

Adrian S. Fisher Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 5/13/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Adrian S. Fisher
Interviewer: Frank Sieverts
Date of Interview: May 13, 1964
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 78 pages

Biographical Note

Fisher, (1914 - 1983) Deputy Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (1961 - 1969), discusses nuclear test ban negotiations, corresponding with Khrushchev and negotiating with the Soviets, and the meeting in Moscow, among other issues.

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Adrian S. Fisher, recorded interview by Frank Sieverts, May 13, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Adrian S. Fisher – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

ADRIAN S. FISHER

May 13, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Frank Sieverts

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SIEVERTS: Today is May 13, 1964, and I am interviewing the Honorable Adrian S. Fisher, Deputy Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Mr. Fisher, perhaps you could start by very briefly recollecting why it was and how it came about that you were appointed, and whether you knew President Kennedy prior to your appointment?

FISHER: I had known the President slightly before the Inauguration. I had been at a dinner

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party with him many years ago when he was a Congressman – a Member of the House. He pointed out that we had both gone to the same preparatory school, Choate, although we were not there at the same time. I had gotten out, I think, a year before he came in.

My appointment as Deputy to the President's Adviser on Disarmament did not result from President Kennedy saying, "This is the man I want," though I don't mean to imply that he had any objection to me. I read about Mr. McCloy's [John Jay McCloy] appointment by President Kennedy as his adviser on disarmament matters. I previously had worked for Mr. McCloy, and while I had made up my mind in advance that I didn't want to go back in the

Government, the McCloy appointment seemed such a very good thing and I was a great admirer of

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his and thought that President Kennedy showed such good judgment in selecting him, that I called up Mr. McCloy and asked him if he would like an assistant. So I would say the drive to get Fisher back in the government was produced by one man, namely, me.

SIEVERTS: I'm sure you're too modest. How would you describe your first contact with the President subsequent to your appointment? Did you see him in the White House?

FISHER: Actually, the first one we had concerned a problem of policy with respect to the resumption of the test ban negotiations. This involved the problem of congressional liaison and there had been a good deal of criticism of the prior administration particularly coming out of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. These were people that I had known fairly well and

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I recommended, through McGeorge Bundy, that the White House set up a luncheon with a series of Congressional leaders sometime in early March of 1961. I recommended that both people from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House, Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate, and the Joint Committee be invited to that lunch. This included men such as Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], Clint Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson], and Doc Morgan [Thomas E. Morgan]. This was a meeting with the President at a luncheon in the White House. The President sort of turned the meeting over to Mr. McCloy and Arthur Dean [Arthur Hobson Dean] and to a much lesser degree myself as to what we were thinking of doing in the test ban negotiations. It was a fairly spirited meeting, and it didn't produce all the harmony and understanding that I had expected. As I say, it was

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a fairly vigorous meeting, ending up with Humphrey saying one thing and Scoop Jackson [Henry M. Jackson], who was a good friend on everything else, but had taken quite an opposite position on the test ban, saying something else.

SIEVERTS: This was on the subject of the nuclear test ban?

FISHER: This was on the subject of the nuclear test ban and the positions we were going to take when the Geneva Conference – then just a three-nation committee on cessation of nuclear testing – resumed, which I think was scheduled for the 21st of March. That happened to be my first meeting with the President. But basically until September 26, 1961, most of the times when I saw President

Kennedy the context was the development and introduction, and the problems relating thereto of the bill establishing the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Mr. McCloy

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and I met with him, I think, in May of '61 in terms of going over the legislation and also met with him in a group of congressmen who were interested in cosponsoring the legislation.

SIEVERTS: I see.

FISHER: I remember one of the big problems was what were we going to call the Agency. Everybody had an idea. We had it Disarmament Agency for World Peace and Security, or something equally ghastly. At various times throughout the summer of '61 we, Mr. McCloy and I – or sometimes Mr. McCloy was out of town and I'd be in touch with him – both on the subject of the bill and the test ban negotiations which were still going on.

SIEVERTS: Do you mean that the President himself had a choice of names for the Agency?

FISHER: He said he'd leave it up to the congressmen. He said, "What do you fellows want?"

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He didn't have any strong feelings on it. He would accept anything that they thought was sufficiently unwar-like. He sort of said, in effect (these were members of the House, as I recall), "What do you fellows want?"

SIEVERTS: But didn't he refer to it during the 1960 campaign as the Arms Control Agency?

FISHER: That's correct.

SIEVERTS: Without the word "disarmament?"

FISHER: Well that is true, but in his letter to McCloy appointing him, he referred to disarmament. What finally was adopted – Arms Control and Disarmament – seemed so simple, so logical, that we thought we should have had it in the first place. It's just like any idea. They always seem good after you've had them, but you always wonder at how long it took you to arrive at it.

SIEVERTS: There was a time, and I guess to some

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extent this debate still goes on, when these two concepts were pitted against each other.

FISHER: Yes, but I think artificially, although it was clearly true. As I detected President Kennedy's outlook on it, he was a sufficient pragmatist not to be concerned with the theology of the name. What he wanted to do was get the Agency set up and get it moving.

I also talked with him in June 1961, I think it was, on the telephone. That was my first experience with his famous habit of calling people on the working level and being quite familiar with the details of a problem. The document he called me about was not an unimportant document. It was an aide-memoire, in reply to the note Mr. Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev] had handed him in Vienna dealing with the

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position the United States had taken on nuclear testing. And we had prepared a draft and sent it to the White House. He called me about it at home. He had the document in front of him and had some really quite detailed suggestions as to the substance and the style, as to whether the phrasing was right. And I found it very interesting in discussions with him that what he really wanted was a discussion of the merits of it. He wasn't saying, "This is the way I want it." We went through a fairly detailed discussion of the pros and cons. It was perfectly clear that that was what he wanted.

It was a bit of a strain for anyone to be discussing with the President a document he had in front of him, and you don't. But this was something you had to do. I had been warned about this when he first called

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Leonard Meeker to discuss privacy. This had happened just after he had taken office. So I sort of expected that over this June weekend the same thing might happen. It was a classified document, so I didn't have it with me but I had it pretty well in mind, so I was able to discuss it with him in considerable detail.

