

**Kenneth T. Young Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 10/29/1969**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Kenneth T. Young

**Interviewer:** Dennis O'Brien

**Date of Interview:** October 29, 1969

**Length:** 49 pages. Note: page numbering begins with 136 and ends with 184.

**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 creation of the Dean Rusk-Thanat Khoman Agreement in March 1962; drafting the Internal Security Program for Thailand and urging Thai officials to create their own; Robert F. Kennedy's visit to Bangkok in 1962 and his support on Thai issues; Thailand's road building program; the different approach to Asia by select assistant secretaries of State; and working with the country team for Thailand, among other issues.

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**Suggested Citation**

Kenneth T. Young, recorded interview by Dennis O'Brien, October 29, 1969, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Third Oral History Interview

With

KENNETH T. YOUNG

October 29, 1969

By Dennis O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: ...time that you were Ambassador whether that had anything to do with the perhaps the plan that it had put together for the country? And as I understand the counterinsurgency group in Washington had picked out Thailand as a target country. Was there any plan that was put together at that point for the country?

YOUNG: Well, we started...

O'BRIEN: Came out of that particular group.

YOUNG: ...in, I think it was in the fall of 1961 with a number of groups that came through from Washington. I began discussing a plan and putting together a

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proposal or a proposed comprehensive plan of action. I had in mind a combination of the political, economic, social, military. If I put it another way, I would say: take the recommendations and programs of the embassy proper, the economic aid mission, the military mission, the USIS [United States Internal Security] mission, [REDACTED]

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██████████ and any other related groups and then integrate them into one plan. This idea seemed to have strong support from various people from Washington who just happened to be coming through.

O'BRIEN: Who were some of those people just who were coming through then?

YOUNG: Well, I remember there was a general, General Rosson [William B. Rosson], who's now in Vietnam, who was then in.... had a counterinsurgency role in the Pentagon. Walt Rostow [Walt Whitman Rostow], General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor]—when they came through on the Taylor-Rostow mission to Vietnam, I asked

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to have them come over to Bangkok to see about the interrelation of this counterinsurgency operation in the area as a whole, at least in Thailand as related to Laos and Vietnam, 'cause I've always felt that we needed a sector or strategic area concept and plan rather than a piecemeal, country by country operation where you would tie together geography, terrain and force requirements as well as operations of the other side. Well, out of this came a—I don't think it was a directive—I think it was a, oh, a go ahead from the State Department, the White House and the Pentagon to see what I would come up with. Well, I went back to Washington in March of 1962 for the meeting with the Thai Foreign Minister [Thanat Khoman], which in effect took the place of the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] meeting. I was never sure why the meeting of the SEATO foreign ministers meeting scheduled for March of 1962 was suddenly cancelled or called off at the last minute by the State De.... by Washington.

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It may have been that the President [John F. Kennedy] or I rather think perhaps it was more the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, or perhaps the Department too that did not wish to get involved in a, what might have been a confrontation with some of the other members of SEATO over Laos at that time, March of '62, which was an awkward period as I recall. We didn't have the agreement of the princes and there was a difficulty in Laos with Phoumi [Phoumi Nosavan] and the Thais were very upset about SEATO, about our commitment and about Laos and it might have been very awkward, so the substitute was a suggestion from Washington that Thanat Khoman come to Washington. I had been proposing variations in the SEATO agreement, in at least in the understandings. A change of the practice and procedure in dealing with SEATO matters in the Council representatives meeting in Bangkok. What we were trying to do was to get away from the practical effect of a veto, not as part of the treaty language itself, because the treaty was always intended and

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is so written as an individual engagement. Each government is free to make its own decision at the time of a threat to the peace and safety of any member in the treaty area, but the practice over a period of seven or eight years had been to become frozen in a unanimous response, a unanimous agreement of all eight members to do anything. Even to send a professor from one country to another had to be unanimously agreed to or to buy four hundred dollars worth of books something. Even trivial things had to be agreed to by all eight representatives or their governments. Given the French and British reluctance to support a strong stand, let's say, in Laos, the Thais and I think the Filipinos and the Australians were afraid that in case of a real threat or invasion of ingress that the unanimous provision would prevent the rest of us from doing anything or prevent it from being a SEATO action. So the upshot of that was this visit to Washington, which I may have mentioned in the

