

Kenneth T. Young Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 04/28/1969
Administrative Information

Creator: Kenneth T. Young

Interviewer: Dennis O'Brien

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Biographical Note

Young worked in the State Department on the Philippines-Southeast Asian desk during the Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration and he was the United States Ambassador to Thailand from 1961 through 1963. In this interview Young discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the high level visit; the need for scholarly diplomacy in U.S. relations with Asian countries; the role of an ambassador; the relationships between the Embassies in Thailand and Laos; William Averell Harriman's meetings with Thai and Laotian leaders; different strategy proposals for and conflicting opinions on Laos; U.S. programs in Thailand; and the Dean Rusk-Thanat Khoman Agreement, among other issues.

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Signed: John W. Carl
Archivist of the United States

Date: 7-18-02

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Second Oral History Interview

With

KENNETH T. YOUNG

April 28, 1969
New York City, New York

By Dennis O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: I've got three points I can make during the course of the.... I mean just general sort of findings as I look back upon the Laos, Vietnam, Thailand problems that I faced, both in the fifties as well as under President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy].

O'BRIEN: Well, would you like to begin with those and just sort of summarize them, and then we can start from there?

YOUNG: Okay. Shall I do that?

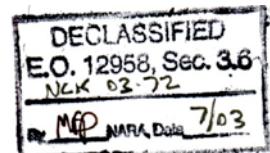
O'BRIEN: Yes, why don't you?

YOUNG: We on the tape?

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O'BRIEN: We're on the tape right now.

YOUNG: All right. Well, I can think of four, at least four issues that seem to me



unresolved now as well as when I was in Bangkok as Ambassador and which require a good deal of study both within and outside the government. The first is the role of the State Department. The second is the advantage and disadvantage of the quick high level visit. The third is the need for scholarly diplomacy and depth perception in our relationships with countries in Asia. And the fourth is the role of the ambassador in countries like Thailand or Laos or Vietnam.

Starting with the first one, the role of the State Department, one of the handicaps that I faced in the sixties and my colleagues out in Southeast Asia was the weakening role of the Department of State within the United States government and particularly vis-à-vis the military. We use the word military: it's a cliché, I know,

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but the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific] in Hawaii [Harry D. Felt], and then the generals in the area. And the relative weakness was expressed in trivial terms as well as in very significant policy questions. In trivial terms, compared to State Department officials and ambassadors or ministers, deputy chiefs of mission, political section chiefs, high level Foreign Service officers, the generals have all the facilities. They have airplanes to drive them around; they have great big houses to live in; they have large staffs to do a lot of their staff work; they have a kind of an auspices and an aura (or they did in the sixties) extending from a kind of an American starry-eyed view of the general with the stars on the shoulders to their commanding presence in Congress where they could get anything they wanted to a feeling on the part of the top civilians in Washington and elsewhere, "Well, if the generals agree, that must be right," so to speak. And this momentum, this terrific momentum was crushing for any civilian

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who tried to buck it.

Again on the trivial side, the general who was in charge of the military aide mission in Bangkok had four offices to handle his protocol problems, visitors, relations with the Thais. I had a staff aide, who did everything for me including protocol, as well as coordinating work and that sort of thing. So, let's say, a quarter of his time, if that, was spent on meeting people, explaining to me what was required in terms of protocol. This is just, again, a trivial demonstration of the weak role of the State Department and the State Department officials. If I wanted to fly anywhere outside Thailand, the air attaché had to get permission from a particular office near Washington to fly that plane for some purpose having to do with the attaché work. It wasn't because I, the United States Ambassador, the President's representative, wanted to go north or south or east or west. That was insignificant—in fact, that had nothing to do with this. And I found this not only ridiculous, but intolerable.

Well, the

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State Department, it seemed to me while I was there, was not asserting itself in terms of policy, in terms of the integration of the political, economic, diplomatic, psychological, and military factors in Southeast Asia, in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, as well as in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. And some of us out in the field felt that we were being let down by Washington, by the civilian side of things, in effect, not so much by the President, but at that day to day level of negotiation of conflict solving, of arguing, of fighting for what you think is right.

And I think that today in 1969 the lesson for scholars as well as for officials is how to get the State Department, the civilian side, back in the position of supremacy in foreign affairs where everything is related and certainly security of the United States is involved and certainly the military have a very primary say in what is good for the security of the United States. But this tremendous, prodigious weight of resources, of manpower,

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command over money, staff, and this huge bureaucracy, starting from the military mission in a country like Vietnam or Laos or Thailand and going all the way through layers to CINCPAC with the tremendous prestige that the Admiral has there in Honolulu covering the whole Pacific area, having a huge staff and having a kind of almost proconsul role to play, up through to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And when it comes to innovation and you're trying to change things in a country that bear on the military—particularly, if it's directly, as I tried to do—the weapons were wrong for Southeast Asia; the organization was wrong for Southeast Asia; the doctrine was wrong for Southeast Asia. In Thailand's terms, anyway. And here I was—I'm not trying to romanticize this, in the sense of a Don Quixote, you know, going at windmills, at military windmills, but I just cite this as a very critical question. Really it gets into very deep matters of: What is the creative opening in any large bureaucracy? How do we get change away from orthodoxy? How do you change this inertia? How do you get the turn

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around when it comes to the military, but also to the civilian bureaucracy too; I shouldn't overlook that.

Now this leads me to my second point: the advantage and disadvantage of the high level visit. I found that the high level visitors that I had, such as the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara [Robert S. McNamara]; the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]; and other men from Washington, some from the White House, some State, some from Defense, could be of great advantage in the terms of the role of the State Department and the need for innovation. I could explain to the Secretary of Defense exactly what it was I was dealing with, my problems, and in front of the military, too. So that it wasn't a question of ganging up on the generals and the colonels, it was just frankly, "We need in Thailand mobility, Mr. Secretary. We need helicopters; we need the light STOL [Short Take-Off and Landing] aircraft that can land in a hundred yards; we need village radios; we need some road building, and we need to get out into this northeast area so that if there is a guerilla war here in Thailand sometime in the next few years

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we won't repeat the mistakes of Vietnam." Well, this was very helpful. And I could document that in many other cases.

I think having the brother of the President in Bangkok for twenty-four hours was for me the highlight of, perhaps, my two years there. Not because he was Robert Kennedy, but because I was able to sit down at a breakfast table alone with him and explain the whole relationship, the change of development of our aid program, military program, the counter insurgency program, the development of the infrastructure, of economic progress and growth in Thailand, the need for a new approach, new weapons and all that sort of thing, and the problems involved in Laos and the relationship of the Laos danger to Thailand directly to him, knowing that he presumably would remember some of that in terms of our notes and tell his brother, the President. Now that was very helpful.

