

Maxwell D. Taylor Oral History Interview—RFK #1, 10/22/1969
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Maxwell D. Taylor (1901-1987) served as General of the U.S. Army; Military Representative of the President (1961-1962); Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962-1964); Ambassador to Vietnam (1964-1965); Special Consultant to the President (1965-1969). This interview focuses on Taylor's relationship with Robert F. Kennedy (RFK), the role and responsibilities of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency), and the investigation into Operation Mongoose, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

MAXWELL TAYLOR

October 22, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By Larry Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library
Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project

HACKMAN: I wanted to ask you about that Bay of Pigs investigation. Can you remember, when it got down to the point of drafting it, the relationship between yourself and Robert Kennedy in putting the draft together? Were there differences on what you would say in presenting that to the President? What were his feelings?

TAYLOR: The drafting was not nearly as difficult as I had expected because, as you can realize, the four members of this panel, Bob Kennedy, Allen Dulles, Arleigh Burke and myself, all had viewed it from somewhat different angles. Bob was clearly there, I would say, to look after the President's interest, to be sure that the history was accurate and not distorted in a way adverse to that interest. By the same token, Allen Dulles, who represented CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], was there to see that history was not written incorrectly to the disadvantage of the Agency. And I would say Arleigh Burke had a similar feeling toward the Joint Chiefs. Having said that, I found that none of these gentlemen was trying to distort history for their own benefit, but they were certainly watching with a very close eye on just what was going into the final record. So I'd anticipated considerable difficulty in getting agreement at the end. Actually, we had none.

I was the primary draftsman because I was the fourth man in the troika, so to speak, and it was my draft that was worked from. Actually of the three of us, I would say Bob was in favor of bearing down harder on the misdeeds committed, and I would say that he was [that way] across the board. In other words, there was no question of his wanting to participate in a snow job or a whitewash of any sort. However, everyone was so disarmingly frank, nobody defended himself. Every key witness, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs, all of them, came in really to confess their sins and they did so, I thought, with amazing frankness. So there was no problem then of pulling confessions from hostile witnesses, but just a question of how to phrase the report so that it'd be neither overstated nor understated, hoping that we were recording a lesson that would be of use to government and not something with which to pillory the miscreants of the past. So in that spirit there was no great difficulty. However, I then felt, as the chairman, that I wanted to show our draft report to the principals themselves so the Secretary of the State would know what we were saying, also the CIA and the rest. And there we had a very little. . . . I had more difficulty with, say, the Chiefs than with the others because they're not one person. They themselves are a body. But in the end the report we submitted was. . . . Nobody challenged it.

When it was received by the President, we had the unusual experience of a White House postmortem, a critique where all the principal actors were present. This was held before everybody involved, and there was not a single voice raised of protest against the conclusions that A had done badly here, B had done badly there and so on. I would say Bob was very cooperative, very helpful in watching for the legality of the hearings. He applied a legal mind, to some extent, to the hearings and the recorded testimony. Also he kept telling the President of how this thing was shaping up so the President's mind was--I wouldn't say conditioned, but at least he knew about what he was going to receive when we went to him, although we as a group had only had one progress briefing with him between the start and the finish of our work.

HACKMAN: Yes. Can you remember discussing with Robert Kennedy in that period the whole question of the calling off of those second air strikes, the ones that are so controversial, the D-day air strikes?

TAYLOR: Well, we all talked about it, really, and tried to get the facts. I think that he felt, perhaps more strongly than I, that the President had really not received enough sound advice from his supporters. This was one of the things that came out all the way through, that neither the CIA senior people nor the senior military people had ever stepped up to their President and looked him in the eye and said, "Look, Mr. President, this plan looks bad," and so on. I'm quite reasonably sure in my own mind, although I could never prove it, that had either [Richard M., Jr.] Bissell or General [Charles P.] Cabell or another senior adviser taken advantage of Secretary [Dean] Rusk's offer to telephone the President, and if they'd laid the facts on the line and said, "Mr. President, this cancellation is a very serious thing and may endanger the entire expedition," I would feel sure he would have responded favorably. On the other hand, I'm equally sure that had he have responded favorably on this point, it still wouldn't have saved the expedition.

HACKMAN: Okay. Did Robert Kennedy ever explain to you exactly why the President had called that off, who had an impact?