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previous tapes. And at that time when I was there I talked about a country plan. In that Rusk-Thanat agreement there is mention of the joint committee and developing it further in terms of political and economic and military planning for the application of our assistance. So I had suggested to the Thai government that we try to have at least an informal, joint committee system of representatives, military, economic, and informational and political, similar to joint committees in other countries where we had a considerable amount of assistance of different kinds. The Philippines had one and I don't know about the Koreans, but there were several patterns for this. So the Thai government had agreed to this joint committee of which I was the chairman on the American side and the Prime Minister [Sarit Thanarat] on the other side. But it wasn't really getting anywhere. I'm not sure it met the style of the Thais and possibly at that particular time they were reluctant to get too much

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involved with the Americans because of their fear and uncertainty regarding the outcome in Laos. Would the agreement on the neutralization of Laos be signed and would that, in turn, lead to the disintegration of Laos and Communist takeover and kind of withdrawal pattern on the part of Americans and so forth? Therefore, if that was to be the projection over the next year or two, it was wiser not to get too much involved in this. And I think there was an ambivalent feeling in Bangkok while I was there, a feeling on one hand of desiring a stronger American support guarantee, even a bilateral treaty, and on the other hand the feeling that well, perhaps getting too much involved with the Americans, being in the American camp would be dangerous for Thailand's future, its foreign relations, its ultimate dealing with China, which was.... which will be in Asia forever, whereas the Americans might go home. Well, out of that came the very strong conviction on my part that we needed to consolidate, integrate

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the American aid program. So we spent the summer drafting a country plan which was known as the Internal Security Program Thailand, our designation. It was finished in the late

summer. Many of the pieces were drawn together by the various elements of the mission. We had a coordinating committee under Len Unger [Leonard Unger], who was then the Deputy Chief of Mission. And Phil Axelrod [Philip Axelrod] in the Political Section was given the assignment, actually, to put it together and write the analytical part: the importance of Thailand, the nature of the threat, the assets and liabilities and so forth. And then there was the action part.... the program. And we brought these pieces together. Finally, I had.... I rewrote the.... good part of it myself in order to consolidate it. It was too long and so I wrote the most of the introduction and the rationale, the general principles of counterinsurgency, that the first responsibility is the Thais and not the Americans for whatever is

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done. It's their country. It's their action. It's their responsibility. It's their initiative and we were only there as advisors, of an extremely important principle which I'm glad.... I think we're still adhering to and we should continue to in this area of internal defense.

Another principle was to get as much decentralization of operations of programs as possible. We all felt that too much of our aid and too much of the planning and thinking was oriented to the Bangkok area, the Central Plains. The threat to Thailand would come from the remote areas, as we call them, the villages along the Mekong. These were areas in which the Thai government had not been very active or effective in the past decades. This was the area in which the Vietnamese Communists had begun to operate in the late '50s and early '60s with such effectiveness.

Another principle was mobility. Mobility in the air and on the ground in order to have a quick reaction to guerrilla units or to agents, propaganda,

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infiltration, that kind of thing. So we then put together a combined program of political, economic, social and intel.... security. Really those three: political, economic, and security in a country plan and sent it to Washington and we started operating on it in the fall of 1962.

O'BRIEN: Now on that plan, I mean in regard to that plan, do you remember in the times you were in Washington or in Bangkok any time that you might have had contact with people who sat on the, well, the so-called 55-12, the Mongoose Committee, these committees that sort of made up the three committees that were also touched, counterinsurgency group? I'm thinking of people like Lansdale [Edward G. Lansdale], perhaps General Taylor, Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] in particular.

YOUNG: Uh huh. In '62 and then in '63, particularly when I came back after the SEATO meeting from Paris through Washington, consultations I meant with the—what was it called—the Counterinsurgency

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Group, the CG.

O'BRIEN: CI.

YOUNG: Yeah, CI. In old State building for a discussion of Thailand. They put on the agenda and I described the plan. It was already been operating. And for six months we'd sent in one or two quarterly reports, which was the first requirement, then they later on made it a monthly requirement. And I dealt with one or two major decision issues which were on the agenda that day. I forget exactly what they were. But we'd had a number of problems which had to be adjudicated by this group. I also saw General Taylor personally and Bob Kennedy and Alex Johnson [U. Alexis Johnson], Roger Hilsman and the Secretary and Governor Harriman [William Averell Harriman] and so forth at that time in March.

O'BRIEN: What do you remember of your discussions with Robert Kennedy? Now he was also in Bangkok at that time, wasn't he?