On the other hand, there are great disadvantages to the top level visit. If he makes a press

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conference, as CINCPAC, the Admiral, often did, Admiral Felt, he undercuts the ambassador or Washington. He just tells the press things, and you have no control over him. And he says things that he shouldn't have said, but not dangerous. He may make commitments or understandings with the local people, the local government, that is. If when you go to see the Prime Minister [Sarit Thanarat], the Prime Minister says, "But Mr. so and so, what we really need is such and such, and we don't understand why it's taken so long." The visitor from Washington says, "Well, Mr. Prime Minister, I don't understand either. I'll see that that gets done. That's a promise." And now there may be very real reasons why there has been a delay, but your visitor either has forgotten them or doesn't know them, or you haven't had time to brief him. So I think we ought to be very careful about these high level visits to countries, especially where the high level visitor is given an assignment with the host government, either to negotiate something or to

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tell something or do something. It should be very carefully worked out as to whether the ambassador shouldn't do that rather than the high level visitor. The high level visitor comes to learn, to listen, to be better informed when he goes back to Washington to make decisions. But he should not go out as a negotiator, that kind of thing. Because he really doesn't understand the country, and this gets to my third problem, the need for a scholarly diplomacy.

I think in Asia one of our problems has been for twenty-five years that we have not had men at the top in the government of the United States who knew anything about Asia. They were European oriented. They knew a lot about Europe, had been there. It's a natural American bias. We are Eurocentrics since that's where our heritage lies. Asia is a strange place, far away; very few presidents—in fact, I would say no presidents—very few Secretaries of State, very few men in the White House or the National Security Council, in

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the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and so forth have any real perception about what makes Japan tick and why or Southeast Asia, or India or China and that kind of thing. Consequently, when decisions are made on the rush or on the run in Washington, as they are, with the world a beating about them, they're instinctive. And I found that very often the decisions made on some Asian country are superficial, particularly in terms of what's relevant for that country. The views and wishes and concerns of the Japanese or the Thais or the Vietnamese and the Indians and Indonesians are usually left out. The people who know that sort of thing, to some extent, in State and Defense are usually left out of the decision making process. The country director, the so-called desk officer, as it used to be, well, he knows that the Thais feel this way about something, but his view of that, particularly if it's contrary to what the topside wants, just gets lost in the shuffle and

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is never viewed. So this is why we have this style or reputation in Asia for being unilateral, inconsiderate, and rather uncouth. Even if our purpose is good.

And I always like to think of my experience in 1962 when American troops were brought into Thailand in May. I had recommended this from Bangkok after discussing with our people, having no idea that this was under consideration in Washington; I was never informed. I wasn't even given a top secret eyes only, "We are considering this. We would like your views." So it was just by coincidence, my telegram to Washington recommending a certain display of force in Thailand apparently crossed or came into Washington the same day that this matter was being decided on. And so I received a telegram from the President, instructions to go to the Prime Minister and, in effect, ask if he wouldn't like to have some American forces in Thailand in view of the deterioration in Laos, military and diplomatically. So I asked for an appointment on a Sunday, and the car

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was waiting, and just as I was about to get into the car, one of the information men in the Embassy came in his car, jumped out and sort of out of breath, as I remember, said, "Mr. Ambassador, we just heard on the radio that a carrier with American troops is sailing up the Gulf of Thailand. They'll be arriving sometime tomorrow." They were already on their way. So, of course, when I arrived to discuss this matter with the Prime Minister and his immediate colleagues in the Cabinet, they had also heard this. So it was, in a way, very discourteous and thoughtless for the United States to have decided on this before asking the Thais, "Really, do you really want this and would it be mutually helpful?" It was a kind of a one sided operation because of this lack of understanding.

And then, to make matters even worse, the U.S. government in the United States said that the Thais had requested these American troops to come. They never did request it. And Governor Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] at the United Nations,

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when he informed the United Nations of this movement of U.S. forces in Thailand, said officially in the U.N. forum in his official paper that the Thais had requested this even though I had sent a telegram in before this saying, "Don't say they were requested because they weren't. Say they were invited to come in." Well, this lack of sensitivity, you see, played a great role in some of the resistance we found in Thailand in other matters.

Well, of course, this leads to this long, long question of what is the role of a chief of mission and an ambassador. And I could go on regarding that subject for quite some time, but I don't think it's particularly germane to your discussions here because it has to do with the, you know, the care and feeding of the ambassador, what they're really supposed to do. I would just point out that in addition to their traditional roles of representation, that is, appearing at a stone laying ceremony on behalf of the United States government or making a speech

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or being at a dinner, that role; and the negotiating and reporting role, negotiating a treaty or an agreement and then reporting on the circumstances in the country, the management role of the ambassador has been very much underplayed and misunderstood or not understood, let's say, by the Foreign Service and the State Department.

Well, I'll just leave you with this one point. I found in Thailand that the military officer, say from forty-five to fifty, is a lot better equipped to command and to organize than the Foreign Service officer of the same age, forty-five to fifty, because the Foreign Service officer had very little experience in twenty years in the command and control of people and resources and money. He'd had small units, maybe he'd been head of a political section, four persons, just like himself, you know, writing reports and seeing people, interviewing, getting close to this or that and helping in the negotiating process. But the colonel had command, so that when you get up to that level of FSO-1, Deputy Chief of Mission,

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or Ambassador, you're really up against it because then you're in competition with people in our rather large bureaucratic society, our managerial society with all its weaknesses as well as its strengths, unable to compete. Your competence isn't as high when you're dealing with that colonel or a businessman or somebody like that. And I think that one of the lessons that we ought to learn from this, that if the State Department is going to improve its role, going back to my first point, it's got to change the training of Foreign Service officers and add, wherever they can, a management function so that they get experience in this control of resources.

O'BRIEN: Well, in going into some of the specific problems then, in regard to Thailand I think that we can perhaps illustrate some of these points and go a little further.

YOUNG: Do you have some questions now you want to get at?

O'BRIEN: Right. I think a good place to begin is just to

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simply establish the relationship between the Embassy in Thailand and the problem in Laos. What is, in a sense, what was your relationship with, not only the Laotian Embassy, but with the sequence of events in 1960—well, of course, not '60—but '61 and '62 that were occurring in Laos.

YOUNG: Well, there were two basic relationships: One, supporting the Embassy in Laos, backstopping the Embassy in Laos; and two, participating in the negotiations regarding the neutralization of Laos. They're both sort of interrelated, but one is very practical administrative, the other was political and policy. In the first case we had to backstop the Embassy and the mission in Laos with certain supplies, just getting stuff through into Thailand, into the warehouses and up by train into Vientiane, just so they could live, survive, food and other things. We had, of course, to look after the wives and children of our men in Laos because at that time all families had been withdrawn from Laos—I guess in the fall of '60, well, '60, '61, in there—because there

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was a war going on. So we had that kind of an aspect. In other words, the Embassy, the American Embassy played a major backstopping role in every respect for the mission in Laos.

During '61, '62, prior to the conclusion of the agreement in Laos in July 1962, I performed most of the other function, which was dealing with the Thai government regarding its position in Geneva on the Laos agreement. I spent most of my time in the summer of '61 until the summer of '62 on that problem. The Lao problem had priority over Thai problems. In other words, the development of new things in Thailand, our programs there, coordination and management and all that sort of thing was secondary to the Lao problem, although there was an interrelationship between the two.