This was one of his first written communications to Chairman Khrushchev following the Vienna meeting. The discussion reminded me very much of a discussion between editor and a member of the Harvard Law Review. He was obviously going to make the final decision because he was the President. But what he started out by doing – not only asking for but really insisting on – was a detailed discussion of the pros and cons. This was really an argument of the merits. He wasn't just giving you the word. It was

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quite an experience.

SIEVERTS: Did it turn into a discussion of a relationship he was trying to develop with Khrushchev?

FISHER: Well actually it did. At this stage the relationship had not developed, but it is a relationship he did build up. He felt that in a couple of places the draft was a little hard-nosed, a little too abrasive. And his changes didn't result in any change in substance but they were...well, he made it considerably less abrasive. He wasn't running for office against Khrushchev, so to speak, and didn't want to put that factor in it to the extent that it might make the saying of a relatively hard truth less saleable rather than perhaps more saleable. So what I detected was an idea of firmness but no desire to irritate or to be abrasive. This

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was sort of strange for me to be on that side of the discussion, because I wasn't known as the greatest shouter of "Let's murder the bum." Yet I found myself being questioned as to whether I wasn't just saying something in a nasty way so I could say we had been nasty to the Communists, not for the purpose of taking a firm position as far as the United States was concerned.

SIEVERTS: This coming after the Vienna meeting is especially interesting. Does it indicate to you that he was looking on the arms control and disarmament and the test ban field as an area right from the start in which there was a possibility of mutual interest and working together?

FISHER: This was a fairly hard, firm note which really said: "Maybe this is such an area, but only if it's on a workable basis."

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That was really the tone I detected in it. But the President was very insistent that this be said in the least abrasive manner possible, though also in a firm manner.

SIEVERTS: Right. What else was happening during this initial period of the Kennedy Administration?

FISHER: Except for this discussion and the luncheon we arranged, most of my discussions with him were primarily on the problem of getting the Agency established. The one I remember most particularly was the evening of August 30, or thereabouts, when we met in the White House – a group of us – to decide what to do about the Soviet-announced test resumption. The bill establishing the Agency was still in the formative stage and we had already had the Berlin Wall to signal a hardening of attitude. I recall saying: "Mr. President, I hope that you won't feel that this event makes it unnecessary for the Administration

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to continue to support the bill establishing the....” whatever the name of the Agency then was. And he said, in effect, that it would not – but that he thought we were dead. He said: “I don’t think it’s right. I don’t think you should be dead. I think the bill should be passed, but I think it won’t be.” I said he might well be right, but I hoped he wasn’t going to make any public indication of that. And McGeorge Bundy then intervened and said, “Mr. President, I think all Fisher’s asking is that if someone else decided to kill it, that may happen, but the Administration stands behind its position.” He said, “That’s fine, I’m with it.” And then we went on to discuss Soviet testing and what we ought to do about it and other matters.

I also saw him when the bill became

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law, at the ceremony at the Carlyle Hotel.

SIEVERTS: In New York City?

FISHER: In New York City where he signed the bill and I made off with one of the pens which I have right here. I also got a couple for my associates who worked with me on the bill. There’s a picture there on the wall taken shortly thereafter of the President shaking hands with Bill Foster [William C. Foster], who he designated as Director, and Mr. McCloy; the other character in the picture is me.

SIEVERTS: Was the understanding from the start that John McCloy would be there through the creation of the Agency but no longer?

FISHER: As far as I know, that was the understanding. At least Mr. McCloy made it quite clear to me after he had been here two weeks. In fact, Mr. McCloy probably got himself involved a little deeper into operations

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than he had contemplated because he, in effect, came down here and worked 5, 6, 7 days a week. I think he originally thought he was going to be sort of an advisory type adviser. Now knowing Mr. McCloy, once he puts his hand to the plough, he’s going to plough the furrow. He not only ceased to become an adviser-type adviser but he actually became a negotiator – going to Moscow to negotiate with Zorin the Joint Statement of Agreed Principles.

There certainly was no decision to “drop McCloy and to appoint Bill Foster.” Rather Mr. McCloy wanted to be in a truly advisory position. It was expected that when the Act was passed, the active phase of his job would be completed. He was brought down to make a series of recommendations. The President asked him to recommend how

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you organize things, what you should do about the test ban and what you should do about the general disarmament negotiations. Mr. McCloy had a rather small organization working on that. He had myself; he had a couple of without-compensation advisers; one of them was Shep Stone [Shephard Stone] of the Ford Foundation. He had George Bunn, now our General Counsel; and he had Betty Goetz and Jeph Wade who rounded out the organization. He got the test ban negotiations back under way, recommended the legislation and then obtained agreement of the Joint Statement of Agreed Principles for disarmament negotiations – all by mid-September or by late September, 1961. At that point he felt he had done what he had been signed on to do. So when the bill was passed he wrote the President saying

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that the job for which he came down was completed. He then accepted the appointment as Chairman of our Advisory Committee in which capacity he still serves.

SIEVERTS: Were there any other ways that you can describe that the President put his imprint on this subject during the first nine months of his administration?

FISHER: Well, I think it's fair to say that discussions with the President at that point were either on the form and ground rules of the test ban, or on the creation of the bill, because the general disarmament negotiations were just getting established. However, the President did deliver a speech dealing with the general disarmament problem.

On the 25th of September, the day before he signed the bill, he delivered

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a speech before the United Nations in which he covered the entire area. This was his first speech on the more general problems of disarmament rather than the limited test ban.

SIEVERTS: Did you work on that speech?

FISHER: Yes, though I didn't work on it as much as I might have because that was the last week of Congress and we had a problem in getting the appropriations for the new Agency. And the Congress was getting ready to go home. In fact, they went home, I think on the Saturday we got our appropriations through. I believe his speech was delivered on Monday so I didn't do as much as I should. You know how it is, Frank, at the end of the Session, particularly as we were trying to catch onto a supplemental appropriation. However, the staff of the US Disarmament Administration

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in State worked on the speech subject to our direction.