YOUNG: Yes, he came to Bangkok in, I think it was, in February and March of 1962, if I recall the dates

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correctly, but I can check that. Well, I had marvelous support from him. I shall always appreciate that from Bob Kennedy, Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and Max Taylor. Without their support I'm sure this whole plan, the concept of the plan that's in its detailed programs, might not have been approved at the top level and at... in some way by the President. Also we would have had a lot more difficulty with AID [Agency for International Development] and with the Pentagon on a somewhat unorthodox approach. But on our issues it came up, I would say that Bob Kennedy went to bat and took up the cudgels for us, fought them out within this group as well as the President.

O'BRIEN: How about his understanding of the problems that a nation like Thailand was having with insurgency? Did he seem to have a grasp of the subtleties of it?

YOUNG: Yes. Yes. I wouldn't want to overemphasize anyone's full understanding of this. I think it's still

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a complex, strange, paradoxical, case by case situation. Every country has a different mix. But I think, in general, his feeling of a broad based approach: the government has to have popular support, it needs good lea... attractive leaders, it needs younger people in it. The older, oh, you know, the diehards, the old fogies. It needs good leadership. It needs a flexible military, conventional, non-conventional. It needs more of the non-military, more political operations in the areas that may be infiltrated. Getting out to the people was one of

the main concerns, I think, that Bob Kennedy had and his brother, the President, in both Saigon as well as in Thailand and other countries. That these governments would harrow, not concerned with popular support, in generating it. Now this is perhaps looking at it from the point of view of American politicians who've.... who know how to do that, who could mobilize opinion and in Asia it's very different. Southeast Asia you just don't have big

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rallies and demonstrations and parties and speeches and that sort of thing, but still I think that the.... essentially both Kennedys were on very solid ground. They knew that if you weren't with the people, if you didn't have them with you in some way, you weren't going to be able to hold back any insurgency that had local grievances, local concerns, local rebellions, in effect. So there had to be a good tie in between the government, on one hand, and the people on the other.

O'BRIEN: Did he have any reservations about the more traditional kind of political leadership in Thailand?

YOUNG: Yes, I think he shared a feeling that has been general in Washington over the years that the Thai government is too conservative, too unrelated with the population, too military oriented. You know, it's the generals that.... In this case the government, the country were run by Marshal Sarit, a strong man who could make

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decisions, but who made them more or less on his own and who also tolerated mediocrity, some corrupt people around him and who, as it turned out, was indulging in his own forms of money chasing and women having that you did.

O'BRIEN: Well, when Robert Kennedy came to Thailand in 1962 did he get out into the countryside?

YOUNG: No, he only spent a day, a little more than twenty-four hours at the end of his trip, which started in Japan and went to Indonesia. And he was in Indonesia several days there. He flew to Saigon and I think stopped there just, as I recall, a few hours. Then he came to Bangkok in the evening, stayed the whole day and then left, I think, the following night around midnight or 1:00 am. It was a tough trip. They both were tired, but they both put on a magnificent display of interest and energy. They both.... We had a separate program for Mrs. Kennedy [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] and for Bob. And my wife took Ethel and she met a lot of the little women leaders, younger

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women leaders and did various things. And with Bob we had a very good breakfast, I remember, along, just the two of us, in which I outlined what I hoped he would say to Sarit, which was in effect to back up what I'd been saying to Sarit about Laos, about the agreement, about the necessity to get into unconventional operations, to train his military people in guerilla tactics, night time patrolling in small units, to develop mobility, decentralization. It was their responsibility. And some of these other ideas which eventually got... were put into this country plan. And also to kind of give the President's view on other issues of the Soviet Union, of course. Yes, this must have been in March of '62. I'm sure it was. Well, he went to see the Prime Minister and we had a very good session. The Prime Minister listened very intently. He recognized the voice of power, of course, the President's brother. And I think this visit helped a lot in moving not only the Thais in this direction, but

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the whole mission, in effect. People really realized that this is what the President of the United States wanted and it may sound like a diminution of an ambassador's power and role, but when you're changing programs and ideas, particularly ideas and concepts that are engrained in the bureaucracy and you're moving from orthodoxy to unorthodoxy, you need, you know, all the clout you can get, because what you're moving is not people so much as process, the process of the bureaucracy. And when the bureaucracy that you're dealing with is at the bottom, like the military aid mission, several hundred officers under a two star general. Well, he reported to a four star general really in Saigon, General Harkins [Paul D. Harkins], and then through them to Admiral Felt [Harry D. Felt] in CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific] in Honolulu and through Admiral Felt to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. So this very heavy, elaborate layering squeezes out much chance for innovation and change. It's a very heavy hand. I don't think

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anybody realizes, unless you've been through it, what you're up against when you try to change that. So the Kennedy visit was a plus.