When I used to go in to see the Prime Minister, Sarit, it got to the point where he said to me, "You're not Ambassador to Thailand from United States; you're Ambassador from Laos to Thailand. When are you going to do something

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about Thailand? You always come in and talk about Laos." And I would have to say, "Yes, I know, Mr. Prime Minister, but I have instructions today from Washington..." and so forth and so on. And it was once or twice a week I'd have instructions regarding the status of the negotiations in Geneva. And they became very critical because there was a point at which I was more than fifty-fifty sure that the Thais would not sign the agreement on Laos, and if Thailand did not sign that agreement, it would be nullified. It would virtually have no effect

because I estimated, as others did in Bangkok, that then the Communists would not sign it. In other words, it was crucial that Thailand be a party to that agreement, however it was worked out. So this was a very, very tough job.

The Thais hated that agreement; they hated these negotiations; they wanted no part of them. They thought we were making a fundamental, strategic error and that the consequences of that error would not affect the United States very much in the long

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run but that they would be vital for the future of Thailand. In other words, the Thais in the winter of '61-'62 right into the spring were convinced that this was a sellout agreement; that we were just trying to get out cheap; that Laos would be overrun by the Pathet Lao, by Hanoi, in effect, Communist right to the border of the Mekong River; and then the whole north, northeastern frontier of Thailand would be open like a sieve to infiltration.

And there was nothing that the Thais could do to prevent that. You couldn't man that frontier with troops, you know, standing arm and arm; it would take three armies of several million men to do that sort of thing, at least the Thais thought so. They did not like the idea of the troika, that is, the Communists, the neutralists and the so-called rightists. They did not have any trust then in Souvanna Phouma; they thought he was a nice royalist but that he would be manipulated by these very, very tough guys from Hanoi and that the coalition was merely a disguised take over.

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In two or three weeks or a couple of months, the whole game would be over in Vientiane. Well, this was the fear of the Thais, and very, very profoundly so.

They were also somewhat tied in, of course, with the conservative group, in particular General Phoumi [Phoumi Nosavan]. Now General Phoumi, who was then the Prime Minister, sort of the leading right wing fellow, was supposed to have some kinship relationship with Prime Minister Sarit. And I never could track it down, just what the exact kinship relationship was in American terms, but that's irrelevant. But in any event, it was an older brother-younger brother relationship and sort of uncle-nephew.

Every time General Phoumi came to Bangkok, Sarit always asked to have me present, which is very embarrassing because Phoumi would put requests to me in order to get around Ambassador Brown [Winthrop G. Brown] in Vientiane, thinking that I was more sympathetic to him than Ambassador Brown was. And I would listen; very often I would sit between Sarit and Phoumi while they talked together. I could understand enough Thai to understand what they were talking about, to get the drift of the

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conversation. And after they'd finished at a certain point, Sarit would ask his Foreign Minister Thanat [Thanat Khoman] to interpret for me. And usually his interpretation always was, of course, in more detail than what I would understand in Thai, but I heard the verbatim and there was no monkey business there, particularly when Sarit was telling Phoumi after a

while, towards the end, to go along with this agreement and to stop this nonsense and stop resisting.

Sarit played his part. He'd agreed with us that he would go through with us and he would get Phoumi to come along, and he did. This was partly because the Thais lost faith in General Phoumi. He made a fool of himself militarily. So that was part of it, but....

The details of how we went about all of this, the Thais and the Laos—I don't know whether you want to go into that now. I will say that I did have to make a relationship between our aid programs in Thailand and their position in Laos. It wasn't a quid pro quo:

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agree to the neutralization of Laos or lose American aide. I didn't put it as crudely as that. What I tried to do was to make the Thais aware that if they were to be next, they needed to develop a whole set of new programs in the north and the northeast in their political, military, and economic development in the inner relationship and that American advisors and American equipment and so forth were crucial to that, and therefore that if they rejected, defied the United States government on this Laos thing, they were jeopardizing their own survival, in effect, their own preservation.

The Thais are very subtle people, and they know what's best for Thailand. This expanded program of economic assistance and military informational assistance, which led to these new programs in Thailand in '61-'62: the mobile information units, the mobile development units, some counter insurgency retraining, the new equipment for mobility, road building program, a decentralization process, rural development, compaction of

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all our programs, priorities for areas in Thailand, northeast one, north two, and south three, and then security areas within these priority zones so that all of the programs, social, political, economic, military, security, and intelligence could be concentrated rather than scattered all over the place.

Well, all of this had some bearing, I think, on the Thais continuing at Geneva and eventually signing this agreement much against their better judgment. And, of course, I think in the long run, their judgment was better than ours. They said that the agreement was only a means to an end on the part of Hanoi and Peking; that Hanoi and Peking would use this sort of so-called neutralized Laos as an avenue to get into Thailand and into South Vietnam. And the Americans, I think, tended to discount that.

One difficulty was that the Thais didn't ever have enough about ideas to other options of alternative language, you see, or alternative formula. "If you don't like Souvana Phouma, who? Tell me who."

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And I often had to ask them that. "See, if you don't like this provision, give us an alternative. Or, if you don't like Souvana Phouma, somebody else. It's either a negotiated agreement on Laos or a major war, and nobody's about to fight a major war over Laos. We're aware of

Thailand's security; we're going everything we can to help you and South Vietnam, but come on." And they never did.

It was a negative approach on the part of the Thais which made it very difficult for Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman]. And, of course, the Thais were very, at that time, were very antagonistic towards Averell. I remember one time when I asked them to come over to Bangkok to present the viewpoint of the President because they'd been hearing it from me every week, but they weren't absolutely sure that this was exactly the way Kennedy felt. So I said to Averell, "You're close to the President; you see him every day; you come and tell Sarit and Thanat this is what President Kennedy wants. And also I think you ought to tell the people up in Laos. And I think what you ought to do also is

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to get you and Sarit get together with Phoumi and say, 'Look, we've got to have an agreement, and we're not going to stand for any of this sabotage and delay and so forth.' That this will bring Phoumi around because he can't resist both Sarit and the Thais and you and the Kennedy and the Americans, too" So Averell came and the Thais were very reserved, even cross; he was sort of tired and cross, too; and the whole thing didn't go off too well.

And I remember one time when sitting there in a couch in Government House and Sarit was just, well, he didn't say anything, he sort of, "Good morning," like that, very gruff. So I suggested that the Special Representative of the President and the Assistant Secretary of State just convey the President's greetings as well as his views to the Prime Minister. So Harriman did in his very precise and well organized way. It was a very good, level, low key statement that Averell made. Well, when he sort of stopped because the Prime Minister appeared to be going to sleep—he wasn't, but these visitors, you see; again, this

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comes back to the point about the advantages and disadvantages of high level visitors—Harriman stopped and sort of said to Thanat, "Will you translate, please?" A little gruffly. So Thanat translated quickly, summarized it accurately, and then Sarit, without really looking up, with his eyes closed and his hands folded across that great big chest of his, spoke in very, very vulgar profanity in Thai and said to Thanat, "Tell him that that's a lot of blank." I won't put it on the tape. In other words, he didn't say, "Tell him," he said, "that's just a hell of a lot of baloney." And I was sort of a little bit shocked myself when I heard this. I wasn't quite sure what the Thai word meant, but my interpreter, an American, whispered in my ear exactly what it meant, and it was just about as raw as anything you can imagine. And, of course, the interpretation came back, and then Averell said, "Well, what did the Prime Minister say; I'd be interested in his reaction." And the Foreign Minister had to cover up

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and said, "Well, the Prime Minister's very interested in what you say. He has some opinions of his own, but he will consider what you have said regarding the President's views." Very diplomatic.

