

And that’s something—that type of thinking—we allowed to happen, allowed even to reach the discussion stage. Of course, I denounced this very hard. In my opinion the guy who thinks in those terms, in a high government position, should have been fired, put in some other job. As you can see, there was a tremendous lot of confusion on policies, programs, related to past promises, hopes, fears that pretty well absorbed the Kennedy administration in its first year in office. There was consequently an instinctive feeling that something was wrong, and had to be fixed. Kennedy naturally looked around to find out the reason. That’s why he kept saying that the State Department has something wrong with it, and he didn’t know what it was.

But part of it was because he didn’t have a very good knowledge of administration, part of it was my failure to let him know more about it, and part of it was Rusk’s total ignorance of that kind of

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administration (idea administration) and Kennedy’s willingness to flirt with big ideas, but not to grapple with them. Now I think he would have learned to grapple with them. In the American University speech, (1963) he did grapple with them.

O’BRIEN: Was there a problem here of liberals assuming power and power corrupting?

BOWLES: Yep, definitely. Big cars.... I remember some extremely remarkable people down there, way overspending their income, their wives all dressed up with clothes they couldn’t afford and going to the hairdresser every two minutes. People who had come out of universities, or simple everyday people, trying to trade wisecracks over the dinner tables around Washington, a little elite group. I used to shudder at them because I liked them, because it wasn’t them. They were, many of them, decent people with a long record of liberal deeds and efforts who were suddenly placed in a situation where they were in way over their heads. But now they were trying to be something different.

But I think you’re right. The McCarthy years pounded into these people’s heads a sense of inferiority, insecurity, and a sense that they weren’t quite trusted by the members of the Establishment. Somehow being interested in people came to be thought degrading and wrong. I think Adlai Stevenson also was not ready to come to grips with the real liberal issues. I really mean it when I say a world revolution has to occur, or *could* have occurred under reasonable control during the sixties. It may come in the eighties or seventies. It may not be—it certainly isn’t going to be shaped by us. But Adlai was not enthusiastic about this. He’d tell me I was more radical than he was. I was. I still am.

What I tried to do was bring about this radicalism, this commitment to change within our system, the Democratic party, and there were not too many people who understood.... Now Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] understood it. Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] understood it. He understands it now particularly. It's gone by him now. Herbert Lehman [Herbert Henry Lehman] understood it. And there were others, not too many.

O'BRIEN: In the State Department, you've got a particular problem there with a lot of people that carry over from the '50's. I'm their about Otepka [Otto F. Otepka], the first thing, and what Otepka represents. Is this a definite kind of target for you and Rusk, to get Otepka out of there and get rid of him?

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BOWLES: I think Rusk—when did he leave?

O'BRIEN: You mean Otepka?

BOWLES: Yes.

O'BRIEN: I believe it's about '62 or '63 by the time they finally relieve him, isn't it? I think that's true.

BOWLES: Wasn't he suspended for a long time?

O'BRIEN: He was in a state of suspension, but there was also an attempt to shift him into other positions which would take him out of directly passing on security clearances.

BOWLES: I'm hazy about that, probably because it occurred after I was out as under secretary in November, 1961. Roger Jones [Rogert W. Jones] was the deputy under secretary for administrative affairs, and he was, by the way, very good—he's Republican. You know, one thing that Rusk was very good at, was every question about trying to put through or rehabilitate able people who'd been affected by McCarthy. I took responsibility for at least fourteen people, sixteen, eighteen, who I was told would create all kinds of trouble for me on Capitol Hill. Say a man came up to us for approval for some post and there would be an FBI analysis of his having some derogatory information on his files on past Communist "associations," or something. I looked the analysis over, and the analysis showed me nothing except a fellow who'd been wrong when he was at Harvard or Cornell back in 1931. Well, I approved him. I never got a single kickback, be it from Congress or anybody else. Rusk was very good on that.

I rescued our ambassador to Iran—you may remember his name—a Foreign Service officer who got fired out of the department for some shipping deal in Taiwan, a General somebody.

O'BRIEN: I don't know.

BOWLES: Well, he was, I thought, unjustly treated. Evidence against him was very slim. He denied it. I rehabilitated him, brought him back in, and sent him to Iran as ambassador. The Foreign Service was terribly pleased.

O'BRIEN: Oh, that's Holmes [Julius Cecil Holmes], isn't it?

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BOWLES: Holmes.

O'BRIEN: Yes, Julius Holmes, right.

BOWLES: And then Holmes proceeded to take a series of positions that were directly opposed to my own. I was trying very hard to push the Shah [Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi] to move ahead with a land reform program and other long overdue reforms. But Holmes wanted to bring all these planes in all the time to please the Shah. So we were on opposite sides again. But at least he was deservedly put back to work.