O'BRIEN: In this agreement is there anything that leads into this, what's been referred to in more recent months here, to the Thai-U.S. military agreement which apparently has some rather se.... some undisclosed clauses in it? Is this a natural evolution? Does it have some connection with that later military agreement as I understand it was worked out in '64.

YOUNG: Well, the Internal Security Program was unilateral. It was not an agreement with the Thai government at all. In fact, they've never seen it. It's still classified.

O'BRIEN: Oh, I see.

YOUNG: It's a classified, U.S. document for controlling the use of United States'

resources allocated to Thailand. Its purpose was to provide an all mission concept strategy and operating program.

O'BRIEN: So it's something that the Thais were never really

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privy of.

YOUNG: That's right. As a piece of paper.... The document was never showed to them. But once we had put it into operation with Washington's approval and it became the controlling mechanism for the ambassador to organize the total U.S. effort in Thailand on the American side and to bring together the pieces of the American aid programs of all kinds which were scattered all over the country and bore no relationship to each other in which the different elements—the military, economic, political and so forth—were operating quite independently. There was no integration. There was nothing compact about the American program in Thailand. It was a scattered program. Some of it was doing good work and accomplishing results. But this partly a control document, partly a direction document, partly an information document for Washington, partly a scheduling document for ordering and having delivered certain kinds of equipment which

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were required. And it was also a integrating document for the whole U.S. mission. Now the indirect effect of this was to, through our different operating elements, to bring the Thais more closely together because when our aid mission was talking about economic programs that bore some relation to security and our military people were also present, that meant that the Thai military and the Thai economic people were also present, so we began to get that. Now, on directions from Washington in support of our recommendation to get a Thai plan or a joint plan, I began discussions with the Thai officials in early '63 to see if I couldn't develop either a Thai counterpart plan or a joint plan for political, military and economic programming. That is that there would be the Thai counterpart of our resources. Now this was not a contingency plan dealing with military operations in or around Thailand. My program, my \_\_\_\_\_, the internal security program was a plan for the organization and the

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use of American resources and what we would do as the advisory or equipment supplying part of the internal security problem. What we hoped would come out on the Thai side would be their action program under the principle of Thai initiative and Thai responsibility, where they would parallel the resources, let us say, on the road building side for mobility with our resources. And we would then have two parallel columns or parallel pages or something of that nature. Well, we started these discussions and they asked us to submit a draft and we did which was much like our program, our plan, but didn't say so. And the effort never got off

the ground and I think it never did get anywhere while I was there and even after I... And I guess after I left it was never followed up. Again I think this was partly due to the Thai ambivalence and reluctance to get too involved with us at that time. In '63 there was still this lingering suspicion of where the Americans would come out. So there's no connection

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between this Internal Security Program and this contingency plan in 1965 as far as I can see. Now, of course, the... What happened in '64, the year after I left, I can't say. My impression is that the 1965 plan related to and expresses the, let's say, the Vietnam war situation of '65 and not internal security in Thailand as such. We were dealing in our day purely within Thailand. Now in terms of guerilla warfare of two, three or four thousand Communists and there was no guerilla warfare and no insurgency as such when I was in Thailand. This whole program was to forestall the possibility or the probability of insurgency by strengthening the politics and the economics, the transportation and the military capabilities, the intelligence capabilities of the Thais to such an extent that they would not be faced with this kind of insurgency that Vietnam had.

O'BRIEN: Were there any undisclosed sections of the Rusk-Thanat agreement at all?

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YOUNG: No. None whatsoever.

O'BRIEN: It's as it is. One of the things that I've been curious about is that during the time you were there Thailand started on a major road building program, particularly in that northeast section. And as I understand it most of that financing came from the IMF [International Monetary Fund], didn't it, and the World Bank?

YOUNG: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Is there, in a sense, a connection between that and American foreign policy and the development of that road building program and plan?