Well, we went on up to meet, to have a secret meeting with Phoumi near the border on the Mekong River and...

O'BRIEN: This must have been 1962.

YOUNG: This was '62, with Averell Harriman. I mean this is just to indicate how much I had to be involved in the Lao thing, you see, because I had to persuade Sarit to go up with Harriman to persuade Phoumi not to sabotage this agreement on Laos and to get on with it, get on the ball team.

Well, there we ran into the difference in the American and the Asian approach. The Asian approach to this, the Thai approach, was rather one of indirection. You have lunch; you talk; you chat, and with Phoumi on one side and Sarit sitting beside him and Harriman and myself on the other and have a few drinks and kind of, you

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know; and I'd suggested that this would be the style, but no. The Americans there from Washington had to go right to the point.

O'BRIEN: That was Forrestal [Michael V. Forrestal] and Sullivan [William H. Sullivan]?

YOUNG: Forrestal and, no, Sullivan wasn't there. This was, I think, Forrestal and Harriman. Or maybe just Harriman, but somebody else, an aide with him, in any event. They challenged Phoumi right in front of everybody else, his own people, Laos as well as...

O'BRIEN: Was this the finger shaking incident?

YOUNG: This is the first one. The second one took place in Vientiane, but Harriman also sort of shook his finger at Phoumi right across the table and said, "You'll be disowned; your country will be in ruins, if you continue, and don't expect any help from us. You're holding the whole thing up. You're endangering world peace, and you either agree with us or you suffer the consequences and your own people like that." When he got through there was silence. And the Thais, I overheard—I was

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sitting opposite the Thais—and one of them turned to somebody across the table, I've forgotten which it was, and said something to the effect that, you know, "This is very unfortunate. This will just... Now it's impossible to do anything." Sort of like, there's an expression in Thai, "Mi di," which means you can't do it. And this is what this Thai said.

It was then that the Thais rose to the occasion, both Sarit as well as Thanat. And Sarit then turned to Phoumi and talked to him in Thai. This was the Dutch uncle, firm but friendly. You know, "I understand your problem. We have the same problem as you do. We look at it

this way, but after all, facts are facts. And we have to go along with this. We're just going to try to register our objections and make it stronger and we're in this together. So you do it."

Phoumi was infuriated. He was insulted. He lost face, you see, his pride. Everything was wrong about that meeting. It was an example of this lack of depth perception, the lack of sensitivity.

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And he and the Thais—the Thais have never forgotten that meeting; I've had it referred to when I've been out in Bangkok the last year or two. Anyway, we got the agreement. And after the agreement was signed and our next job was in the implementation of it. All the Americans who were in Laos came out, every one of them, all the military people, everything in the next day or two, and we had to fix up sort of a receivership for them, take care of them and get them out of Thailand.

O'BRIEN: Well, what was the second incident in Vientiane with Harriman?

YOUNG: I don't know. I heard about that only secondhand that he met with either the whole Cabinet or members of the Cabinet, the top Lao, and shook his finger in the same way and said, "If you don't agree, it's your end; you're finished. You either come along or else you're finished." It was very brutal. And what the Thais told me was that he didn't have to do that then, that the Lao were just—they'd already more or less caved in on this, Phoumi and the right wing. And what they needed was

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a kind of a face saving way to come around and not be humiliated. And that they weren't going to sabotage it from inside by appearing to agree and then holding out and stalling it and all that sort of thing. That they realized that the game was up.

O'BRIEN: Then it wasn't a deliberate act on the part of Harriman; it was rather, would you say it was rather a lack of sensitivity?

YOUNG: Well, I think he was so concerned. He'd been working on this for ten months and here are these people, who are the last ones, kind of the hold up, and I think it was just sort of a very natural frustration and impatience for these fellows.

O'BRIEN: But very damaging?

YOUNG: Well, not in the long run, no. They agreed. They had to, you know, but for a while it was some concern for a week or two that it might have angered both Lao and Thai. And the South Vietnamese got wind of this, too; they heard about it, you see. They all had this lurking suspicion

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that what Washington was really doing was a sellout, a soft-sell sellout and that they were all going to go down the drain.

O'BRIEN: Did any of this particular relationship that you had with the Laotian situation ever interfere with the relationships between you and Ambassador Brown? Later Unger [Leonard Unger] came out there, too, didn't he? Did this ever lead to any friction between you and...

YOUNG: Not personally, no. But I think there was some suspicion both in Vientiane and Washington that maybe I was more on the side of the right wingers and Phoumi because of this—I'd known Phoumi for quite some time and he tried to use me, you see, when he'd come down, and he'd.... And there were sort of secret efforts to make contact with me which we all knew about, you see. And I rejected it, so I suspect that there might have been in Vientiane or in Washington some little suspicion that maybe I, you know, I had to be kind of watched. I don't know whether

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it was, certainly not personally, with Ambassador Brown. We had the very best of personal and official relationships. I mean, we exchanged....

Every time that Lao made any kind of an approach to me like this, under the table, I just bucked it right to Washington and to him, I mean, just told him about it. I rejected every one. You know, like the time they wanted me to go across the river for a kind of a marriage or something. Oh, that's right. He invited me to the marriage of his daughter in Savannakhet, I think it was, or Pak Sane, and I used an excuse and said I couldn't.

Then there was another time when they, he and Boun Oum, who was then Prime Minister, came to Bangkok, and they had a reception, and I was invited. And it just so happened by coincidence that I had to be down outside the city paying a courtesy call on the King in his summer place. This was May, I think. So I flew down there in our C-47, saw His Majesty and returned out to the air field. But they were also calling on His Majesty, either, I guess, after I did, or something like that. Anyway,

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I got out to the airport, and lo and behold, they came after me in the car out to the same airport. And I had to speak to them, say, "How do you do?" and all that sort of thing. And then there was a question of who would take off first. And I said to the pilot, "Well, please, the Prime Minister should take off first because he has a reception in Bangkok." So, I don't know, something happened and the plane either blew a tire or the engine wouldn't work in their plane or something, so I gave them our plane, our C-47, you know, and the air attaché to fly.... And here the Ambassador's plane, so to speak, flew back this group of the Laos who were still resisting this agreement in Laos. This was even after this Harriman thing. But during this very time when they were bitter about us, you see, and I'd refused to go to their

reception because I didn't want to be associated with Phoumi and Boun Oum and the others and his group, in Bangkok; I had to show that we were not associated with that.

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Oh, it was really a ludicrous valiant effort.