TAYLOR: Of course we knew as a group because we'd been asking questions about it. Whether Bob knew the circumstances before he joined our group or not, I don't know. Bear in mind that nobody but nobody knew the full story of the Bay of Pigs until the four of us put the whole thing together. It had been so deliberately compartmented for security purposes that the principal actors only knew pieces of it, and whether Bob knew himself about the details of the cancellation before our investigation, I don't know.

HACKMAN: Okay, now I want to move from that investigation to what you can recall about working with Robert Kennedy on Cuban policy from the time of the Bay

of Pigs and the investigation through the rest of the Administration, but excluding the missile crisis which you discussed to some extent. I'm basically talking about the [Edward G.] Lansdale group and then the [John H.] Crimmins group in State and the Mongoose Committee which you were on.

TAYLOR: Well, when we finished our Bay of Pigs report, obviously that didn't finish the Cuban problem. Cuba was still there. [Fidel] Castro was still very much in power. The four of us in our report stressed our feeling that Castro was a permanent menace to the hemisphere and we should proceed to devise ways and means to make his life harder and, if possible, to eliminate him without resort to anything like the invasion which had failed so disastrously. And we were encouraged to do so. That was indeed the current policy. The so-called Mongoose Committee was built on top of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) with essentially the same membership, slightly different, which was to watch and suggest all possible devices by which Cuban economy might be adversely affected, Castro's regime undermined, and by which we could get adequate intelligence out of the island. It was always a great problem to know what was the truth with regard to the internal condition.

Bob was very keen about this, very aggressive and pushed very hard to increase our capabilities. He was a great fellow to have on the Committee because he was a gadfly, and I think I've mentioned frequently that he could perceive a snow job so quickly and be so impatient, even rough on a witness, that word got around--when you go over to appear before this Committee, you had better have your facts in a row and tell a straightforward story--which was very helpful indeed. And of course, also, his presence on the Committee represented the obvious interest of the President himself, so that any committee he was on was not a do-nothing committee. We got things going and were far more effective than the average committee which usually does have a very good, very high batting average of achievement.

HACKMAN: Now you described how the Special Group for Counterinsurgency was tied in with the 5412 Committee. Did Robert Kennedy also sit on the Mongoose Committee? Did he attend most of those meetings?

TAYLOR: Yes, this was a rather interesting thing, the evolution of this series of committees. One of the conclusions that came out of the Bay of Pigs was that the Executive Departments were just not able to organize and direct anything as complex as the invasion of Cuba. We had no idea that invasions like that were going to become commonplace, but the experience illustrated the difficulty of pulling together the resources of a number of branches of government under a single leadership here in Washington and getting things done in a certain way overseas. And we felt that our government needed to correct that deficiency to the extent it could within the constraints of the Constitution.

So we recommended an approach to this problem as a part of our report, which was never either formally accepted or rejected. Everyone seemed to think, "Well, it's a pretty good idea." But State clearly didn't like our proposal because it looked like, as indeed it was, an invasion of what they considered their primacy in the field of foreign policy. So as a sort of compromise we were told that the 5412 Committee to which I had then been assigned was directed to look after the kinds of things which had been contemplated in this recommendation in the Bay of Pigs report. Very shortly we did start considering anew in the 5412 Committee the problem of counterinsurgency, which is like the Bay of Pigs in the sense that many departments in government are involved and there is no place, short of the President, where everything comes together.

HACKMAN: Let me just ask you, where exactly did the idea for adding the CI group to 5412 come from? Does it come down? Or is this something you and Robert Kennedy clearly had in mind?

TAYLOR: We were encouraged to take the 5412 Committee and use it as a forum in which to reconsider the problem of interdepartmental action. 5412 had in it representatives of the White House, State, Defense, and the CIA, so it was just an easy thing to say, "Well, let's just expand this body and give it a new character, and we'll proceed from there." That was the birth of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency). It started meeting here at

2 o'clock every Thursday in this office. But Cuba meanwhile was still a problem, and we dealt with it in the Special Group (CI). Gradually, we realized that whenever Cuba was up for consideration, we needed to have other people such as Lansdale, who had been made a sort of a general manager for the covert operations in Cuba. We added Lansdale and one or two more and remained at the same table another hour as the Special Group (Mongoose). So we'd normally start in a small group, 5412; then we'd expand to Special Group (Counter-insurgency); then we'd expand to Special Group (Mongoose). It was just a slow increase of the membership, so we'd sit here from 2 o'clock to 5 o'clock in the afternoon evolving from one committee to the next.