YOUNG: Well, they were related. I mean in the... The IMF and the World Bank's program for highway development in Thailand was related to American policy on economic development in general. That is, I think we agreed too that Thailand's prosperity, industrialization and agricultural development, required a network of roads, of major highways, truck lines, smaller blacktop roads and then the web of what we'd call county feeder roads,

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laterite or gravel. The World Bank had a study or maybe it was IMF made, I've forgotten when now, but they came up with a plan, eight year plan, as I recall, for developing this in

stages by loans. There were also parts of it that were to be financed by other sources. The Export-Import Bank, I remember, was asked to make a loan for a road southeast of Bangkok. And then there was one to the west and also some private interests got involved on supply of credits and some very corrupt deals in the construction business from outsiders, Europeans and Americans. But the decision finally was to go ahead with the World Bank plan and I believe the World Bank 'cause IMF loaned Thailand the money and now they.... It's much more developed.

O'BRIEN: Were there any military considerations in this?

YOUNG: No. No, now we had a separate road.... security roads program which was part of the country plan, which was to put small roads, what we call feeder roads—it's either one lane or two lanes, all

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weather—into some vulnerable areas in the northeast and the north which had no roads whatsoever. The theory was that one or two of these or three or four of these gravel roads—I think we were.... five meters wide, fifteen feet, something like that, wide, well constructed, good foundations so they wouldn't wash out—would permit rapid mobility on the ground in with trucks and mobile equipment to bring in the police or a battalion of the army. And that also the roads would generate economic activity, would generate the movement of goods. It would permit people to move out of the villages and bring their fruit, their vegetables, their chicken, their pork. It would generate small shops along the areas of these roads. It would also generate small roads so the people might even build into their village, let's say, two miles in through the forest or at least for ox carts or something like that. Now these roads were financed by the U.S. government primarily for security purposes, but also with an economic

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impact in mind. This caused great debate in Washington and we almost lost this because AID or some of the people in AID believed that this was a wrong utilization of AID money. This was security, the Pentagon would pay for it. And the Pentagon didn't have funds like this under the AID act, you see, for this sort of thing. So it fell between two \_\_\_\_\_. The economic analysis in Washington did not agree that these roads would produce economic benefits, that there would be an economic fallout, so to speak. So AID was very much opposed.

O'BRIEN: Well, who in AID.... Do you remember any particular people in AID that were resisting? Seymour Janow [Seymour J. Janow] was then...

YOUNG: I think Seymour was genuinely negative about these roads. I think he felt that they were a diversion of AID funds and that this was not the



proper.... There's quite a lot of money involved, you know, for two of these roads was nearly six million dollars. And also the Thais wanted much more

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elaborate roads than we had in mind. We had described this to the Prime Minister and others at the top as to what we had in mind, gravel, laterite, the least amount of money, both Thai money and American money, to get as many roads as you could out of the same fund, let's say. And the cheaper you make the roads, the more you get and this was the urgent problem, and get communications get opened up. Well, the highway department in Thailand sort of pulled a fast one over everybody and they were thinking of wider roads with heavy macadam and that sort of thing and so we would have half the distance, so we had to judicate that and it was a very sticky, even prickly controversy for a while, but we got it resolved both in Bangkok and Washington.

O'BRIEN: When you first went there, Thailand, not only Thailand but Burma and I guess also Laos too, were having some problems with some.... the Chinese irregulars, some of the old

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troops that I think Burma was pushing out about that point. Did you take any role at all in attempting to get those people out?

YOUNG: No, I think that had already taken place before I arrived. The so-called KMT [Kuomintang] problem back in the mid-'50s and a lot of those Chinese soldiers from way up in the north had left or been evacuated, but there was still a remnant of several thousand in the mountains that are sort of in between, well, where Burma and Laos connect just at the north of Thailand, up way way, quite remote areas. And as I understood it, these were men from Yunnan province, just to the north, who did not wish to go to Taiwan. After all, that didn't mean anything to them. Their home was in Yunnan and they wanted to go back. They had intermarried either with Thais or tribal people or something. They had a good thing going for them. They were relatively safe. A lot of them were growing opium and selling opium on the world market and making lots

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of money and they were well defended and they were soldiers and there wasn't much you could do to dislodge them, you know. It was sort of like a great big tick that got so dug in in a dog's back, you couldn't get it out without infecting the dog or pulling off a big hunk of skin. The Thais did not have the capability or it would have been a diversion of their capability to have gone up with their army to dislodge these fellows from these mountain areas, you know five or six thousand feet up through long trails and ravines, so they're still there.