O'BRIEN: Sarit was accusing you of being more interested in Laotian problems, and at the same time, weren't the Thais, in a sense, pushing the United States to become involved in the Laotian problem?

YOUNG: Yes, they wanted a stronger position there in Laos itself, that is, a stronger military position, even a military intervention or at least a holding force of SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization], let's say, in the southern part of Laos, the pan handle. The pan handle strategy which a number of people, a number of Americans and Asians and SEATO people advocated. I advocated it, too, a pan handle strategy of—across from South Vietnam, the route 9 idea of building a road laterally across from Thailand across the pan handle over to near where DaNang, that was the tail, the support area, support it right across and then man it prior to any agreement on Laos as long as the Vietnamese were holding the northern areas along Phong Saly and Sam-Neua and plus the Plaine de Jarres [Plain of Jars]. Now the sensible strategy

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of counter force was to block off that pan handle, even if it meant sacrificing a good part of north Laos. Well, this was the strategy that never got to first base in Washington. Kennedy, apparently, didn't want it, or it didn't—I don't know whether it was ever really presented to him as an alternative.

O'BRIEN: Who else was supporting this idea?

YOUNG: Well, there were a lot of people on our military side and planners as well as a lot of diplomats, the Australians, New Zealanders, and others. And they would have committed forces to it. And it wouldn't have taken very much, I don't think. But, you see, then, perhaps rightly, the concept of further American involvement with combat forces in Southeast Asia was just anathema. And it was never explained to them in terms of alternatives: either do it on a small scale now and hold this, hold this area and build it up behind this shield, sort of an extension of the seventeenth parallel, the idea not a line across Laos, but kind of a holding, a screen sort of on a small scale, so that

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you'd have enough, you know, enough coverage and mobility in and around the pockets of this sieve, so to speak, that it would make it difficult for guerrilla infiltration by units of fifty

to, say, two hundred or three hundred from North Vietnam. But it was never undertaken and then we end up with half a million men and a thirty billion dollar a year war.

I can't honestly state that the failure to develop a pan handle strategy or a Southeast Asia regional strategy led to our prodigious involvement in South Vietnam, far beyond the cost in men, money and effort than I think was necessary. We've torn the United States apart by this effort in Vietnam the last four years. And we're tearing it apart today even though you may not see that, but it is. This is one of the reasons that Harvard is in trouble. This is one of the reasons that Cornell is in trouble and every university across the land. Vietnam has a very large role to play in addition to other problems of student faculty relationships, the adolescence of universities, the black problem,

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et cetera: Vietnam is right there. This is just what they were telling me Friday and Saturday up at Harvard. You know, "go back to Vietnam." And I can go back to questions like this.

O'BRIEN: Right.

YOUNG: Yes.

O'BRIEN: In regard to the SEATO actions, of course, you were here in Washington when that SEATO meeting took place in March of '61. You hadn't gone out yet.

YOUNG: No, no, no, no. I was still waiting for something or other, confirmation. No, I guess I'd been confirmed, but....

O'BRIEN: There's been a suggestion, or at least I've run across the suggestion, that many of the other nations, not only Thailand and the Philippines and the nations attempt to, in a sense, support rather strong action at that point, but even some

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of the other nations were willing to take a concerted effort at that point. Did you get any insight into this? Is this an accurate kind of....

YOUNG: Well, I've heard about this afterwards, that there was an expectation that the United States was going to lead the troops up the hill and over the top and take some kind of SEATO action, holding action, preventive action, within Laos and apply one of the SEATO plans and that the United States at Bangkok backed down. And shilly-shallied. And this shilly-shallying is the word used by an Australian diplomat; it was what caused the Thais to lose such confidence in the United States in '61-'62, and the confidence in the American will and capacity just virtually disappeared.

When I got to Bangkok with Vice President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] in early May or mid May, I ran into this just head on. And instead of continuing on with him, which I wanted to do, everybody there in Bangkok told me that

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you've got to stay, you can't leave. If you as the Ambassador designate leave Bangkok to go on with him, this will just add to this feeling that Bangkok's being or Thailand's being taken for granted and that we're not really meaning business.

Because, you see, another problem there was that Johnson couldn't say very much about Laos because Kennedy had sort of told him, I gathered, to lay off or be careful about saying anything on Laos. At that point it wasn't clear, in May of '61, whether it was going to be a negotiated peace or a military buildup. But the March SEATO meeting did have a disturbing effect on the Thais, the Australians, New Zealanders, Filipinos, Vietnamese and others because they'd been led to believe, particularly by Kennedy's television remarks on Laos a few days before—I think on the twenty-second or third, something like that of March, a week before the SEATO meeting—that we were going to hold firm in some way, that we weren't going to be pushed around, we were going

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to buck up the Lao government. And we'd negotiate from a position of greatest strength, rather than just letting it all erode.

O'BRIEN: Well, in that regard then, Thailand begins to make some moves in the direction of loosening ties with the United States after that, don't they, going towards a neutralist policy?

YOUNG: Well...

O'BRIEN: Were they serious about this?

YOUNG: Yes, there was a sort of a, you know, a kind of chit chat and talk. I think the main, almost exclusive response of the Thais in that regard was to begin opening up towards the Russians. And during the summer of 1961, the Soviets played it quite smart and began offering cultural exchange, trade, and better relationships with Thailand as an alternative. Sort of on the grounds that if things do go bad for you, it's best to have good friendship with the Soviet Union. That was the ploy the Soviets used. And the Thais very secretively, but also some of

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this was made public, I mean, they didn't cover it up entirely, they used it as a ploy against us to some extent. And they were very serious conversations with the Soviet Ambassador. In fact, the man who conducted those conversations with the Soviet Ambassador was also

designated by the Prime Minister to conduct discussions with me about a change in the quality and quantity of American aid to Thailand.

O'BRIEN: Who was that?

YOUNG: His name was Vongvichit [Phoumi Vongvichit], V-I-C-H-I-T.

O'BRIEN: Vichit.

YOUNG: Vichit. He died, I think in 1962, a very strange man. A man who was disliked by many, many Thais, disliked, feared, and hated even for playing every side and always coming out landing on his feet.

Now, I'll never forget the time he invited a few of us to dinner at his house, my wife, the head of the aid mission and one or two others, in his home. We went in, sort of, and sat down at the table, which is the Thai style. You just don't

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have drinks first. You went right to the dining room table. And there on the wall opposite me, painted on the wall, were a large Nazi medal, a large Fascist medal, and a large Japanese rising sun medal, medals with sort of things on them. And then on the wall was a tree, a tree with all the roots and then all these branches. And this was his family tree. And the names of his sons and then daughters and then boxes for where he was going to have his grandchildren and great grandchildren, you see, none of his children were married, as far as I know, at that time. In any event, he had this whole thing planned out. Well, and then after dinner he went to the cabinet, the Thai style cabinet with the glass windows, and showed us with great pride the medals he'd received from Nazi Germany, from Fascist Italy, and from the Japanese militarists. Just as if, you know, I showed him my diploma from Harvard or I showed him this or something if I had that kind of thing. And it never occurred to him, or at least

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he didn't express any recognition of the incongruity of showing these things to me, you know.