O'BRIEN: Well, McNamara comes into Defense and—within the framework of the law, pretty much institutes a revolution in the Defense Department, with a very, very, very entrenched and powerful group within and outside. Now the State Department's geographic bureaus don't have any real constituency, yet they're able to pretty much thwart any changes that you're thinking about or the White House is thinking about in terms of policy. Now why is that? Is it the fact that Rusk sides with the geographic bureaus?

BOWLES: Well, I think if Rusk had had McNamara's imagination and resiliency and perspective, we could really have rebuilt the State Department, as well, perhaps, and as easily. You wouldn't have had, as you say, the constituency, but I still think we could have made an enormous difference. I think personally McNamara is a great person. I've learned to have tremendous respect for both him and McGeorge Bundy, both of whom I thought were wrong through a lot of this period, but who I think had the mental capacity to realize that they were wrong, and consequently have now developed and grown into two remarkably different people.

I remember Bob McNamara's promise to get the troops out of Vietnam with a victory by December, 1966, 1967. You know, it was incredible he could make a statement like that. But the point is that once Bob learned he was wrong, he had the guts to change and say so. And he was, I think a—and still think is a—very good person. But Dean never saw this. Dean was perfectly willing to accept the whole disorganized, tradition-ridden department as though it was created by the Lord himself. He figured—he thought I was against the Foreign Service, which I wasn't. I was just for getting a better Foreign Service to carry out the President's policies. Rusk and I were in complete conflict on the whole question of administration. The last months I was there—all through that period I suppose, I must have

said thirty-five times, “Look, Dean, will you make me general manager of the State Department and give me full power to do what’s needed, subject to your approval and the President’s approval? Let me take

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responsibility to make this damn place run as it should and must.”

I remember one night I made a very big pitch to Dean on the back porch of my house in Georgetown. Our wives were both away, and we had dinner together—a rare event. I said, “Dean, don’t worry about this. I’ve run things bigger than this—during the war, and other times—and I’ll check the things with you. We’ll set the policies together. But let me carry them out, and I can say yes or no.” And he said, “No.” He wanted the under secretary to be sort of a replica of himself. I saw it as an administrative job where you naturally had something to say about policy and particularly had something to say about reviewing the old policies.

For instance, I could see nothing disastrous about two Germanys. Do you really want one Germany? Are the Russians wrong on this? I’d just as soon have two Germanys for twenty years. Why don’t we let both Germanys in the U.N., let both Koreas in the U.N., let both Vietnams in the U.N., let both Chinas in the U.N. This doesn’t have to be permanent. They can merge or do whatever they will. It doesn’t set the style forever. You can never make peace with Russia as long as you’re trying to build a strong pro-West Germany in the middle of Europe. Why, Russia would never accept it for a minute. Russia never will. You could never get them to look at a thing like that. It was different. It wasn’t what had been done.

O’BRIEN: Well, Rusk as secretary of state sees and admires very much Marshall [George C. Marshall].

BOWLES: Marshall gave the whole goddamn thing over to Bob Lovett [Robert Abercrombie Lovett] and told him to run it, and Bob Lovett ran it well. I told him that one time. “You talk about Marshall,” I said, “Why don’t you do what Marshall did?” Marshall hardly ever got to the office half the time. He was there on the big policy decisions, but he was never involved in who should be deputy assistant secretary for Far Eastern affairs.

I remember one time I came back from Europe in ‘68. Marshall was there, and I had met some people in Eastern Europe who were interesting to him, and he spent the whole morning on me. He had nothing to do. His desk was clean as a whistle. That’s carrying it to two extremes. Marshall was in on the big decisions, of course, and was a terribly wonderful man. But Bob Lovett was the person who did all the work and made the place go, and that’s the job I wanted. Now my wife [Dorothy Stebbins Bowles] tells me I’m not telling the truth when I say I didn’t want to be secretary of state very much. She says,

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“You’re kidding yourself. You’re just trying to make yourself feel better.” But I didn’t—in the first place, I knew what was going to happen. I knew enough about politics to know that I was controversial, and I’d been battling for all kinds of things I’d believed in for many years and inevitably made some enemies. For instance, the Southern senators checked into my (the 1960 Democratic) platform. I knew all this.

You see, the southerners say that if Bill Fulbright can’t get this because he’s a signer of the southern manifesto, then Bowles shouldn’t get it because Bowles wrote the platform of 1960. I was adjusted to it. I would have been astonished to have gotten it, and I was perfectly pleased to go in as the second man to Rusk. Build up Rusk, so that Rusk becomes the big cheese, and establish a smooth-running, efficient operation that would reexamine all our policies and come up with adaptations. But the system wasn’t there.

O’BRIEN: We were talking about the Rusk style, and the relationship of you and Rusk, and Marshall, and a certain comparison of the two.

BOWLES: I understand that when Jack Kennedy saw Bob Lovett, when he was trying to pick a secretary of state, Lovett asked him, “Do you want a secretary of state or do you want an under secretary of state?” And Jack Kennedy laughed and said, “I guess I want an under secretary of state,” meaning, “I want to be the secretary of state myself.” Whether that story is true or not, I don’t know.