HACKMAN: But Robert Kennedy wouldn't ordinarily sit on the 5412? He'd only come in at the point of the CI?

TAYLOR: No, he was not a charter member, so to speak, of 5412, but he and I worked very closely together. I kept him thoroughly informed on its activities because it did have a bearing on these other committees.

HACKMAN: Okay, now getting back to something you just said. You said that you'd been encouraged to use 5412 to expand into the CI thing. Encouraged by whom? Whom did you check this out with before the decision is made? Any resistance along the line?

TAYLOR: Well, this was discussed, you see, with the President at the so-called post-mortem of the Bay of Pigs and then with [McGeorge] Bundy. I had many discussions with the latter. He was sympathetic but somewhat skeptical as to how this thing should be organized. So at last Bundy and I agreed--whether Bundy checked it with the President, probably did--that in lieu of our recommendations in the Bay of Pigs report we would start on the 5412 basis and see what could evolve from there.

HACKMAN: Can you remember an initial round of reactions from Defense, State and CIA at that point?

TAYLOR: No one ever opposed any of these things. Whether they had any concealed reservations or not, I never knew, but they knew this project had the President's own interest behind it. They knew Bob Kennedy was there to see that that something was done, so everyone went along very happily, apparently.

HACKMAN: Through that fall of '61 can you remember other kinds of things, other than going the GI route, that you and Robert Kennedy discussed that you might set up to coordinate things?

TAYLOR: No. In the fall this was on the 5412 phase. It was just after the turn of the year, as I recall, that the standing group (CI) was established by NSAM 124.

HACKMAN: January of '62, yes.

TAYLOR: Either about this time or shortly thereafter another aspect of overseas activity, namely how to do better in the international propaganda field, was discussed many times. And Bob again was a great activist, impatient with our inadequacies in telling our story abroad. And we had many discussions trying to find something effective to do. All we accomplished, as I recall, was getting one man, [William J.] Jorden, set up in State to watch things and get a certain amount of coordination between the work of State and USIA [United States Information Agency], in the missions overseas. And I can recall Bob's great feeling based on his critical analysis of the problem that we Americans abroad were not getting in touch with students and not getting in touch with labor, that these were untouched areas of great importance in the emerging countries in particular where the American influence should be felt in a beneficent way. He was sure that our people on the ground ought to get to know the young people who are coming forward. That was an attitude which we came to know so well later. But this was the first time that I sensed his keen awareness of the importance of youth on the international front.

HACKMAN: This is the committee, I think, eventually then that Lucius Battle is involved in, the Inter-agency Youth Committee, I think, that Robert Kennedy . . .

TAYLOR: That's right. I've forgotten the timing of so many of these things, but that was one of the things that he was very keen about. He pressed State all the time to get more attaches abroad who had youth as their one responsibility.

HACKMAN: Can you remember anything happening during the Administration that really brings him around to that point of view, particularly on youth and labor unions? Is it that '62 trip to the Far East, Indonesia, or is it . . .

TAYLOR: I think that trip to the Far East did have an effect, as he certainly came back tremendously impressed. It seemed to be a revelation to him, his own appeal to young people and, in this case, to foreign young people. And he came back with a sense of his own ability in the field and of the importance to future American relations of the attitude of a new generation abroad and that they should be the object, not just intermittently of casual VIP trips, but of a deliberate policy of our government.

HACKMAN: Was it clear to you during the fall of 1961 or in the period after that Bay of Pigs investigation that Robert Kennedy would want to be a part of any group that was getting involved in trying to bring things together, coordinating things, whether in CI . . .

TAYLOR: Well, yes, I would say it was clear he was grasping, as we all were, to find some feasible, practical way to move forward in these areas where our programs had been amorphous in the past. For example, to get our hand on our public relations abroad is like wrestling with a jellyfish. So I would say that he was searching, as we all were, for some practical way, and he was not only anxious, but hopeful of taking part and did. As

Attorney General, he really had no business in any of these things. It's one of those cases which I've often cited to illustrate that when a President wants important work done, he picks a man not because of his assignment but because of the man himself. I've cited Bob as one example and Douglas Dillon as another. The latter was very highly prized by both President Kennedy and President [Lyndon B.] Johnson, not because he happened to be a Secretary of the Treasury at the time, but because of his background and his character.

HACKMAN: Was Robert Kennedy, just since you mentioned Dillon, do you know if Robert Kennedy was frequently looking to Mr. Dillon in this period for advice on the foreign side?