And I always had this strange feeling about this man, because one day he talked to me about increased economic assistance and what you'd have to do and the next day he'd be talking to the Soviet Ambassador, which I knew about, from, let's say just secretly. I won't go any further than that. And this is what I call the two door diplomacy. In the sense, not untypical of what Thais have done before. During World War II the same man who had talked to the Japanese commander of, ruler in effect of Thailand, and the next he'd walk out the door and go talk to the resistance movement against the Japanese.

O'BRIEN: Well, how did the Thais react to this movement towards the, well, the events that lead up to the Geneva talks as well as, well, the Kennedy-

Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] meetings in Vienna and the understandings that come out of there in

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regard to....

YOUNG: Well, I don't recall exactly what the impact of that was in June because that took place sort of far away. I'm not sure that the June meeting with Khrushchev had much effect. One, it signaled the agreement of Khrushchev and Kennedy to negotiate the Lao problem. That worried the Thais. On the other hand, the Kennedy Administration was making, well, putting a lot of emphasis on the—that the Russian policy was to support wars of liberation, which meant wars of liberation in Laos and in particularly in Vietnam, and that the United States was opposed to that anywhere in the world. And a war of liberation one place would be influential regarding a war of liberation in another place. And the United States the policy was counterinsurgency to try to help stop this. If free governments want to, so-called free governments, wanted to survive, the United States would help them survive against this tactic of liberation.

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O'BRIEN: Did they...

YOUNG: Quote, unquote.

O'BRIEN: Did they react to the Bay of Pigs as well as...

YOUNG: I don't know. I wasn't there at the time, and I don't recall hearing much about it. I would say that all of this—the Bay of Pigs, the Khrushchev meeting, opening the negotiations on Laos, the concern over Vietnam's future, the Thai skepticism about Ngo Dinh Diem and the situation in South Vietnam, knowing very little about it, and the Thai incompatibility with the Vietnamese for historical reasons going back over the centuries, all of this and Burma, too, China, which then seemed strong—I think all of this added up to this feeling of fatalism in Thailand and in Southeast Asia in the summer of '61. This I heard from very many people who'd been in Bangkok, the Diplomatic Corps people whom I knew. They all warned me that if the domino theory was precisely incorrect because these countries are not identical like dominoes, there was a very important

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lesson in the so-called domino theory of psychological fatalism that all these countries, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and even Indonesia felt that we were through. The United States had had it, and we were just giving up, and therefore, it was just a question of time before China would be in Singapore. And most people mentioned the

five year cycle. In five years, 1966, Chinese hegemony would exercise control over everything down through Singapore. Not by an invasion of Chinese armies or air forces, but just kind of the wave of the future, the erosion, the engulfment. As we weakened pieces would fall, and eventually the whole thing would be put back together again under a Chinese stamp. And this was very seriously felt as it is today, too: you have this crisis of confidence recurring.

O'BRIEN: There's some historical precedence for that.

YOUNG: Sure, that's right. Despite what professors say back here about the absurdity of the so-called domino theory or the absurdity of any interaction

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or relationships here. I think Ed Reischauer [Edwin O. Reischauer] doesn't understand this, and, of course Morgenthau [Hans J. Morgenthau], the people who were European specialists, Stanley Hoffmann at Harvard, all the antis on the academic side, George Kahin [George McTurnan Kahin] even, and Lewis [John W. Lewis] at Cornell; it's amazing how they overlook or just ignore this feeling on the part of Lee Kuan Yew and the Indonesian nationalists, the non-communists, that is, whether they're socialists or conservative middle of the roaders. This is a package. You know, it's like a balloon. Anywhere you put a hole in it, it's going to collapse. And this was the feeling in '61. It was again the feeling in '64, and it's now the feeling in '68, '69.

O'BRIEN: Okay, now this feeling is there on the part of people like the Thais as well as people like yourself that are ambassadors and other ambassadors of other nations in Southeast Asia. Now do you find basically agreement when you get into the higher levels of

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policy making in the State Department and the Far East and Southeast Asian Sections, did you find any tension with people there?

YOUNG: No, I think at the working level, as they call it in Washington, there was a general acceptance of this, an advocacy of it. There were proponents in State, Defense, CIA, AID [Aid for International Development] for this interdependence. People like Bill Bundy [William P. Bundy] for example, over in the Pentagon, I think McNamara saw it; I think Kennedy, Bob Kennedy, felt it. I think our problem came in treating Laos differently from Thailand and Vietnam. I think that was a mistake of concept on the part of the Kennedy Administration. I thought so at the time; I think so now. A well intentioned and, I think, deliberate differentiation there, that you could get a neutralization agreement on Laos and that would help solve the problems of Southeast

Asia, but in the mean time you strengthen Thailand and South Vietnam while you're neutralizing Laos,

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And everybody gets out of Laos and leaves it alone.

Well, this was naïve to expect, and what we did in Laos was not to make the safeguards or the compensations, the contingencies, either within the agreement itself or outside the agreement, but if it is violated within a reasonable space of time that we will take counter actions. We didn't do that, with the result that the Ho Chi Minh trails are—Laos was split in half as the opponents of the negotiations said it would be unless you build in strong provisions and negotiate them and as long as it takes to negotiate. You negotiate, for instance, an international control commission which has the right to move anywhere in Laos and that the veto of the Communist member cannot prevent it from going out of Vientiane. Oh, we gave that up, you see, in effect, and so forth and so on. I won't go into that sorry story, but there it was so that the differentiation of treatment I think had something to do with the situation we're in today.

Now, you say, "Well, how did this

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happen? Why wasn't there better understanding?" Well I think a lot of this has to do with Congressional reaction. Here again, the Congress said, "Don't send an American boy into Laos. We won't have it. The American people won't stand for it. Can't even spell the place. Don't even know where it is. You can't fight a war that way." And they were, in a sense, right.

This was a kind of forewarning of the problems that President Johnson got into. If you're fighting a war and American boys are being killed, you know where the hell the place is, or why you're fighting there. You're going to eventually and rather quickly even run out of that support for the draftees, the families, the kids, public opinion, and so on, up to the more sophisticated level. And I appreciate that very much, that difficulty on Laos, that he did not have the support of the—Kennedy did not have the support of the leadership.

My question is whether or not any real effort was made to discuss this and really consult with the congressional leaders on the issues, the pros and the cons. "Let's look at them, frankly.

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Let's have a whole day. Let's get the State Department in and the military and maybe call in our ambassadors and really see, because this is a fork in the road. And if we go down the negotiation route we may see the whole place go to the Commies eventually, and what does that do to Japan and India and our interests? Or, if we have to take a stand, where do we take it? Where can we draw the line and make the line stick in Southeast Asia? Or is all a quagmire? All right, let's look at this now." The thing was a very superficial brush off with

the congressional leaders, and naturally they said they don't want our boys killed in the jungles and mountains of Laos.

A lot of military man came out and said, "It's a terrible place to fight in Laos because you've got mountains that are like saw teeth, they jag, very steep," and so forth. You had other military people who said, "Well, with our command of the sea and the air, we can cordon off that mountain area, the mountain chain, and we've got it made." You see, so you had a split opinion there.