SIEVERTS: This was the former bureau?

FISHER: In the State Department, that's right, but they were acting under the direction of the McCloy organization.

SIEVERTS: This was a speech, presumably, that he took very seriously?

FISHER: He took it very seriously and had gone over it a great deal. Frankly, I don't think I could have improved it any because it was a great speech. By and large a good deal of work on the speech was done in New York with McCloy, who was then completing negotiations with Zorin [Valerian Zorin].

SIEVERTS: Did the President do any last-minute scraping up of notes for you to help pass the bill? You were in very tight circumstances that September, as I recall.

FISHER: No, except to the extent that he counseled

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by telephone with Hubert Humphrey. It really wasn't necessary at that stage, but the President made it quite clear that he considered this bill important. The Secretary of State called up Judge Smith [Howard W. Smith] and told him the importance the President put on getting this out of the Rules Committee. When it got out of the Rules Committee onto the House, an entirely new parliamentary situation developed. This became something that had to be disposed of before adjournment rather than something that you might not get to because of the adjournment. And at that point the adjournment fever as far as the establishment of the Agency is concerned – as distinct from the appropriation – began to work in our favor. Because this was then something that had to be gotten out of the way before

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adjournment. It's like the crest of a wave: if you're in front of it, you're in good shape.

SIEVERTS: And if you're behind, there's no scrambling back.

FISHER: That's right. If you're behind it you're in trouble. There's nothing you can do about it.

In a very real sense the President's imprint was on all these actions because in every one of them we had a degree of Administration cooperation that's absolutely unheard of in an Agency of this kind. It all existed because everybody knew the

President wanted it and was interested in it. I don't recall any direct interventions made the last three weeks or so but I think this was because none was necessary. When he made it clear that although he was a little bit pessimistic, he was going to fly the

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flag and stick with his original position notwithstanding the Soviet testing, that decision, once that was done, well, everything else followed from it.

SIEVERTS: Did you observe any specific reactions from him when the Soviets did resume testing?

FISHER: Yes, he did not think this was a terribly good thing. He had resisted a series of recommendations in the Administration that we should be the ones to resume testing. He made an offer – it probably wasn't an offer in any real sense – that if the Soviets would call off their tests, which they announced a day or two before, he would propose an atmospheric ban. He and the Prime Minister did it. He reacted in a way that he typically reacted in that sort of situation, that is, he didn't seem to be wildly enthusiastic about

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the action but he recognized we were in a new situation.

SIEVERTS: At that auspicious moment your Agency came into being. Where did it go from there? Did the President enter into the picture at all in the early months after the Agency was started?

FISHER: Well, the second that the Soviets resumed testing, the test ban negotiations obviously went into a decline because they resumed testing with a series that had been very actively planned and they sort of went bang, bang, bang – a lot of them – and they were big ones. So it didn't seem to him a matter of either national security or political sagacity to let the Soviets get a long test series out of this series and then say let's agree to stop. So the discussions went primarily to the general disarmament negotiations because at that

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stage of the game we had agreed to the Joint Statement of Agreed Principles, something that he had approved. By November they had agreed on a form for the Geneva Conference and had agreed on a date for the end of March. So most of the activity dealt with the more general disarmament problems up until June. Those discussions led to the so-called treaty outline of April 18, which was developed in the so-called Committee of Principals and which he approved. Every one of these major decisions, on which there were often differences inside of the Executive Branch, went to him, and he would hear people out and make up his

mind.

So his principal discussions during the winter of 1962 were not on test ban. The test ban went on the back burner, so to speak. And we resumed testing ourselves –

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underground testing. We didn't actually resume atmospheric testing until some time in April of 1962. I think there is one thing to say about his reaction at that point: he recognized that it probably made sense on balance to resume testing at that time. But he also recognized that there were a lot of people that were going to be deeply offended by the United States resuming atmospheric testing. We had people picketing the White House, and there was a lot of excitement about it – just because the Russians do it, why do we have to do it? The one thing he made perfectly clear in that situation was that as far as atmospheric testing was concerned that he was not going to do it on a monkey-see, monkey-do basis. He insisted that each atmospheric test – I'm sure that this was true of the underground test as well,

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but he really focused on the atmospheric tests – he insisted that each be significant. He would ask: “What are you going to learn from them? Do you really need them?” And that's the reason we didn't resume atmospheric tests until some time in April. You could have set something off in the air just to show the Russians very soon, but it wouldn't have been a meaningful test. And he insisted that they be scientifically meaningful tests, even in the face of a rather extensive period of Soviet tests. That was his principal imprint on this area at that stage of the game.

His other principal concentration was on developing an effective position on the more general problems of disarmament. The April 18, 1962 treaty outline which was tabled in Geneva was one which was gone

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over by him. He had gone over it in really substantial detail, and the Joint Chiefs and Secretary McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] had supported it. They argued it out – and all the problems involved – not necessarily differences of opinion but just issues to be solved.

SIEVERTS: What were the formal mechanisms for discussions on this subject in the Government? Did the President sit in on the discussions in point?

FISHER: They could be two ways. We had the so-called Committee of Principals which consisted of the principal officials concerned with this matter. That would be the Secretary of State; Secretary of Defense; Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission; Chairman of the Atomic Chiefs of Staff – either initially as adviser to the Secretary of Defense and later as

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a member in his own right; Mr. McCloy, when he was the President's principal adviser on disarmament; Mr. Foster, when he was the Director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Mac Bundy; Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner], and the Director of USIA. Now they would consider it usually after the Committee of Deputies, the meeting that I would chair. And then usually we would decide on a sort of consensus basis whether or not this was sufficiently important to go to the President. And if so, which issue was sufficiently important. We had Mac Bundy there – he was usually the one who had a pretty good sense of what the President wanted to get in on. And then you'd call and arrange a Committee of the NSC.