But, two or three weeks after the election, in talking to Kennedy at breakfast, he said, “Just suppose for a minute you were secretary of state. How would you set it up? Who would you bring it?” People say this meant that he was thinking seriously of me. I don’t think he was. It was the kind of hypothetical question he often posed. I said, “Well, I think I’d bring in Dean Rusk as under secretary.” And he said, “He’s with the Rockefeller Foundation, isn’t he?” I said yes.

Now Dean, I think, would probably have been good in that job. He’s intensely loyal, absolutely loyal. He was loyal to Kennedy, he was loyal to everybody. I think he was genuinely distressed about his relationship with me, because we had been good friends. And I think he’s been unhappy about the way it worked out.

Last year I received an award—a Distinguished Service Award—at the State Department after I got back from India. They had a little ceremony at the State Department at which Rusk was present.

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Secretary Rogers, who didn’t know me from Adam, said some polite things, then asked Rusk to speak. Rusk gave his usual eloquent little five-minute speech, which he’s a past master at.

He said, “Chet Bowles has had many ideas in regard to American foreign policy, many of which are now an integral part of our policy. As for the rest, only history will determine whether Chet was right or wrong.” This I interpret as a generous reference to his differences with me. It was very nicely done. I think he was—whenever I came back from India, he always seemed genuinely glad to see me, and I was glad to see him. Occasionally, I would receive a really warm letter from him, in India. I think he did the best he could to support me on specific questions when I was in New Delhi, but on the key questions, such as

Pakistan, Southeast Asia, etc., we were poles apart. Fundamentally, he didn't agree with me and thought a happy Pakistan was more important than a new Asia alternative, which he didn't believe was possible. But within the confines of his own convictions, he was friendly and warm. I should think he would have lost his temper once in a while.

O'BRIEN: I'm curious now, about another thing, too. Here Dean Rusk is sitting as the head of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1960. An article of his appears in *Foreign Affairs* on the President and foreign relations, and he becomes secretary of state. Was he—what I'm asking—is there a group of people let's say, loosely surrounding the Council of Foreign Relations that has the ability to push forward a person for the position of secretary of state or, let's say, stop someone else from becoming secretary of state?

BOWLES: I think it's true, within certain obvious limitations. I think that that article was probably no coincidence. It seemed too timely. It was clearly designed almost to please Kennedy. And I think that Bob [Robert A. Lovett], Jack McCloy [John Jay McCloy] and.... The story—it's in my book—about the Rockefeller Foundation trustees meeting in December—there were about five prospective candidates there. Rusk was called out of the room and came back and slipped me a note which said, "I've just got a call from Kennedy. What in hell does he want to see me about?" I said, "He wants to make you secretary of state."

And the next morning he saw Kennedy at breakfast and telephoned me from the airport and said, "Well, that's one thing we can check off our list. I couldn't communicate with him at all, nor he with me." He said that the breakfast was a complete dud.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, was it a surprise to him?

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BOWLES: I think it came as a great surprise to him. In fact, that breakfast he thought was the key point. Kennedy could be sort of difficult to talk with sometimes. I assume that Kennedy probably froze up, didn't talk easily, and Rusk doesn't unfreeze other people or himself very easily, so it probably seemed an abortive occasion.

O'BRIEN: Well, was the fact that he was called—was it a surprise, would you guess? Or do you know? Do people like McCloy or people like Acheson....

BOWLES: I don't know. My guess is that it probably wasn't. I think Rusk knew that McCloy and Lovett both had talked to the President about it. I think they both probably gave very high marks to Rusk. They both were on the Rockefeller board with him. I knew them.

I don't think Acheson had any particular influence (with Kennedy) at that moment. Acheson had been outspokenly against Kennedy all through the campaign—immensely opposed to him. He was for Johnson. Yet Acheson emerged for a few months as a key

advisor on Europe, and, I think, on the Kennedy-Khrushchev episode. It is interesting that the people who emerged in many top positions in foreign policy were the guys that had never taken a position in politics. I hope that young men in politics will not interpret that as a reason to keep their mouths shut.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, was there much speculation at the time of the Democratic National Convention about any possible choice of secretary of state?

BOWLES: I think at that point, a lot of people assumed I would be, or Adlai. Also, I was asked by Kennedy to be his liaison with then-Secretary of State Herter. Traditionally, the party out of power gets briefings by the State Department on sensitive foreign policy issues so the candidates won't put their foot in it and upset things. Nixon didn't want this, and Herter was upset by that. So Herter said, "You're a member of the (House) Foreign Relations Committee. You have a right to all this information. Drop in and see me in a few weeks." So I saw him every two weeks.

That was carried on, and when the election was over, Kennedy asked me to act as his representative in Washington, to see in his behalf the people there involved with foreign policy—ambassadors and others.

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I provided a buffer. He couldn't talk to anybody. Now this was probably partly because I happened to be in Washington. He knew me, and he knew I had a house there and that it was easy for me to do this, so I did it. I don't think it meant anything in particular. But people who saw that sort of thing read more into it than I did.