O'BRIEN: Really just a few things about.... in a way of an administrative way about

the way you handled the embassy and all. First of all, you had some time in the State Department in the '50s and then you were out and came back. How did you respond to the increased emphasis on, well in a sense, crisis management as it developed in the White House and the State Department? Rather than the old machinery of the operations,

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coordinations board of the National Security Council [NSC], did you.... Did Thailand ever fall into a kind of crisis situation?

YOUNG: It fell into a crisis situation in May of '62.

O'BRIEN: This is when the troops came?

YOUNG: At that time, but that was more a crisis over Laos and the possibility that the movement of Communist troops over towards the border of Thailand, right into the Mekong River and some Chinese elements that seemed to be in northern Laos. At the time when the Lao army sort of fell apart might signal.... might be signaling a pressure out on Thailand. That whole operation was done in a crisis way. As I look back upon it, I think it was done too abruptly and quickly. There wasn't enough coordination and consultation with the Thais. The troops were actually on their way before I even received instructions to go see the Prime Minister to ask if the Thai government would believe also that it might be useful for a stabilization of the whole area. Some American

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forces, air and ground, came into Thailand. I remember just before I entered my car at the residence to go see Sarit, that somebody in the embassy told me that they'd just heard over the Voice of America or just received a report from the Voice of America that there was an announcement—or maybe it was a press announcement. I've forgotten exactly which—that a carrier with the marines on it entered the Gulf of Thailand and that the Thais probably had that same information too. Well, of course, they did. They asked me about it when I arrived at the Prime Minister's office. And it was sort of, "Well, here you are asking if we should formulate a joint agreement and make a joint announcement, but your troops are already on the way. What's the meaning of this?" So the Thais were somewhat put out by kind of a fait accompli 'cause if they'd said no that would have meant that the carrier would have to turn around and go back. It was not the best kind of crisis management that one would hope for.

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O'BRIEN: They had three Assistant Secretaries for the Far East during the time you were Ambassador, McConaughy [Walter P. McConaughy], Harriman, and Hilsman. How did they stack up?

YOUNG: I don't recall having much contact or by play with Walter McConaughy, whom I'd known for a long time. I forget when Harriman actually took over.

O'BRIEN: '62, wasn't it? Shortly after the...

YOUNG: Was he the Assistant Secretary that long? I thought it was.... He was in Geneva, but I think it was the end of the summer of '61 or early fall of '62. He was Assistant Secretary and also negotiating the Lao agreement, both. Sort of commuting with Geneva. Something, as I recall, I may be wrong on those dates. As Assistant Secretary his main interest, as far as we were concerned and as far as my role was concerned, was in the Lao agreement and getting the Thais to come along. He came to Bangkok I remember in the fall of '61, September I think, and talked with Ambassador Brown [Winthrop G. Brown], Ambassador

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Nolting [Frederick E. Nolting, Jr.] and myself and told us what the policy was and that was that. In his inimitable way. "This is what the President wanted, now you fellows, you get it. You help get it." Then he came over to Bangkok in March of '62 after the chiefs of missions meeting, 'cause again I suggested that it would be helpful to me if he came and said to Sarit exactly what the President was saying to him, Harriman. It's all well and good for me to repeat this over and over again on the basis of instructions and reading instructions off right from the telegram. You know, "The President wants me to convey to you," but I don't know, there was... because of the Thai fear and concern and insecurity, all of that, it needed a little backing up. So that my relationships with Harriman are totally in terms of how well I was doing with getting Sarit to come along on this agreement. And at times Harriman felt I wasn't doing enough and that the Thais were baulking and what was the matter with Sarit

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and why couldn't we get him and all that kind of thing. And also I think he had sort of a liberal skepticism about this sort of autocratic rule of this man, Sarit. They didn't hit it off very well anyway, Sarit and Harriman. Because Harriman represented the negotiator, the man who was trying to get Souvanna Phouma in. At that time the Thais felt Souvanna Phouma would not be able to handle the situation, if he were made prime minister of a neutral, three part, troika government. They thought he was.... would be too much led by his half brother, Prince Souphanouvong, the leader of the Pathet Lao. They felt that a much stronger position on the agreement.... That we were in the driver's seat and we should negotiate a stronger agreement to get the Communists—the Chinese, the Russians and the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao—to agree to that rather than sort of be soft on the edges. So that the Thais had as strong feelings about this on their side as Averell did on his. Roger Hilsman was much more

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aware of this area. I mean, you know, Averell didn't pretend to know anything about Southeast Asia. He just had a job to do. And so he did not get so much involved in the internal developments in Thailand that I was involved in, when I wasn't involved in Laos. The Thais used to say to me, "You're really not Ambassador to Thailand. You're Ambassador for Laos." [Interruption]

O'BRIEN: Well, Hilsman was much more aware then?