This is another factor which I think I should

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mention in this, and that was the variety of conflicting opinions coming out of the Pentagon in the spring of 1961. President Kennedy was very badly served by the Pentagon, by the military. Both on the Bay of Pigs as well as on Laos. Now there's a very causal relationship there, in my judgment. I was in all of the meetings in the Cabinet Room on Laos prior to the Bay of Pigs, and things were moving up through the SEATO meeting, and the SEATO meeting was a kind of holding operation where we didn't show our hand exactly. And then I think we would have gone on and been a little firmer and organized a multilateral effort to do something in Southeast Asia. I think that was Kennedy's instinct. And then the Bay of Pigs came. And the same men in uniform who told him that the Bay of Pigs would work were the same men who couldn't tell him what would work in Laos.

I remember one day in the Cabinet Room with him sitting in the middle of the table, turning to these four or five men in uniform, and he got at least four different opinions as to what

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should be done regarding Laos, Vietnam. And they were very different opinions. They weren't just qualifications over details. They were strategically different. The Navy, the Air Force, the Army, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Marine Corps Commandant, and then the civilian representatives. And the upshot of that meeting was, in effect, "Gentlemen, if you don't know what to tell me, go home and find out. Go back to your offices and come back with something that I can understand." And he was just like that. And I'll never forget that. It was an incredible performance of the lack of, you know, just the sheer lack of leadership over there. It was terrible.

And it was because of this doubt on the military side presented by the military people—not that they were in doubt; each one felt very strongly, you know. Curtis LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] said, "Just give me the word, Mr. President. I'll bomb those guerrillas out of existence." Incredible answer. And he believed it. The Army side, the Army man [Maxwell D. Taylor] said, "We don't have the logistic capabilities in Vietnam and Thai. We don't have the

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roads, Mr. President. And we don't have the air bases. We don't have this. We couldn't mount a division in there now." "All right, well then why are you recommending it, if that's the case?" "Well, it will take.... Oh I don't know, we have to...." The Navy had some other view; I forget what it was now. Anyway.

O'BRIEN: What was the Marine Corps thing?

YOUNG: I think the Marine Corps was a little bit more, "Well, we can do it. Just tell us, and we don't need all this jazz. You know we fight lean." Which is true.

O'BRIEN: They were, of course, they were working with counter, with...

YOUNG: Well, it was counterinsurgency and also the commando, the small; the Marines move in, but you see, they can't stay. And the Army point was that this isn't a Guadalcanal operation where you move in and six days later you've got the island and then that's that. Here you've got to be able to hold; you've got to be able to reinforce; you've got to have a supply; you've got to have your tail, so to speak. And there was the kind of attitude of perfectionism

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that so often occurs in the Army planning, which is okay; it's all right. I mean, I think General Taylor was very wise in saying that if you don't have enough air bases in northeast Thailand; you don't have the railroad; you have to go through Bangkok; you don't have a port; and you've got all sorts of.... And in other words, he pointed out a hundred reasons why it would be difficult, if not impossible, to support any major military effort, even if there were no fighting, but just in the implantation of a SEATO force in the pan handle. Okay. What does the President do when the military people give him all kinds of different advice and that sort of thing?

O'BRIEN: About a year later this counterinsurgency group begins to form in Washington, and some of the things start coming out there. Did many of these things or were any of these things implemented within Thailand?

YOUNG: Oh, yes. Sure.

O'BRIEN: Did you have a direct contract with that planning group?

YOUNG: Well, with the counterinsurgency force....

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Well, what happened there was that we started sort of a new approach in

the summer of '61, in the spring of '61, a review of our aid programs in an effort to change them and to meet both counterinsurgency as well as a changing circumstance, to decentralize, to get more activity out into the remote areas, and this what I call compaction or convergence of programs, American and Thai. And I presented an overly long memorandum to the Prime Minister in June—I think it was, or July; July, I guess—on American assistance, which is what caught their fancy and gave them the feeling that there was a new look in the United States. And I think this had a lot to do in bringing them back from this double dealing or double door diplomacy with the Russians and maybe going a more neutral or dividing up, moving away from us, playing safe, so to speak.

Well, that produced a number of new programs on the part of the Thais as if they were Thai programs, because one of the things that's important in this part of the world is keep the American label off

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anything you do if you possibly can. One of the great mistakes that's been made in Vietnam in the last four years is the American label is on everything. And this is what's hurt us so badly inside Vietnam as well as back here. However, in Thailand we tried, anyway, to see that it was a Thai proposal with a Thai label on it. And sometimes it worked that way.

The accumulation of these pieces led to the drafting of a country plan for Thailand, which I called the ISP, the Internal Security Program. I started that in the spring of '62, turned it over to one of the officers in the political section. He got very involved in analysis.

I got involved with the troops coming in and having American troops up in the northeast, as well as not having a—I had no DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]; I had no MAAG [Military Advisory Assistance Group] Chief; I had no USOM [United States Operations Mission] director during the summer. And I had a new USIA [United States Information Agency] fellow coming in. So the four top men in the U.S. Mission by coincidence—here's another lesson: there's no country planning from Washington; they're all separate

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bureaucracies; and by coincidence, this all happened even though I complained about it. I made a great mistake there. I should have protested and raised hell and even gone back to Washington and said, "This is not the way to run this program. If you've got five thousand American troops in Thailand, if you want this country planned, if you want this turnaround in counterinsurgency, you can't take these four men out at the same time. Phase them over a six months period, but don't take them..." And then the administrative also was rotated out; his time was up. And this all happened. And not one of them could I stop separately. I tried to get the MAAG chief changed; I tried to have Len Unger kept on, but he had to go to Laos, you see, that was critical. Oh, and the MAAG chief was given another star and sent to Korea. It was just horrible; it was really horrible.

And I was—there was nearly a breakdown in the whole operation, especially in getting this plan written.

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So I had to write it, take it home and write it myself in between other things. Anyway, it was adopted in Washington and has been up until recently, and, I guess, it still is the framework for our operations in Thailand.

O'BRIEN: It was really the basis of, too, wasn't it, for the formation of a kind of model plan for other countries?

YOUNG: I don't know how far it went with other countries. It's considered a model, this ISP, and I guess a few other countries looked at it to try to see whether it was adaptable to.... I think it has certain principles in it which apply to other countries where you have a wide variety of American official efforts and also where you have an insurgency situation with American participation.

O'BRIEN: Well, things get better in '62. There's a series of visits that take place on the part of high level officials to Thailand. And there's also the Rusk [Dean Rusk]-Thanat Agreement. Now is this a concerted effort on the part of the United States

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to improve....