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It was practically the same people there, which ever you would call them. But the President would meet on this a lot of times. He made it a practice. Before the April 18th thing was tabled we had several meetings with the President. Before the Geneva Convention resumed in March, I think, we held a meeting with the President. And then in June and July of '62 we met with the President quite often. Let me back up.

The Geneva Conference recessed some time in early March of '62 – in mid-May – and as always that's sort of stock-taking time. And we were considering what, if anything, how and if it were time to resume active deliberations on the test ban. In those deliberations some of the AFTAC people – that's Air Force Technical Applications Center – they're the people

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that run our own detection and identification network – discovered that they thought they had made a series of reevaluations of their ability to detect and, to some degree, identify nuclear tests. There were primarily two of importance. The first one was that they had discovered that there had been a wrong estimate as to the number of earthquakes in the Soviet Union that might be confused with a nuclear test. And therefore to the extent that you were concerned about static on the line, so to speak, the static wasn't as bad as they thought it was going to be. There weren't as many that you'd be nervous about. They also discovered that what seismologists call third-zone detection – that's detection from way out – was considerably better than they thought. This had been in the process of study over the last couple of years.

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Now, the decision was made to release that. This was announced in a rather off-handed way in the Committee of Deputies, which was to consider test ban. I remember I was chairing that meeting and I was very much surprised by it.

As a result of that, people who participated decided that rather than have this information leak out, there should be a release on it. And duly a release was made about the 3rd of July. Well, we had one failure of communication. We were considering what adjustments to make in our test ban position on the basis of this new scientific data. And

with knowledge of that consideration our representative in the test ban negotiations, the distinguished lawyer, Arthur Dean, when he got off the airplane in Geneva said what was true but on which there had not

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been a government position yet, that we were considering the possibility of changing our position to eliminate the necessity of any control posts. I'm not talking about on-site inspection, but about control posts in the Soviet Union. The seismic stations did not need to be in the Soviet Union because you could detect from outside. Now the fact that we were considering this was true, but there had been no announcement on it.

At that stage of the game the Secretary of State read about this and said, "What's this?" I remember Bill Foster was away that weekend, and he had trouble with an airplane, coming back. So I got the phone call. "What has Dean said about giving up on the number of, not having any control posts in the Soviet Union? I haven't been

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aware of any such change in position." Well I had to admit that I hadn't either.

And then we had to issue some statements sort of clarifying the matter. Now I didn't discuss this with the President directly. But I talked to Mac Bundy about it. And frankly, the President was very upset. He liked to have things done well. And the idea that we had made a proposition and we were saying something else: he had a rather adverse reaction to that, to put it mildly. So he passed the word down: "Now look, let's get this thing straight. Either we've got a position or we don't have." And we started to discuss what our position should be. And at that stage of the game, we had a series of elaborate meetings with the President beginning in the middle of July. We got Arthur Dean back to consider what our position

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should be. The President sort of recalled to the colors, so to speak, as special advisers to this point, Bob Lovett [Robert A. Lovett] and Jack McCloy. And we held a variety of meetings.

The President then came up with the idea that we should do two things. That we should indicate that we were prepared to make a change in our comprehensive test ban position to one relying primarily on peripheral stations or stations without United States personnel inside the Soviet Union, and maybe consider a reduction of the number of on-site inspections. But secondly, and people didn't think this was as important historically as it turned out to be, that we indicate to the Soviets that we had a double position, and if they weren't prepared to go with us on this that we indicate, we were prepared to

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accept a treaty limiting tests in the atmosphere, underwater and outer space. But we would say we were not backing away from our previous position. Rather, that this was a position we were prepared to take if they wouldn't accept the inspection implicit in the other one. Do

as much as you can. Now this was decided with a really exhaustive series of meetings involving his analysis not so much of “could there be cheating under a treaty?” but rather a very cold-blooded analysis of where we would be, what we would look like without a treaty, with both sides free to test, 5, 10, 15 years from now – what would we look like with a limited treaty; what would we look like with a treaty recognizing there might be some possibility of cheating by small underground tests. And he insisted on an elaborate series

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of position papers on each one of these subjects, prepared, some of them by us, some of them by Harold Brown. And in the back of his mind always was the concern that unless we accepted some inhibition it wouldn't necessarily be just the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France that had nuclear weapons. It might spread. That was one of his principal interests.

As a result of his fairly active studies, I guess we were in and out of the White House 5 or 6 times during a two-week period – sometimes a small group; sometimes a fairly large one; sometimes a large one added to Mr. McCloy and Mr. Lovett.

And that resulted in a decision which was taken back to Geneva, and culminated in an actual treaty draft which was tabled later in August. The treaty drafts were two:

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there was a comprehensive draft, and as an alternative, the three-environment ban.

While this had been discussed earlier by President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] and some others, really the first one that had been tabled in this context, not involving a variety of control posts and other matters inside the Soviet Union, was the one tabled in August of '62 as a result of these elaborate discussions which began, oh, I'd say the 15th of July or thereabouts in '62, which began almost by accident because we got our signals crossed with our negotiator who made a statement which we were considering a fall-back but hadn't authorized any statement to that effect. You know how it is in negotiations. If you say you're considering a fall-back, you've made a fall-back.

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SIEVERTS: You've fallen.

FISHER: You're right, you've fallen. But what happened was not so much a fall-back but a readjustment of our inspection requirements in the light of this new scientific – breakthrough's the wrong word – just increased skill, but actually the most significant thing in the limited test ban was the idea. Though the test ban had been under study with his knowledge, oh, since April or May of '62, I don't think it was directly the President's idea. The idea actually came from here. People noticed that while all the peoples of the world said they were against all tests, the real excitement came when the United States resumed atmospheric tests – though there was more to it than the pollution of the atmosphere. In the President's mind, it was also the fact that countries

that limited themselves

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to testing underground – countries wouldn't undertake that limitation, probably, if they were developing, if they were intent on a nuclear capability. So this was sort of a symbolic way that you could say to yourself that other countries had committed themselves not to go into nuclear. As for the real big ones, this did put a top limit on the arms race. So he was interested in it in a variety of ways. It was sort of typical. It wasn't his initial suggestion, but he was aware it was going on, and had a sympathetic approach to it if it could be worked out. But nothing ever happened until this big shake-up resulting from the mix-up in mid-July.