Also I had been named his foreign policy advisor early in the campaign. Although this was a phony thing from the beginning. I never advised him much about anything. He never asked my advice much. I used to see his speeches before they were given, but I can't say I contributed much to them. I was—he wanted a liberal on his side. He had none—Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] would not come out for him. Stevenson's plans were unknown—where he was going and Humphrey's, Reuther's.

I had decided to come out for Kennedy because I thought I might be able to shape things a bit. I thought he was going to win, and when Stevenson said he wasn't going to run—or at least wouldn't say so—I decided to go along and take my chances and try to help Kennedy. So I think probably a lot of people thought that I would naturally be named for State, but I never thought that particularly. I did at the very first stage. But I didn't really care. Again I want to be sure I'm representing my position accurately. Probably my wife, if she were here, would say I did care. I don't think I cared.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, there's a number of little questions that I could ask. One I'm rather concerned about, in regard to this thing about Vietnam. Of course, the chairmanship of that task force, in 1961, went to Gilpatric, as I understand. And it's been suggested that at that point State and Secretary Rusk...

BOWLES: Abdicated.

O'BRIEN: ...Abdicated.

BOWLES: They did.... Completely. It became a Pentagon problem, a Defense problem, not a State Department problem. I protested very strongly about the military orientation of the task force group being sent to Vietnam to come up with proposals for action. I said, "Send myself, send Ball, send someone whom you trust. But for God's sake, don't let the Pentagon take this thing over." Max Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] went. That was the beginning of the end. I go into detail on this in my book (*Promises to Keep*).

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Kennedy went along with only part of the Rostow-Taylor proposals, i.e., sending 16,000 training officers to help modernize the South Vietnamese army. I have been convinced that Kennedy would not have gone beyond those sixteen thousand. He might have gone a little beyond. I don't think this is just wishful thinking. I don't think he was ever very concerned with it. I think he was reacting to—as I said before, the Bay of Pigs episode—he was reacting to Khrushchev. He wanted to show him that he wasn't just a young, weak, wobbly person. He wanted to demonstrate to Khrushchev he could be tough too, and Vietnam was a good place to be tough in.

O'BRIEN: In your other interview you mentioned that you had had a conversation with Dobrynin [Anatoly Fedorovich Dobrynin] prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis. You said you had gotten some reports that missiles were being brought into Cuba. I assume at that point you didn't know whether they were inter-ballistic missiles rather than defensive missiles.

BOWLES: No, we didn't. We knew they were bringing in planes as well as missiles—bombers. I used to see Dobrynin maybe every few months or so for lunch. It so happened that I had lunch with him this day. Tom Hughes, who was head of State's intelligence, he'd formerly worked for me, came in and said, "We just got the most shocking news here that the Russians are really moving stuff into Cuba." And I couldn't believe it, and he said, "Well, no, but we know that it's true."

So when seeing Dobrynin, I said, "Don't play around." At that time a lot of people were talking about the President bluffing, saying he wouldn't really do anything about it. There had been a lot of rumors about this. I was going away to Africa in three days—two days, so I said, "If this is true, and I think it is true, it's absolute folly. And please assume it's folly, that you'll be in difficulty if you can't stop it. Our relations will be in grave trouble." I don't think he had any idea of it, from his own government. I reported this conversation to the President, also to Rusk. I believe a note on my conversation on all this, is in my files somewhere.

O'BRIEN: You mentioned prior to that that you had spent some time on the 303 Committee. Did you get in at all on some of the developments that took

place after the Bay of Pigs and between the Missile Crisis, in regard to some of the activities of—well, some of the clandestine activities that were directed at the...

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BOWLES: No. This subject was handled at the President-Secretary level, with of course, Allen Dulles and to some degree McNamara. The 303 Committee's activities were more connected with Tibet and China. Most of our work was involved in that. I think most of your Cuban stuff, as I remember, was bypassed and went directly somehow....

O'BRIEN: To the Mongoose—was it to the Mongoose Committee?

BOWLES: I think so, yes. That's what they called it. At that time, I was greatly concerned by the confused lines of authority in undercover programs and also with the organization of the CIA. I was asked to put together a memorandum on the alternatives—after the Bay of Pigs—on what can we do now, what are the choices? And I did that, knocking down the big ones. The general feeling there, in the President's office—if you had taken a vote at those first few meetings on what to do next after the Bay of Pigs, you would have had a three-to-one vote to invade Cuba. That's my judgment. But the President kept his head.

O'BRIEN: Does Lansdale [Edward G. Lansdale] have any particular impact?

BOWLES: To some extent. I saw him only two or three times. I was quite impressed, but not tremendously so. I thought he was overrated probably. The idea of combining military and guerilla jungle tactics to deal with subversion was for a while very appealing, and Lansdale was sort of symbolic of that. The Green Berets sort of reflected that, cops and robbers, and cowboys and Indians, ambushing people. Again the liberals were looking for a cheap way out.