TAYLOR: I wouldn't say. . . . I never noted that he turned to him in particular. Doug was one of the group of trusted counselors around the President. Everybody has a high regard for him, and I'm sure Bob did, too, but I wouldn't say he singled him out.

HACKMAN: Yes. Okay. I wanted to get back just a little bit more to Cuba. What can you remember about. . . . Well, how well did the Mongoose Committee work?

TAYLOR: It didn't work well at all. It could make good plans, but then the execution was very, very difficulty. It was difficult because Castro had perfected his police state organization; it was very hard to get intelligence people in. There were endless hundreds, literally thousands, of exiled Cubans who presented themselves as the future saviours of their country, but when tested for performance, for delivery, they were very disappointing. So that I would say the achievements of the Mongoose organization were very limited.

HACKMAN: How would this group report to the President, or would it?

TAYLOR: I would as Chairman. [I would] The President literally followed these things personally. When the day was done I would have an appointment already arranged in advance and be over there and report to him.

HACKMAN: After these Thursday meetings usually?

TAYLOR: That's right. Meanwhile I could send him notes or memoranda any time. I'd see him every day on other subjects. He was very accessible.

HACKMAN: Can you remember Robert Kennedy's sort of basic approach to Cuba after the Bay of Pigs, what kinds of things he felt could be done, and, if you can remember, any of the kinds of things he felt weren't worth trying or wouldn't work?

TAYLOR: Well, I can't. . . . I really can't single out details of his position, except he was, I would say, an activist. There was no question that he felt that the United States had suffered a great humiliation in Cuba, as we had, and hoped it would be possible to reverse that in some way by utilizing the Cuban exile resources, assisted as we could on the American side. And so he joined with us in attempting or at least approving attempts of various kinds of penetration of Cuba for intelligence, for sabotage, and applications [considerations] of economic pressures on Castro abroad. We went across the whole gamut of possibilities, and he was constantly pressing for affirmative policies and programs and very impatient with the very limited results.

HACKMAN: Was the President usually receptive to these kinds of things? I mean, can you remember him vetoing any of the things that were suggested by CI?

TAYLOR: I can't specifically. I wouldn't say that everything of a terrorist nature that was ever suggested was approved.

HACKMAN: Blowing up bridges and things like this?

TAYLOR: Yes.

HACKMAN: All right. The reason I wondered is because I get a feeling from several other people that they feel at least that plans would develop, but somewhere proposals would be rejected, and I'm trying to get at whether that was the President or whether it was . . .

TAYLOR: Yes. There were restraints put on, but generally it was for State reasons. State had received overall guidance, as we had, from the President to the effect that all actions should be kept in a low key. We didn't want to have great headlines across the papers that this and that had taken place and suggest clearly that the United States' hand was in this thing. The general feeling was that anything big was going to be charged to the United States. So that consideration put ceiling on what could be done.

HACKMAN: Any strong resistance from Robert Kennedy on that approach?

TAYLOR: No, I don't think so. I think he also felt, as most of us did, that that was about the best, the most aggressive policy that could be recommended at that time. And we were all skeptical as to what we could accomplish, but still felt it was worth trying, at the same time thinking we'd be acquiring intelligence--by pressuring Castro we would get a feel for him, for what's behind him.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any of Robert Kennedy's own comments about Castro as a personality or . . .

TAYLOR: No, I wouldn't say I ever felt that he personalized Castro as an adversary in a direct way, but he viewed him, as we all did, as a menace

to the peace of the hemisphere and also a Communist dictator, if you will, who was sitting on top of a very fine little country with whom we'd had one of the most friendly relations in the past.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any dissatisfaction on Robert Kennedy's part in terms of the Mongoose Committee with the kinds of things that were being suggested either by Lansdale or by the CIA people who were working with Lansdale?

TAYLOR: Well, yes, I would. I think we all were critical in a sense. Many times it didn't seem to make much sense to try something in Cuba which would endanger the lives of some of the Cubans who were involved in the thing. I think that that sense of responsibility he [RFK] had very, very deeply. "Why lose lives if the return isn't clearly clearly worth it?" he would ask. And so many of these little tasks were just annoyances to Castro and of very questionable value.

HACKMAN: I don't know if you can talk about these kinds of things? Can you think of specifics that he would have . . .

TAYLOR: No, I really can't. This is lost in the past. There were so many that came up and were discussed, some adopted, some rejected, either as a result of conflict with broad policy or because they just didn't seem worthwhile. The list would be long, but the actual value of any one would be very small.