SIEVERTS: During the period of several weeks of intensive discussions, how would you describe his role? Was he a leader of a

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rolling consensus, or was it a case of having to knock heads together, or what?

FISHER: His role seemed to me to be more of a question-asker. He'd say, "What do you think?", "What do you think?", "What do you think?" And from this question-asker, they came out pretty quick. This was not the slowest questioner in the world. Far from it. About the speediest I've ever seen. He'd say, "Well, I think we're going to need some more information on that."

Then after that happened, he became sort of a rolling consensus fellow. He would announce, "What do you think? What do you think? What do you think? Got any objections? Got any objections? Got any objections?" But he didn't start out that way. He started out in this area

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as a question-asker. He'd say, "All right, look, why don't we get some information. We don't have any information on what we can expect in terms of development of weapons over the next years." Let's get a paper on how much would be inhibited if we had a comprehensive test ban, and in that paper," he'd say, "put in what might happen if the Soviets cheated on us, cheating of a type we couldn't detect."

He was a great one to say "Let's examine all the possible alternatives." At that time the important thing was the comprehensive test ban. The President said, "Perhaps we should take a new look at this limited test ban. If we can't get the inspection. Perhaps that would be better than nothing." And he

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came up with an approval that authorized that as a sort of a second string to the bow, so to speak.

SIEVERTS: At this time were there any important parts of the Government that opposed offering that and how did you deal with that, if so?

FISHER: There was no important part of the Government at that stage that opposed it. The Joint Chiefs raised some questions about the comprehensive ban and later on they raised some questions about the limited. Not serious ones. But questions. But at this stage of the game their concern was primarily on the comprehensive.

SIEVERTS: Was it that they didn't examine the three-environment ban as closely because they were more concerned about the other?

FISHER: I think they had a good look at it at this time and were not unhappy with it. I don't think it's a revelation that happens to people

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from August '62 to July '63. I don't know how true it was that they said, "Well, we'll examine it, but we don't think it'll happen." Normally that isn't the Joint Chiefs' point of view. Normally they examine every alternative on the assumption that it may happen. I am sure there are some people in the political areas, some of our allies, who didn't raise any objection at the time, believing it wasn't going to happen, so why bother. But in terms of the President's own thinking, his concentration was primarily on the comprehensive ban, but he focused on the limited a lot. He expressly authorized it. He said "Look, if the problem is on-site inspection, why can't we agree that we don't need on-site inspection?"

SIEVERTS: In other words, he really wanted it, too.

FISHER: There's no question about it. He wanted it.

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He didn't want it so badly that in the case of the comprehensive he would agree to something that was unsound. But he was prepared. He was quite impatient with people that weren't prepared to put their own heads to work and then try and think up all available alternatives. And that, I think, is the reason he was receptive to the studies that were going on for the Limited Test Ban. He would say, "Look, you can't get the big one because of the on-site inspections, so what about the limited one?"

SIEVERTS: Did he have much knowledge about the technical questions involved, the nuclear technology and so forth? Did he take the time to get himself briefed on that?

FISHER: Yes, he did. He insisted on it. You never would know how much of the stuff we sent him he'd read, and how much he'd

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know by himself. And how much he'd have Bundy read and digest for him. Digest for him orally – although he was an omnivorous reader. I couldn't tell whether he had read it himself or whether Bundy had read it and talked to him about it. But in either event, he seemed to me about as well advised on the subject as any non-scientific person could be. I didn't discover any gaps in his knowledge, and I had read all the stuff very thoroughly. I don't think I knew any more about it than he did. I'll put it that way.

SIEVERTS: How did he make decisions on this subject?

FISHER: Well, he used to do it this way. He'd start out by saying, "I've got about X questions I want to ask." After asking them he'd go around the room and ask each person what he thought. Then, on the basis of that

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he'd formulate a JFK consensus. Then he'd say, "All right. Now what's wrong with that?" And he didn't mind being argued with. I think he rather enjoyed it. But he rather felt the discussion wasn't as thorough as it should be if... There was no objection to raising questions, in other words.

SIEVERTS: Did he think of his subject in terms of its domestic, political, consequences? As a congressional problem?

FISHER: Well, he was aware of it, particularly when the emphasis was almost entirely on the comprehensive test ban. He was aware of the fact that if he got a comprehensive test ban, he was taking on a major political fight because, for a variety of reasons, there were lots of people who had been working for many years to prove what a mistake any form of comprehensive test

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ban was, and some of them during a couple of years, '58, '59, were people of political persuasion of which he shared. They felt they couldn't change their minds just because of January, 1961.

I don't think he expected, at that stage of the game, to have anything like the political

coup, so to speak, that the limited test ban turned out to be. I think it was rather the other way around. I think he regarded this as a tough one that he felt obligated to take on that might be politically very difficult. He was prepared to say, "Look, if the Committees of Congress don't want this, that's their responsibility. I think it's right. It's up to me to sign it and fight for it."

SIEVERTS: This was his thinking in connection with the comprehensive treaty?

FISHER: Mostly. That's the thing that was on most

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peoples' minds at that stage.

SIEVERTS: Did he have problems within the Executive Branch on the comprehensive?