In talking this way about the liberals, what I feel was missing was a really deep-seated liberal view about the world in that period, that was really down deep. I think we could have turned history around in that ten years, if Kennedy lived, if he'd seen it. And I think that he—his charm and his strength and the guts he showed at the Missile Crisis.... If you asked me what is the most important single need of the President, I'd say the guts to say no to the military and keep on saying no until they get tired. Kennedy had that, and I doubt Nixon has.

O'BRIEN: Well, Rostow was the chief spokesman for the idea that the Cuban Missile Crisis was a great turnaround in American foreign policy. Do you see that as a watershed in any way?

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BOWLES: How does he mean it?

O'BRIEN: As I understand it, he sees it as the great divide in which communism was on the offensive before and democracy is on the offensive afterwards.

BOWLES: I don't see—where the hell are we on the offensive? I don't see that we're on the offensive anywhere. We're just sort of drifting and have been since the Cuba Crisis. I think it was a marvelous performance by Kennedy, and I think that it proved that he had guts, and I think that's the essential thing.

My friends all say, "Who's going to be the next president? Is it Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie]? Who are we for?" First of all, no person exists who is capable of being president. There's nobody qualified, nobody half-qualified. You have to assume we're going to have a half-qualified person in that job. If you assume that.... Start with that, then what are the qualifications we want? We want, first of all, a guy who will say no to the generals, the Chiefs of Staff, as Kennedy did. Secondly, you want a guy who can communicate with the American people and also with Congress, and can give them a feeling—be an educator, in a sense. He doesn't have to be a good administrator. He can hire administrators. But Kennedy had that first all-important requisite.

What scares me now is, I can see a miscalculation coming sometime, and I can't see Nixon having the guts to say no. I hope I'm wrong. I think Ike [Dwight D. Eisenhower] would have said no. I'm not sure Truman would have. I'm trying to be honest, I admired Truman. But he went along with the boys. Acheson ran our foreign policy. Truman was a great man otherwise, but he rubber-stamped a lot of Acheson's policies which I think were wrong. I think Acheson was terrific inside of Europe. If you take his assumptions, that the whole future of the world has for the last hundred years been run out of Europe, it was a brilliant performance. But these assumptions were wrong. With the end of colonialism, the world was no longer run by Europe and a European balance of power was only part of a policy.

O'BRIEN: What happens to policy planning?

BOWLES: Well, in the first place you have a lot of bright people, and you don't know what to do with them—you don't know how to assign them, so you put them in

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Policy Planning for six months, a year. And once they're there, they have no particular standing. They're at war with the geographic bureaus, unless they work out of the Secretary's office and his special group, and have the prestige of his office.

O'BRIEN: They're emasculated during the Kennedy Administration.

BOWLES: Sure. Kennan [George Frost Kennan] was the last one that really ran it. But Kennan, you see, had Marshall's confidence. But since then it's been

ineffective. But then, when you get any good people in Policy Planning, every time you have an emergency and you want somebody to handle, say, the German problem, someone will say, "Borrow so-and-so from Policy Planning for three months," and so he's transferred over and drops everything, packs his bag, and leaves for Berlin. So the good ones are constantly taken out. I think that if the Policy Planning group is going to work, the Secretary himself must set up a small, very talented group, which will work very closely with the Secretary.

O'BRIEN: We haven't talked much about the problem of interdepartmental relations with State on foreign policy problems, and I imagine this is something that must have really overwhelmed you when you came in—how to keep the other agencies, not only in the operations—at the ambassadors' end—but in Washington, in mind.

BOWLES: Well, it was.

O'BRIEN: What did you do to try to reaffirm State's leadership?

BOWLES: We tried first of all to set up State as being pretty much in charge of AID and USIS, and we did, I think. I had persuaded Ed Murrow to take over as head of USIS, and he became a real factor of importance. We were less fortunate in regard to AID, until we persuaded Dave Bell [David E. Bell] to take a leave of absence from Harvard. The Pentagon was—we abdicated in Asia to them. One little story I've got—it's an interesting one—illustrates our difficulties in setting up the State Department as policy makers and coordinators. I was trying to look at the whole cultural affairs and educational exchange thing. And I discovered that a large number of foreign students—exchange students—were not coming only through State, through our Bureau of Cultural Affairs, but through other government agencies as well. The Pentagon, for example. There were forty-two thousand young

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officers coming here from different countries abroad to study every year or take courses. State didn't have anything to do with them, didn't know who they were. We didn't even know their addresses, who they were, or where they were. Labor, Agriculture also were bringing people over here on exchange programs. Everybody was.

So I said, "Look, if State's going really to run foreign policy, they ought to run this one. Let's get some policies. Let's be in charge, carry it out. For instance, let all these young officers coming over here from abroad through the Pentagon spend two weeks at some university campus—Minnesota, Wisconsin—meeting young people their age, and not military people alone."