HACKMAN: What about considering the possibility of removing Castro in some way? Was there much discussion of this throughout that period?

TAYLOR: In a conversational sense, but I know of nobody who advanced a specific proposal. Now whether because of moral grounds or unfeasibility, I couldn't say.

HACKMAN: Was there a point reached where people more or less, the Mongoose Group, concluded that we're not really accomplishing much in this way, the best hope is sort of just to try to make the Alliance for Progress work or something. What I'm trying to get at is how does the Lansdale Group sort of die down, which it does?

TAYLOR: Well, since the Bay of Pigs, we really had the choice of ejecting Castro by military means, which nobody proposed after the Bay of Pigs, of simply doing nothing and taking a philosophical point of view, "Well, time will take care of Castro," or doing something in between which would make his life as unpleasant as possible, make it just as hard as possible, and so to facilitate time, to be a helper to time. Well, the latter was really what we were doing, but little by little we saw that Castro was not getting weaker. If anything, he was getting stronger. And as I recall, the Mongoose effort just gradually died down. I don't ever recall it being called off. Now I've never consulted the record. As a matter of fact, you see, in October '52 I went over, and I became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and gave up the Chairman of the Mongoose Committee.

HACKMAN: '62.

TAYLOR: '62, yes. But by that time I would say that it'd ceased to have any real vitality.

HACKMAN: How did you stay in touch with that situation, then, after you became chairman? How did your relationship with the 5412 and the CI group change?

TAYLOR: Well, I remained a member of the Counter-insurgency group. You see, the Chairman JCS was a member of the Special Group (Counter-insurgency) and of Mongoose, so I was still a member as long as Mongoose met. But I've just forgotten when meetings became so rare. . . . Whenever Lansdale had something he wanted to get approved, we would meet, and eventually Lansdale just ran out of gas and, I think, was given a new assignment.

HACKMAN: But you continued to meet with CI?

TAYLOR: Yes. I'd been chairman of the Committee before I became Chairman of the Chiefs. When I returned to the Pentagon, I simply became a member of the Special Group (Counterinsurgency), and [U. Alexis] Alex Johnson became the chairman.

HACKMAN: And then . . .

TAYLOR: [W. Averell] Harriman after him.

HACKMAN: Harriman, right. Can you remember at the time that you left discussion that Robert Kennedy would become the chairman? And I've heard some people say that he wanted to. Can you remember that?

TAYLOR: Well, there was a long discussion as to who would take over my job that I had when I returned to the Chiefs. I had been the Chairman, CI, as the President's representative. It was obvious that Bob was one that should be considered to replace me. The general feeling among the group was that it ought to be a White House representative or, if not a White House representative, then State, on the grounds that State really had a certain primacy in this field. And I think that was a fair consideration. I would hate to trust my memory, but I'm sure I talked to Bob about it and he never expressed the desire to take the position. And I think I would be correct in saying that he recognized that he as the President's brother and as Attorney General really shouldn't take the chairmanship. Anyway, it was agreed that State should fill the chair if Alex Johnson were to be the man. It was really given to State with the understanding; if you nominate Alex Johnson, we'll make him chairman. That's the way I recall it. But he [RFK] continued to be just what he had been after Alex became chairman, just what he had been to me, a great strength to the chairman giving all the support of his personal prestige derived from his relation to the President.

HACKMAN: Do you know why at some point finally the Lansdale thing on Cuba, the Mongoose operation, was sort of shifted to State? Is this just because he runs out of things to do?

TAYLOR: I didn't know that it had. . . . it was. If so, I'd forgotten.

HACKMAN: Finally, yes, it was.

TAYLOR: See, Lansdale was really chosen on the grounds of being a reputed Cold Warrior who had won his spurs in various places in the Far East. So it was really his personal background that got him his job rather than what he happened to be--a general in the Air Force.

HACKMAN: Had his appointment on that been primarily at Robert Kennedy's suggestion, or was it your suggestion, or can you remember how that was made?

TAYLOR: I can't recall. I can't recall how it became Lansdale. I would say that the general feeling was that he disappointed us because he didn't come up with programs which, even if successful, would be very effective. And there always seemed to be a wordiness about his proposals; they were not concise effective plans which offered some hope of progress.

HACKMAN: Had Robert Kennedy been very familiar with Lansdale's previous record?