FISHER: I don't think that he did. He felt that he had that pretty well organized. Let me mention one point that gave us some interesting moments during that period. The President had a very short threshold in his own mind from the time when he wanted the thing to be solely considered in the Executive Branch, and let him worry about the political problems, until the time when, prior to a decision that was made, he expected some of the political staff work to have been done. And it was possible for people to make some mistakes in that area. It went very quickly and imperceptibly from the "Look, we're all just kicking around ideas and don't expect things to be

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discussed outside the Executive Branch" phase to the time when we were about to make a decision and he expected the political homework to have been done. And if it wasn't done, he didn't want to hear someone say, "But you didn't tell me to do it." He implied we were all part of the Government that operates in the present framework; we don't have to tell you to do that. I've seen many people sort of get out of phase with him in that way – to their sorrow. I think probably the United States Bond Issue was a case where the phase thing was out. This is not said in any spirit of criticism, but this man's mind worked in such a way that it was easy to get out of phase this way.

SIEVERTS: What happened then? You tabled the proposals?

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FISHER: Yes, that's right, and there was a fairly brusque Soviet rejection. The Geneva Conference recessed. Then you get into – well, for a period – Cuba.

SIEVERTS: October '62.

FISHER: This was tabled in August; rejected by the Soviets in September. The Conference recessed some time in September. The United Nations was in session in discussing matters somewhat like this but no one paid much attention to this sort of the great drawing of breaths in the latter part of October, '62.

The next significant thing where he got involved in this was in the exchange of correspondence which he undertook with Chairman Khrushchev – rather, Chairman Khrushchev undertook with him.

SIEVERTS: Flowing out of their correspondence during the Cuban crisis?

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FISHER: Yes, that's right. It developed out of that very private correspondence. The only letters I know anything about are the ones that deal with disarmament, although I knew something about the others because there was a faint disarmament overtone to several of them. For the last letter that the President wrote the Executive Committee asked for a paragraph of input on what might be discussed in this area, in the Arms Control Commission. Just before Christmas of 1962 he received a letter from Chairman Khrushchev that said, in effect, we've been talking about the comprehensive test ban for a long period of time and you made an offer of 8, which had been made privately by Art Dean. In addition, Art Dean has spread informally the idea that the United States might be willing to go

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as low as 2 or 3 – this letter has been made public, so what I'm saying about it is not as important as the letter itself. He said, "Why can't we come to an agreement? I'll maybe consider 2 or 3 myself, and let's get this thing out of the way." He sent this thing over here for us to look at. He wanted this to be kept very private. We prepared a reply here. The letter went back and said, "Look, that isn't right. Dean didn't say 2 or 3; he said 8. That 8 was a substantial reduction of our previous position; we'd hoped you would come up a little." At the same time saying, "Eight isn't the final figure; the final figure may be negotiable, but we're not going to do all the negotiating. Why don't we talk about it?" And he got back a letter

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that wasn't terribly responsive. It said, "That isn't true; Dean had said 2 or 3. It's a matter of record, but if you want to talk about it, we'll send someone who can talk." So at that stage of the game, they sent over Kuznetsov [Vasily V. Kuznetsov]. And they had some meetings here and in New York. They'd hold meetings here for a little bit and then in New York for a

little bit. The meetings in New York were both at their Mission and our Mission in the UN.

SIEVERTS: This was in January, February 1963?

FISHER: Yes. They went on here for a couple of weeks and then in Geneva. Kuznetsov showed up there too. Well, nothing happened on this. Because we took the position that it was nice that the Soviets were prepared to agree to some on-site inspections, but let's have the idea of what they meant by an on-site inspection

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before we negotiated numbers. The two factors were related.

SIEVERTS: The fine print, in other words.

FISHER: That's right. The Soviets said, "No, let's agree on numbers. Then we'll agree on what they are." And the discussions more or less broke up with Mr. Foster returning from Geneva sometime in March of '63. It looked like nothing much was going to happen. I think the President was disappointed in this. I think he may well have felt that we were a little stuffy. I think, historically, that we probably were justified for reasons that I'll indicate when we get around to the thing that actually happened.

At one point we did change our position a little bit. Instead of 8 on-site inspections we suggested 7. Mr. Foster being in Geneva, the advance congressional

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consultation on this step fell to me. I went and saw Clinton Anderson, Chet Holifield [Chester E. Holifield] and Senator Pastore [John O. Pastore]. All of them fussed at me, saying, "There's never going to be anything in this area – nothing." I said, "Well, we've told them that 8 isn't necessarily the final figure and if we make some movement, maybe there will be something forthcoming. If there's nothing forthcoming on their part, then that's the end of it."

To my horror, the next morning that all appeared in The Washington Post. I got a call here in the office from the President, who said, "What about it?" I said, "Mr. President, if you want to know from where this came, I can assure you it didn't come from here because the only one who knew about these discussions in this Agency was me, and I didn't talk

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to this reporter. And the second point is just for your interest, I think no one of the three Senators I talked to would recognize this as what they told me, since they had given me a rather hard time – in a friendly way – they're all friendly people." (I had earlier discussed with some colleagues in the White House that I thought the bark of our senatorial colleagues

was worse than their bite, that if we actually had a treaty and it came to a question of how they'd vote, it would be a question of whether they're for or against the Administration.) The President said, "Where do you think the leak came from?" I said, "Well, frankly, Mr. President, I thought it came from the White House." One of the things I found interesting about that was that he didn't consider that lése majesté. I didn't say that he did it, obviously, but

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I said I thought it came from some of "your" colleagues. And he said, "I don't think so. I don't think any of these guys over here know this fellow." But he was perfectly prepared to consider on its merits the suggestion that this particular leak had come from members of the White House staff.

SIEVERTS: He had gotten used to that allegation by that time from our office as well.

FISHER: You see the report of the conversation as it appeared in The Post was not unlike the way we had discussed it with members of the White House staff. The result was that when Bill Foster made the offer a day later it already had been cleared in The Washington Post. We all here were very unhappy about it.

My own personal relationship with the President at this point came in

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relation to Senator Dodd [Thomas J. Dodd] - a man on whom people have expressed varying views - but of whom I am actually very fond, ever since I first knew him at Nuremburg. And I have a very high opinion of him though I don't agree with him on everything. The Senator made a speech in the Senate which seemed to us here to be designed to pass a resolution in the Senate stating that no matter what came out of the test ban talks the Senate should advise the President in advance that this wasn't a good idea.