I got Phil Coombs [Philip H. Coombs] in to head the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. I'd known him for years; he had worked for the Ford Foundation and done a very top job. And after a long discussion, I finally got Rusk to go along. I said to Phil Coombs, "Here's your job. The Cultural Affairs side is running all right—the U.S. orchestras

are going to Russia, and the American singers are going to South America, and everything's in shape. Your bureau can handle this. But State must have a policy on how the huge number of foreign students coming here are handled. You settle down for a year and really build a policy. Then we can delegate the appropriate parts of the operating side to the other agencies—Labor, etc., by using their money.” Phil put together a budget of about eighty million dollars, against the fifty-two million we had before. Rusk approved the budget. The President approved it. I approved it. The Bureau of the Budget approved it.

Phil Coombs went to Rooney [John Jay Rooney] up on the hill before the House Appropriations Committee, and, of course, Rooney tore it apart. And then Phil got some very top people to come in and testify for it, university presidents and very distinguished people. And Rooney got mad. Rooney went to the White House. Phil was called in by George Ball, and says, “You’re fired.” Phil said, “What for?” And George said, “I don’t know. I was asked to do this.” And so Phil asked, of course, to see Rusk. Rusk was very composed. He said, “I don’t really know, it’s something in the White House. I don’t.”

Now, I was there. At that time I was out of my under secretary job. I was right there in the department, and they never told me about it, never discussed it with me. And Phil had done precisely what I told him to do. The charge brought against him was that he had too big ideas on the budget. Well, why the hell did we approve the budget? We all approved it. Now, obviously, Rooney went to the White House and laid it on the line, and Kennedy or somebody went along. And that’s pretty bad.

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O’BRIEN:           How about CIA?

BOWLES:           The CIA—I think that CIA was brought a little bit closer to State, in part. You know, the CIA is terribly dependent on where you are. In some places it’s very good, and in others not. But again, we failed to take the issue up. Now after the business of the Bay of Pigs, I wrote a memorandum to the Secretary and the President suggesting a whole new set up.

I suggested that the CIA be divided into three parts: one, research work, a study of the Russian economy and Chinese economy. A lot of this should never be classified. It’s perfectly open stuff. It could be handled by Tom Hughes’ Bureau of Intelligence and Research at State. The second part of it—exchange of intellectuals and so on—is cultural affairs, which ought to be handled by State. And the third part, the covert part, is relatively small—I’d set it down at ten percent of the whole. I proposed, let’s have a British type, really undercover group, have it small, answerable to the President and the Secretary of State. And let the rest of it be delegated, and let the word CIA disappear. The CIA’s dead—there’s no CIA.

Well, predictably my proposal didn’t get anywhere, and I blame myself because I didn’t fight for it hard enough. You see, what happens, you find you can only fight for so many things, so you take a look at that one and say, “Well, I know I’m not getting anywhere,” and you select your issues which have the best chance of success. Looking back at it later, you say, “Good God, I saw this, I understood it, I didn’t do anything about it, didn’t really follow through adequately.”

I knew, for instance, that there was that group of students financed by CIA—the students who were working at that education thing that was going on. It was a really terribly damaging story when it broke in the *Times* [*New York Times*]. Quite a lot of us must have known about those students and what they were doing. And I blame all of us for not seeing it coming and doing more.

O'BRIEN: Well, in 1961 the State Department loses as I understand, loses some of their intelligence community, and the CIA grows, and the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] is created. Does this cause you a problem in just simply evaluating and getting straight information about what's going on?

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BOWLES: It certainly does. I think that the thing was saved to a degree by Tom Hughes, who has an extraordinarily good mind and a lot of courage. He stuck hard to his own ideas of what was right. He was—tended to be against the defense people generally not always. In many cases it was CIA and State together. Sometimes the CIA was caught in the middle, with both Defense and State leaking stories against CIA. They've often done that job.

But I think that you ought always to have a very strong guy in State on this. If you don't, you're just whipped around. Take all this stuff going on in Vietnam that comes out of the military. It's disgraceful junk they're handing to Congress. The weapons we've "captured."

A friend of mine now working as the administrative aide to a senator, went to the Pentagon and said, "How much is the value of all these captured weapons?" They said, "Oh, we've never put any value on them. Here's the numbers." The aide said, "I want to know what they're worth." And they said, "Well, we don't know." He said, "My senator's going to make a speech next week. He's going to include a figure of eighteen million. That's our estimate." And the Pentagon said, "Oh my God, don't say that. It's a lot more than that. He said, "Well, how much is it?" "Well, it must be at least thirty million." This was last week. It's incredible—thirty million dollars is a drop in the bucket over there.

What you've got to get, what you've got to decide is what precisely is our foreign policy for the United States, and then determine what military power you require to carry it out. Dean Rusk could never think in those terms, I'm afraid. And certainly Rogers isn't going to.