YOUNG: Yeah. Well, you know, being a sort of a... having some background and also having been in the head of intelligence and research in the Department, he'd been reading all of the intelligence analysis reports and been involved in some of the policy discussions in the State Department with the NSC and so forth and with Kennedy on Laos and on Vietnam and Thailand, Indonesia.

O'BRIEN: Well, there's quite a transition then. You know, if one goes back to assistant secretaries for Far East from, let's say, Walter Robertson [Walter S. Robertson] to Roger Hilsman as far as their view of Asia and their

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understanding of... and the way they look at, for example, the presence of Communism in Asia. Do you feel that this section of the State Department has strengthened over the years in its understanding? What happens among the people who make Asia and Southeast Asia their business?

YOUNG: Well, I suppose the thing to say is that there was a variation from the assistant secretary familiar with many of the areas and countries in Asia and the assistant secretary who was not familiar with many of the areas or the assistant secretary who had a one country or one problem focus. Walter Robertson's focus was China because he had worked there during the war and he'd been the General Marshal during the time of the negotiations. He had very strong views about the Chinese Communists. Still does. During the '50s under Secretary Dulles [John Foster Dulles] issues of post-war Korea and that problem in Korea in '53 and Indochina and the Chinese Communists, the ambassadorial talks, the Taiwan crisis, '58, Sukarno, the development of

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the Communist power in Southeast Asia, this was his main concern. But it was really focused on China and the other areas, such as Japan, let's say, or development, were less interesting. By the same token, Averell Harriman's interest when he was Assistant Secretary of State was getting this agreement on Laos. Everything was subordinated to that or just didn't come into his range of interest or responsibility. They both were men with very strong ideas and a very clear, set focus. Then, you take somebody like Jeff Parsons [James Graham Parsons] who was Assistant Secretary of State and had served in Japan, Foreign Service officer of

considerable ability, and then ambassador in Laos. He had a more general range, as did Roger Hilsman too.

O'BRIEN: So.... But as there.... Over.... In the end do you think that, not only there at the assistant secretary level, but among the personnel who staffed Far East, is it a general strengthening of people or.... I don't know.

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YOUNG: I think a general conclusion might be that the conduct of Asian policy and the management of the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs are strengthened when your assistant secretary has familiarity, background experience in a set of problems or countries. I think that's generally true. Now Walter.... Everybody respected Walter Robertson because he was a man of great integrity and a man of great discrimination and taste and a Richmond gentleman, but there was also the feeling within his Bureau that he was too China focused. Some people used to criticize him for being obsessed. And almost every problem would turn into its.... into the China aspect of it: will this help the Chinese Communists or be a disadvantage to them? And when there were other issues involved, it was usually turned into that kind of a discussion. This is speaking very broadly. Because he was an extremely sensitive man and a very intelligent man and he would listen to economic problems and Indonesia and, you know, development and Japan and

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all of that, but I think as a general rule, without talking about any particular personality, I think assistant secretaries should be men of broad background, if possible.

O'BRIEN: How did your country team work for you? Was it.... Did you have pretty good cooperation between all the agencies involved beyond the plan? For example, you were privy to all.... everything that was going on in the country?

YOUNG: Yes. I think I had.... I think I had good cooperation for the most part. I had some difficulties with the first general who was in charge of the mission. He was a rather a tough, hard fellow and he didn't like civilians and he didn't like ambassadorial control at all. He wanted to run his own show and he felt he was entitled to without my interference and this effort to bring the whole mission together collided with his way of doing things, which was separatist rather than integrative. I had some problems with AID and the USOM [United States Operations Mission]

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Mission because, again, the new fellows that came out to AID were apparently instructed to operate as independently of the embassy as possible and to report, more or less, directly to Washington in their own field of AID and to just keep me generally advised. Now they did



management mission group which then made the recommendation to me on this plan itself. I found that a very useful device for coordination, for

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decision making, in terms of a total mission effort. It was a small group. It was an action group, in a sense it was action recommended to me for a decision.

O'BRIEN: You mentioned some of the problems of getting the bureaucracy and the bureaucracies moving in new policy directions and referred specifically to the military. How about the State Department? And, not only that, but the embassy that you were dealing with at this point? Did you find any.... Can you apply any of those criticisms in that direction?