Being not young, but eager, and Mr. Foster being out of the country, I decided to take that on. I wrote a letter to The Washington Post that sort of answered Senator Dodd. And Senator Dodd wrote a letter to The Washington Post answering me. At that stage of the game I got a phone call. The phone call being from the

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President who said, "Look, this guy's made points a, b, and c, and you haven't answered him. Now I think you better." I said, "Yes sir, fine." So I went ahead and did a reply, though I did not clear the details of the answer with him. I cleared them with Spurgeon Keeny and Mac Bundy on the White House staff. The President followed this exchange of letters very actively.

Well, the next thing that happened was we had gotten some intimations of a Soviet

change in position. They were very confused and I think the people in the White House knew more about this than I did, that Khrushchev had said to Wilson [Harold Wilson], and perhaps one other person, that he might consider an atmospheric test ban. The information on this came through a variety of channels and I think the White House had better information on

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it certainly that I did, and maybe better than the State Department. The decision was made in the White House to make a major speech out of the American University speech, to see whether or not these feelers that we heard were real ones or not. Now the American University speech was written in a great hurry. It was written in a period when the President was still on a speaking tour, and part of it was cleared by teletype on an airplane flying back.

Like many of the President's speeches, since it was a good speech it's got more authors than you can shake a stick at. Everyone had a finger in it. A lot of us now say, "We wrote a paragraph – maybe two paragraphs – the part dealing with disarmament, and dealing with the test ban." And the statement that we would postpone

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atmospheric tests. I think that anyone who had anything to do with that speech will always look back on it as a red-letter day.

SIEVERTS: It was one of the great speeches.

FISHER: It really was. It was a great speech and the thing that caught much of the press corps by surprise at the last minute...no disrespect intended to American University...but you normally wouldn't assume that this would be the forum for the announcement of such an earth-shaking proportion.

SIEVERTS: Interestingly enough, abroad it's considered a very good forum because the name American University is considered very good.

FISHER: Sure, it's the nation's capital.

SIEVERTS: It sort of sounds like the national university.

FISHER: That's true. No disrespect intended; it's a good school.

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SIEVERTS: It was a very hot day, too, when he delivered it, wasn't it?

FISHER: Yes, it was. Now, at the same time there had been discussions (on this the White House files will show if my memory is playing tricks with me) primarily with the British that we make one last try at a test ban by sending three senior citizens to discuss it. That was primarily a British initiative, I think not unrelated to their elections, but you can't be critical of them for that. The combination of that and the feelers we had gotten out of the American University speech was the Soviet reply accepting the offer to have three senior citizens discuss it and – this was the significant thing – suggesting that the discussions be done late in July. This was early June. It meant that in mid-July something might

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be happening because their meeting with the Chinese Communists was approaching.

SIEVERTS: I see. And perhaps because it takes some weeks to formulate a position.

FISHER: Well, more than that. A decision prior to a meeting with the Chinese Communists would permit them to second-guess it. Something that might be unpopular, that they might not like. A decision after their decision on how far they wanted to go with the Chinese Communists. The decks¹ might be clear. By this period, in June, the President had selected Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] to go, and had gotten up a team which included me, Carl Kaysen, later on added Bill Tyler [William R. Tyler, Jr.], Frank Cash, John McNaughton (who was then the General Counsel for the Department of Defense), Alex Akalovsky, Frank Long (who was the Assistant Director of Science and

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Technology here), and a fellow named Frank Press, who was a seismologist – on the assumption that they might discuss underground test. Well there was a period of fairly active participation in preparing for this. Again, in terms of the President, we were considering a variety of alternatives.

Against this was a background that something might be coming in the field of limited test ban, that the offer made by the President in his considerations of July was to be considered worthwhile. No one really knew and it was a fairly dim hope. The only thing. It was based on these mutterings we were getting through Harold Wilson, and on the selection of a date which looked more rather than less hopeful. But still it wasn't terribly hopeful. But we went ahead and

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prepared for it with considerable detail. The standard business, including the Committee of

¹ Editorial change by Wm. W. Moss, JFK Library – 5/24/77 after checking carefully against tape.

Principals, at a meeting at the White House. The President took a great personal interest in the preparations.

SIEVERTS: Were you preparing for more than a three-environment test ban?

FISHER: We were preparing primarily for a three-environment ban. We had some other things in there in the event they insisted on a comprehensive, but we had a feeling that Khrushchev wouldn't have called for this after the January, February, March experience unless he thought that something less than the straight comprehensive might be in the cards.

SIEVERTS: There was some pretty solid feeling, in other words, by this time that the inspection issue was pretty unnegotiable, but there might be something else?

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FISHER: There might be something else. This feeling was based on two things: it was based on a report of a discussion between Harold Wilson and Chairman Khrushchev which was made, denied, made, but the White House seemed to have a feeling there was something in it, but it wasn't good enough to be sure. And there was the selection of the date. Meanwhile, these preparations were going on. It didn't look like anything was going to happen until about the 3rd of July. Then Chairman Khrushchev made a speech in East Berlin of all places. It's rather hard to think that anything good would come out of Khrushchev's speech in East Berlin. But this was one in which he, after 10 pages, in the spirit of Rapallo, said we want a test ban and wouldn't it be good to have a test ban, and the Western powers have been

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very stubborn, obstinate, awful-awful; they've insisted on all these non-negotiable things; it's their fault we don't have a comprehensive test ban, but let's try a limited test ban where they can't insist on on-site inspection – together with a non-aggression pact between NATO and Warsaw Pact. At that point it looked like the Harriman Mission might do something.

SIEVERTS: But there was a feeling that it might run up against a snag in the non-aggression pact.

FISHER: There was, but up until that point the feeling had been maybe they were going to discuss a three-environment ban but only with a moratorium on underground tests, which would have been "no dice", and we would have been right back where we were. At least there was a concern

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as to whether or not these signals that had come were strong enough on that. They really weren't. After the Khrushchev 3 July speech the problem was the relationship to a non-aggression pact and to a lesser extent the problem "What about the relationship to peaceful uses?"