What do you want a military for? Well, first of all you want to be sure the Russians don't someday point a nuclear bomb at our head, and say, "Agree or else." You don't want that to happen. You want to be sure that you've got plenty to take a first strike and then recover. Do you want a nucleus of a European force that could move in if there was land war in Europe? I would think maybe you did, but you could discuss that. Do you want a landing force for Latin America? I would think no. In short, what do you want, what do you need?

What happens now in the whole thing is that these things are decided, just because of the past momentum of these groups: the bomber group, the nuclear people, the flat top people. The number of flat tops is

fifteen, which, by no coincidence, is the same number of dreadnaughts agreed to in the 1922 Naval Treaty in London. There's no coincidence. Those fifteen flat tops would not last very long against nuclear rockets. You've got B-52's; therefore, you've got to get B-50's now; the better plane. I doubt any one of them will get more than a hundred miles within Russia.

What do you want? Do you want them for bombing, let's say, villages in some other country like Vietnam? If you do, say so—where? Now this issue has never been forced. What are these weapons, armaments, etc. for? Now that's State's job.

There's a story here. This town (Essex, Connecticut) was burned by the British in the War of 1812. In India, I used to criticize the Indians because they're always looking, in effect, for armies of elephants and crossbows and spears to come through the Khyber Pass. They're always aimed in that direction. I used to say, "That's not your problem. Your problem is the East." But I said, "Foreign policies are hard to change. I'll give you an example." I told them that my home town of Essex had been burned by the British, and I said, "Now we have—or did have until 1948 a series of forts on Plum Island, Gull Island, Montauk Point, Fishers Island—disappearing guns. I used to wonder what they were for, and it suddenly occurred to me that they were to keep British frigates out of Long Island Sound, that they were built up for that in the first place. It's the only purpose they could possibly have. The British fleet, the German fleet entering Long Island Sound? Today? Nonsense. They were set up originally back in 1814, 1815, 1816, and we couldn't get them out of our blood." We'd built up a tradition—a coastal tradition—with a government organization, an economic investment, a momentum of the past, to support it. The military just hang on to these things.

And here's where State ought to move in somehow. This again is what Kennedy should have done, and said, "What's our defense for? How are we going to use it?" I don't know what you'd come up with, but my guess is thirty billion, forty billion dollars, something like that.

O'BRIEN: Well, political-military planning in the 1960's has really meant that the Defense Department has run foreign policy, hasn't it?

BOWLES: Yes, definitely, and certainly still is. With all the power of that patronage, and all the money they can use. The State Department was nothing of that kind. But I

think that a good new president might have the chance that Kennedy had—though Kennedy had his chance probably at the best point in history. We may have other chances. I don't give up on this, but this chance was missed.

O'BRIEN: You got involved in the whole problem of African diplomats as well, as I understand.

BOWLES: My wife and I used to see a lot of them.

O'BRIEN: I know—in fact, I did some interviews with Pedro Sanjuan. He handled a few of the problems in Washington.

BOWLES: We took an interest, and my wife took a big interest, in Africa. If she had to choose, we wouldn't go to the British reception, we'd always go to the Ghanaian one, or one for the Shah, whatever it might be. Build them up.

O'BRIEN: Well, I've kept you long enough today.

[END OF INTERVIEWS]

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Telephone: 617 223-7250

December 12, 1972

Mr. Chester Bowles  
Essex, CT 06426

Dear Mr. Bowles:

Thank you for your letter of December 4, 1972, reporting progress on reviewing your oral history interviews for the Kennedy Library. I appreciate the time and effort you are putting into them, and I am sure that future researchers at the Kennedy Library will be most thankful for your contributions. I should say, however, that we prefer additional notes and commentary to a rewriting of the text. Leaving the text substantially as it is helps to preserve the flavor of the original conversations. It may make for strange prose, but it is good oral history.

You have asked if there might be materials we would like you to add to the information you have presented. The invitation is most tempting, but to do it justice I would have to spend more time than I can presently afford in reviewing your transcripts and the files to see what more should be done. Perhaps at some later date you will allow me to do a supplementary interview when we have had a chance to process all the national security files. I do have two specific questions, however, that have come to my attention almost by accident in the course of processing the files. Some comments by you on both of them would be much appreciated.

There is, in the Cuba sub-series of the National Security Files (McGeorge Bundy's staff files), a memorandum of February 18, 1961, from Tom Mann in which he sounds ominous warnings about the plans for the Cuban invasion that was to become known as "The Bay of Pigs." His predictions about the outcome are uncanny in retrospect. I realize that his references were to the earlier version of the plan, later modified, and I realize that others also voiced their objections. I have never seen Mann given credit for this. I know that the President saw the memo, because McGeorge Bundy gave it to him along with a memo from Bissell

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advocating the other position in favor of the plan. I get the feeling that the modifications made in the plans between February and April and the departure of Mann contributed to somewhat mute the opposition to the invasion concept. Can you comment?