YOUNG: Yes, I think we were trying very hard to improve Thai attitudes and relationships to the United States in view of what was happening in Laos and in Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia. I conceived of my principal target, my priority target, was to improve the relationships and understandings between both governments and with the people outside the little clique at the top. The students, intellectuals, the rural people, village leaders, all of that, to get a sounder, broader base for support because the President felt this was, Thailand was, as he put to me once, the anchor. It's our anchor in the whole area. And if Thailand goes we can forget about Indonesia, the Philippines and everything else. This was Kennedy's own perception, not something that I told him or somebody else. He had that very strongly. And then South Vietnam was sort of the pawn in the anchor, so to speak. If South Vietnam went down the drain in '61, or '62, or '63, it wouldn't necessarily mean that all the rest of this would erode, but it would be awful close

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to it. So the two were interrelated. That meant that we had to... [Interruption]
I've got to go pretty soon. Have you got some more questions?

O'BRIEN: Yes.

YOUNG: But the Rusk—have you got this on still?

O'BRIEN: Right.

YOUNG: Well, the Rusk-Thanat agreement was part of this whole process, a piece of the pie, so to speak, a piece of the action, but of a different origin, scope, and composition. It stemmed, I think, from the feeling of letdown in the SEATO meeting in March into the summer, the way the Laos negotiations seemed to be going, of weakening away from a solid, strong, anti-communist position. And particularly the Rusk-Thanat agreement reflected, I believe, the Thai assessment of the British-French, particularly the French, withdrawal. And the French were an empty chair in SEATO.

Over the years a kind of unanimity procedural rule had built up so that no decision could be made by the SEATO Council in Bangkok unless it had the votes of everybody there. And this became kind of a pattern frozen in concrete, so to speak. The Thais then felt about Laos, "There

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but for the grace of SEATO goes Thailand. If the French said no, we will not permit any SEATO action to defend Thailand, Thailand was finished." This was the arithmetic or the logic of the Thais.

Therefore, what do you do about SEATO? If the French are going to veto it, it's no damn good, get rid of it.

So in the fall of '61 and into the winter there was a buildup of Thai resistance to SEATO which became very serious. In fact, it was one time when they didn't even go to a meeting, as I recall now—I'd have to check back in the records or the newspapers—where the Thai representative was told not to come to a SEATO meeting. Now that was pretty serious. And that was a warning of defection from SEATO and that Thailand might withdraw from SEATO itself and find some other way to defend itself, which would imply, of course, the various options that were open to Thailand, accommodation and non-alignment, sort of isolationism, a whole lot of other things which I'm not sure they had figured out. But in any event, this was very serious, the Thai defection from SEATO, because of the French

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veto or presumed veto.

Well, in actual fact, SEATO is not an unanimity organization. It's an ambiguous multilateral treaty; it's both collective and unilateral or collective and, yes, unilateral. In other words, the United States can take action under the SEATO treaty even if no other SEATO country takes that action. You see, this is why it is ambiguous. It's collective, but non-collective. And the question then was how to make this aspect, this non-collective, non-unanimous aspect, viable in terms of Thai American relationships.

The Thai proposal was for a bilateral, United States-Thailand defense treaty like the one we have with Korea, Taiwan and to some extent Japan or the Philippines. A bilateral treaty which, in a sense, would say the same thing, "The United States will act according to

its Constitutional process,” but it would be bilateral. That would, in effect, assure the Thais that the United States was not going to let them down in case of trouble and in case of aggression. And at least, we’d do the same for Korea—do the same for Thailand that we would do for Korea.

Well, the difficulty with that, as was

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pointed out to me in innumerable telegrams from Washington which I could point out to the Thais was, “This will open up the whole relationship; this will require Senate advice and consent in the ratification process. And we don’t need that because we already have, in effect, the guarantee under SEATO of a unilateral action. And you got it when we signed that and ratified it back in 1955.” “Ah, but how do we know if the French say no, you won’t go and say, “We’ll have to sit back. We won’t do anything because it’s got to be unanimous.”” And so out of this came the idea of what was to be a note presented to the Thais in Bangkok which we drafted in Bangkok, very largely, and sent into Washington; a diplomatic note which would have been checked out with the Senate committee and all that and presented to Sarit and Thanat and possibly made public.

Well, then this came up in time with the SEATO meeting to be held in 1962. And for some reason or other, Dean Rusk decided he did not want a SEATO meeting. I’m sure because of the embarrassment over Laos and

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negotiations and perhaps the Thai pressure for change, the French were being very sticky and all that, so very abruptly the State Department just sent out word to these countries. And I got my message saying there will be no SEATO meeting. And it was to be held in Washington, I think, by rotation, you know. It was just about a week or ten day before the meeting was to be held, and everybody had been preparing for it, you know, and this was very embarrassing. My God, I had a hell of a time as a SEATO Council representative explaining this. It was very officious for us just to say, “No SEATO meeting.”

Well, anyway, as an alternative I was at the same time instructed to invite Khoman to come immediately to Washington. And I was to go along, too, to discuss American-Thai relationships and this bilateral question. So he got on the plane the next day or day after, and I flew directly to Washington from Bangkok, arrived without any mental or physical faculty, which is what happens when you go thirty hours across

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four times zones—the jet drag is fantastic. I got to Washington late afternoon for a four o’clock meeting. I arrived about three and got there for a four o’clock meeting within the State Department in Alex Johnson’s [U. Alexis Johnson] office to go over this draft that was going to be handed to him which was based partly on what we’d done in Bangkok and how the State Department had revised it and the lawyers and all the rest of it. It wasn’t as satisfactory as I would have liked to have had it and so forth and so on.

In any event, Thanat came in the next day, and we had this negotiation, and he looked at it and made some changes and so forth. And it was checked out with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at least I was told it was. I can't prove that. But I was told it was checked out before it was presented to Thanat. And he agreed to it, and that was the Rusk-Thanat agreement which said, in effect, that this is a unilateral as well as a collective commitment and that the United States will act and not be bound by its others, which is what we said back in '55 at—repeating it in public and saying in public again

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what had been said in '55. It didn't add one thing to the treaty, and those who claim, as I think some will—and I read a recent column by Stan Karnow [Stanley Karnow] from Hong Kong which totally misinterpreted the Rusk-Thanat agreement, totally misinterpreted. It's not an added commitment at all; it's—call it a clarification. It makes explicit what was implicit. And then we also had some things in there about joint committees and joint operations and this joint planning which the Thais never carried out to my satisfaction while I was there. I think they still were resistant and suspicious of how far to get involved with the U.S. in case we did go off the other side.

O'BRIEN: Well, if you'd like to finish up this at this point we can. And I was going to say this, that I'd like to go on for another session sometime in the future. It's not inconvenient for me to come by in New York at all.

YOUNG: Well, I won't be able to do it until sometime in the summer because I'll be going off on a trip to Asia, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia two weeks from this week and I'll be back in early June and then.... But after that, if you're still on

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project....

O'BRIEN: Well, I'll still be on it. In fact, I'm taking a trip, a series of trips, and I really won't be back here until July, so....

YOUNG: Well, do it in August then because I'll be off in July, and it's very slow around here in the summer.

O'BRIEN: Oh, good.

YOUNG: You know, nothing happens as far as I'm concerned, except what I do. The phone never rings; we get very little mail. Well, everybody's away in vacation. And this organization is kind of an academic year basis, anyway. They don't have any programs...

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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