SIEVERTS: In your discussions with the President prior to going to Moscow, was there a reevaluation of positions taken the previous summer or year before?

FISHER: Yes, yes he considered a number of ways you might deal with the underground testing problem. Our old position included the possibility of building on something which, of all people, Congressman Hosmer [Chester Craig Hosmer] suggested: that you have a quota of underground tests and of annual inspections. If there was a little bit of cheating on that, who cared?

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SIEVERTS: Have the quota high enough so that cheating wouldn't matter?

FISHER: Wouldn't be critical, but low enough so that you put some restrictions on the arms race. We considered a variety of other matters that might be workable in the context of non-dissemination...other ways of hitting the problem, but Khrushchev's speech made it clear that there was only one problem, really, but it turned out to be two with peaceful uses, which is one we'd never made up our mind on. So the Harriman negotiations, while extremely interesting and dealing with a variety of other problems such as the question of Germany and everything else, most of the work had been done with the exception of the peaceful uses thing. It was really based on things the President had authorized back in August of '62.

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SIEVERTS: The year before?

FISHER: Yes.

SIEVERTS: So he didn't have to go through this process of asking questions and so forth.

FISHER: He asked for a review. It became increasingly apparent what the problem was going to be – it was the problem of peaceful uses.

SIEVERTS: Well you had to wait, also at this point, until you got to Moscow?

FISHER: That's right. In Moscow it became absolutely clear that there was going to be no moratorium on underground tests, that the sole issue was peaceful uses in relation to a non-aggression pact. And that was handled. Actually, we tended to give up on the peaceful uses, insofar as nuclear events outside of a country. But with an understanding that we might go back and amend the treaty if peaceful

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uses ever became really practical. The non-aggression pact was handled between K. and K.

SIEVERTS: You were in Moscow. And there weren't any phone calls?

FISHER: Well, there was one phone call at the very end, but not to the President. Mac Bundy. I didn't have any personal contact with the President until the plane coming back from Moscow stopped at the Cape, and Harriman and Kaysen and I got off and sort of reported to the President as to what the problems were, and what had happened...which was rather typical. You know, I find that the combination of the fact that he was President of the United States, and the informality of him was absolutely delightful. But at this stage of the game he knew me well enough that we

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discussed life on a first-name basis. I mean I called him "Mr. President" and he called me "Butch". After he greeted Mr. Harriman and congratulated him, I sort of came in and we shook hands and he said, "Nice going, Butch." That shows an interesting way to discuss life with the President.

We discussed some of the problems. There had been some criticisms raised about the treaty in the press, that it banned and prevented nuclear weapons from being used in war, which is a matter that had been adequately handled in understandings when we were drafting it, and also that it somehow conceded our position on outer space – which I think was also not justified. He wanted to talk about those. But he was alert and chipper. We discussed problems,

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and then discussed how we were going to handle the senatorial consideration. And that was that, I think.

SIEVERTS: This was Hyannis Port, just after you returned?

FISHER: Just after we got off the plane. Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk] was there, and Mr. Foster was there from Washington.

SIEVERTS: How was the President dressed?

FISHER: Oh, sports clothes. It could have been any other normal forty-five year old young man on the Cape. Only he wouldn't have had a helicopter flying up and down in front of his house. Obviously, it was an environment that he found congenial. He had lived there all his life.

SIEVERTS: Did he stay in close touch with the negotiations while they were going on?

FISHER: He did stay in close touch the entire period and in fact had delivered a speech

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on this thing, I believe from Washington, two nights before. We came in Saturday. He delivered the speech Thursday, I believe. I think he came up to the Cape Friday. This was Saturday.

SIEVERTS: Did he have a particular view on the concerns that had been expressed, or did he just want to hear from you?

FISHER: He wanted to hear from us. One of the things that I found in my own dealings with him was that very seldom would he express his view before he asked you. The idea was, "What about it?"

SIEVERTS: And you couldn't tell what his view was?

FISHER: I assume this was intentional on his part. He didn't want to have a group of people guessing what he wanted to say, and then saying it. Then there were discussions, and after that he duly gave us a drink – gin and tonic all around, in fact, I think

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later on two. He got Mr. Harriman duly organized to go over and have a press conference in Hyannis Port. We didn't go back to his house and flew back to Washington.

We discussed with him later the tactical problems dealing with the senatorial ratification. As the thing wore on, he handled this directly, for example, in discussions with Mike Mansfield and Senator Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen], who, I think was the key, and with only his immediate staff. I think the last time I saw him was when he invited Mr. Foster and myself and Governor Harriman over at the time he signed the instrument of ratification.

SIEVERTS: Did you go back to Moscow with Secretary Rusk?

FISHER: I did not.

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SIEVERTS: That was the ceremonial trip?

FISHER: Yes. I stayed here at that period. As I said, the last time I saw him was sometime in mid-October, the day after the treaty was actually signed. The instrument of ratification, actually.

SIEVERTS: That was the last time?

FISHER: Yes. In summing it up, I think this story divides into roughly three stages: one was getting the Agency set up; the second was the test ban which is the thing he began on, and the last thing I saw him on; then, finally, the general disarmament negotiations. It is perfectly clear that he wanted a test ban.

SIEVERTS: Did you have the feeling that there was unfinished business? As of the fall of 1963?

FISHER: Well, I think so. From his point of view, I think he felt this was just a

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start in terms of a relationship with the Soviets.

SIEVERTS: Anything specific that he had going at that time?

FISHER: No, there was not. But he felt, "Now you've got this one, let's get cracking on something else." For example, there had been some further possible options spelled out in Governor Harriman's instructions. Generally speaking, his approach then was, "Let's not rest now. This is a first step. Let's get cracking on something else."

SIEVERTS: Thank you very much. This has been most interesting. This has been an interview with Adrian Fisher, the Deputy Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. This is May 13, 1964 and this is the interviewer, Frank Sieverts, from the State Department.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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