I have also run across a memorandum of conversation (State Department standard form) reporting a meeting on April 29, 1961, on the subject of Laos and whether or not to introduce troops into that country to save the deteriorating situation. The meeting was evidently not at the White House, but perhaps at State. Present were: Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Attorney General Kennedy, yourself, Generals Decker, LeMay, and Shoup, Admiral Burke, McGeorge Bundy, Alexis Johnson, Walter McConaughy, John Steeves, Charles Bohlen, Daniel Anderson, Ambassador Kenneth Young, and G. Edward Reynolds (Lao Desk Officer).

After a lengthy discussion on the pros and cons and assessment of the probabilities of what might and might not happen, you are reported near the end of the conversation to have said (right after a comment by Ken Young about the possibility of introducing Vietnamese troops) that you thought the main question to be faced was the fact that we were going to have to fight the Chinese anyway in 2, 3, 5, or 10 years and that it was just a question of when, where and how; and, that you thought a major war would be difficult to avoid. LeMay is reported to have opined, then, that we should fight now since the Chinese were likely to have atomic weapons soon.

I wonder if you can recall the incident and comment on it. Was that really your view of things at the time? How pervasive was the notion of an inevitable confrontation with the Chinese? Was it an extension of or a permutation of the old cold war mind set of the forties and fifties, or did it arise out of the objective lessons of the then current situation? What effect did this mind set have on deliberations on Laos, and later on Vietnam in the fall of 1961? Did people talk about it much?

Maybe I've opened a can of worms, here, but I think the comments you may care to make would be interesting.

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Once again, thank you for your time and effort and for your contributions thus far to the Kennedy Library's oral history program. I will be looking for your answer and the corrected copies of the interviews in the spring.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM W. MOSS  
Senior Archivist for National Security  
and Foreign Affairs

WWM/jb

CHESTER BOWLES  
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT 06426

February 22, 1973

Dear Mr. Moss:

Please forgive the long delay in answering your letter of December 12th.

I have carefully re-read the transcripts of my relationship with Jack Kennedy--the first done with Robert R. Brooks, former Dean of Williams College, and the second with Mr. O'Brien of your office. Although it may take me some time to get around to it, as we are about to leave for India for a two month trip, I will add any thoughts which may occur to me in the form of notes or comments, which will be so marked.

I am interested in the memorandum that Tom Mann wrote on the "Bay of Pigs". I had not seen it nor had I discussed the subject with him. I had assumed that he favored the invasion and I am glad to hear that he took a quite different position.

It is interesting that two weeks before the "invasion" occurred, Tom came to me and said he was very nervous and upset and that his own work was too heavy a burden for him to carry. I urged him not to consider resigning and managed to have him appointed Ambassador to Mexico. Obviously he felt he had been under great pressure and had no desire to play a major role in the Latin American debacle which was about to occur.

I am baffled by your question on China. At no time have I ever felt that a conflict between China and the United States was inevitable. Indeed I had taken just the opposite position. I had hoped we might find some way to bring China into the world community and develop a working relationship with this great country.

I was, however, deeply concerned that the Chinese might feel forced to enter the Vietnam struggle as they had done in Korea if they became fearful of a United States military effort which might appear to be aimed at them. When the proposal was made to put American troops in Laos in 1961, I argued that this would very likely produce some military reaction from the Chinese. I was also concerned that the Chinese might become more aggressive in Southeast Asia in order to increase their food supplies. At that time we had under-estimated China's capacity to produce food for her people (there was a major shortage in 1961 and 1962) and I felt they might feel the need to move into this highly productive area.

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I proposed that we deal with the situation by attempting to neutralize the entire Southeast Asia area and make a major investment in building up the Mekong River Basin. This, I suggested, would enable the Chinese to procure without war the food they needed and also would open up the market for them to trade on a peaceful basis.

I proposed on many occasions that we sponsor an effort to establish such a neutral area, hopefully with at least the tacit cooperation of both the Chinese and the Soviets. It does not now seem so far-fetched as many thought then. I made this proposal on several occasions to the Secretary and the President. In the summer of 1962 I almost managed to secure a general approval for an effort to explore these possibilities in the Southeast Asia area.

I also felt it was important that we have a good relationship with India which at that time feared the Chinese (they still do) in order to secure assurance of India's support in the event China should attempt to over-run Southeast Asia by force. Four or five days before President Kennedy died I presented him with a memo detailing my discussion with Nehru on this subject. At that time our own forces were not actively involved in Vietnam and Nehru expressed, to my surprise, willingness to help if such a situation did develop.

My efforts through this period were based on the assumption that a war with China would be a catastrophe and that a peaceful solution might be developed by the neutralization of the area, providing China with a major opportunity to secure adequate food supplies and to establish trade relations.

With my warm regards.

Sincerely,



Chester Bowles

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John F. Kennedy Library  
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Waltham, Massachusetts 02154

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P. S. Much of this is covered in my book, Promises To Keep,  
in the chapters on Laos, China and Vietnam.

Dictated by Mr. Bowles,  
signed in his absence.