YOUNG: To the embassy itself, the politico-economic sections?

O'BRIEN: Right. And to the Foreign Service?

YOUNG: Well, one difficulty I had with both the embassy and the State Department was to get an understanding and approval of a new position of coordinator, program coordinator. This took, I think, eighteen months. We started before this plan was put into effect, but actually it really got going and had some reason when we knew we were going to have to put

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this plan into operation. One argument was that the Deputy Chief of Mission should be the coordinator of the mission's total complex, program by program. I felt that that was not the role for the deputy chief of mission. He had plenty of other things to do, both within the embassy proper administering certain parts of the embassy, the administrative side of embassy work, the consuls in the country, and then substituting for the ambassador at a whole lot of functions. Furthermore, the country plan visaged a lot of detail in follow up, you know, specific, sometimes very picayune problems, or in getting equipment from Washington and getting a telegram coordinated in Bangkok back to Washington, that kind of thing. So it wasn't until the inspection team came to Bangkok, State Department's inspection of the embassy proper, that I felt I really made some headway, because they consulted everybody, those who were against this as well as those who were for it, listened to both sides.... I wanted them to hear both sides and have junior

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officers express themselves. This kind of thing. And they recommended this. They supported my.... They endorsed my recommendation for this position and it eventually came about and it's been in operation ever since and I think it's proven its worth. Within the embassy itself I don't think there were any major problems of adjustment, of new thinking, unorthodox. I

think the political section, four or five men in that, were very much for broadening out to meet, to get in touch with, make contact with different groups or individuals in Thailand. The youth, for example, we started a youth program to find out who were the young people, the comers. We got involved with the universities, the students and the intellectuals, some faculty people, the academics, some of the younger civil servants with Western training, the press, and then the up country leaderships, one of the regional leadership in the Northeast and the north, that kind of thing. So the political section was very enthusiastic and I thought quite capable in being the instruments for going out. I

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mean I gave them as much leeway and trying to increase their representation money so they could do it. We may have spread ourselves too thin. I would criticize myself in this regard in trying to cover too much too soon and being too concerned over the time table, that we didn't have much time, that our interests and the Thai interests were going to be hit pretty hard within two or three years and we had to make up for lost time and let's get with it and if we cover too many bets, well that's the way it goes. As far as the State Department itself is concerned, I think in general I had sufficient support there. One of the problems you get in an embassy is you don't know what's going on in Washington. It's very hard to keep in the know. Everybody's busy. You don't have time to write letters back and forth. We didn't have a telephone at that time, so you're often in the dark and suddenly these telegrams arrive and you don't know what led up to them, the reason why. You know, you just read it, a page and a half. Suddenly there it is and, you

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know, who's responsible for this, who generated this. Who's at the Pentagon or which part of the.... Which person in the State Department. They come out anonymous in that respect. But I think the country dir.... the desk officer, country director and the office directors at that time and I'd say generally speaking we had pretty good support.

O'BRIEN: Well, I really don't have any more questions. Is there anything that you feel that we've left out or haven't put enough emphasis on?

YOUNG: Well, I'd like to read through this material and just see if there are any gaps in my own recall.

O'BRIEN: Well, when you do I get back up to New York. We could very easily get together and finish up anything that you'd like. So, why don't you just let me know when you have a chance to look at it and in the meantime I'll get this finished up, get a copy up to you.

YOUNG: It's a question of whether you want a comprehensive summary of all aspects of this particular period from



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my point of view.

O'BRIEN: Well, I'm going to leave it right up to you, because you're the person, you know, that was there and I think that, you know, anything that you feel is going to add some insight into what an ambassador did in Thailand and what Ambassador Young did in Thailand, you know, that's going to have some meaning and some importance is fine. Provide someone in the future a pretty good understanding of all this.

YOUNG: Well, one subject I'd like to go into perhaps more than I have in this first set of interviews would be the deployment of American troops in 1962, May of 1962, and my experience with them and with Washington over the next six months. Briefly, the question was how to disengage this combat force in a way that the Thais would understand and we would understand. It would be a systematic withdrawal by agreement as to time and so forth. And I was never able to get that out of Washington. I proposed this but never got any reply and it just sort

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of dribbled out and I think left a bad taste on the Thai side.

O'BRIEN: Well...

YOUNG: But that's something I can perhaps get into in a little bit more detail in my...

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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