TAYLOR: I don't think so. He knew him only by record, I believe. I don't recall . . .

HACKMAN: I'm trying to think specifically of the I think Lansdale did a report in early '61 on Viet Nam that at least the President saw.

TAYLOR: That is right. There was a paper that was floated by Lansdale before I came down in

'61. I saw it later on.

HACKMAN: I just wondered if Robert Kennedy was familiar with that?

TAYLOR: I expect he saw it.

HACKMAN: After the Bay of Pigs investigation, obviously Robert Kennedy and you share a concern to bring in some kind of coordination on some of these problems. Does he also have clear ideas on, say, the workings of the National Security Council? You discussed in the first interview the abolition of the OCB [Operations Coordinating Board] and the planning staff. Does he have clearly established views on those things?

TAYLOR: I don't think that he did, although I would say it seemed to me that Bob had a sense for organization as a device, as a useful tool of government, beyond what the President had. During the Bay of Pigs we had a lot of discussions on what kind of adjustments of the federal relationships would be necessary to permit the kind of focusing of inter-departmental power that we thought was necessary. And it seemed to me that he understood organization and was for it, whereas I never felt that President Kennedy ever cared about it--he talked in terms of people. When I started to work for him, one of the things Bob told me was, "Now, you'll have to remember my brother doesn't think the way you do," referring to my old military past, which he was always throwing up to me. "He thinks about issues and people, and he likes to talk things out." And I soon found that the most carefully prepared fact sheet would rarely get read. Bob had been a great help to me in pointing out the President's foibles, but it always seemed to me Bobby talked my language to a very great degree and sensed the need for order around the President, which he realized was not present in that first year, a very disorderly year.

HACKMAN: Did he share the President's habit of not doing a lot of preparation and coming in and wanting to do most of the things by talking things out, or does he read most of the things you send to him?

TAYLOR: That's a little hard to answer. Of course, he was doing a thousand different things. He was overloaded by anybody's standards, and as a result he frequently came to meetings unprepared, but he learned quick as did President Kennedy. President Kennedy liked to learn by talking. I would say Bob had some of that same characteristic. On the other hand, if I had something I knew I wanted him really to study, I'd get on the telephone and say, "Now, Bob, I'm going to send over by hand a paper to be there at 2 o'clock. I just hope you'll get time to look at it." He never failed to do that, to respond to an appeal of that sort. But just the routine distribution of documents didn't mean very much to him.

HACKMAN: Can you tell me what kinds of things you were sending to him in this period, and also what normally he would be receiving on the foreign affairs-military side because of his work on the CI group?

TAYLOR: Well, I recognized that he was far more than just the Attorney General. My job was to support the President, and to keep Bob Kennedy well informed was a form of supporting the President. So I went out of my way to see that Bob got papers that I got which I thought he ought to know about. First, it might affect our common business. Secondly, it would give him background to assist in his rôle of advising the President. So I made myself a sort of letter box or letter exchange point for papers. When documents crossed my desk I often was thinking, "What does Bob need," and would sort out papers and see that he got them. Sometimes he'd seen them before. I gathered that the distribution of papers within his office was far more uncertain even than in the White House, which was pretty bad. So it was a sort of an informal alliance, so to speak, based upon a common interest in certain problems--a very useful one.

HACKMAN: Do you know if anyone else on the Committee would likely have been doing this same thing, or did you think you were the person . . .

TAYLOR: No, I don't think so. I think it was just our personal relationship.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about his relationship with the other people on that Committee? Who do you. . . . Who was he particularly high on that you can recall?

TAYLOR: We were a very congenial group and had the great advantage that everyone had a contribution to make. When he went back to his office and picked up the telephone he'd get things done-- that was the great strength of the Special Group. They were all doers, I would say, and that's the kind of people Bob liked. The people he didn't like usually were the witnesses and the assistants that we called, especially those from State. He was allergic to the junior echelon of State. He always liked Alex Johnson, however. So that within our group I would say we were all congenial. I wouldn't say that he played any great favorites. I always thought he had a very high regard for [Edward R.] Murrow, who joined the Committee shortly after it was formed. He had a low opinion of the AID [Agency for International Development] representatives, who I must say were often not particularly strong in representing the capabilities or the performance of their department.

HACKMAN: You mean the underlings or the member?

TAYLOR: Actually, you see, the high command of AID was very shakey then. Fowler Hamilton came in and was immediately swamped by his job and almost never attended the Special Group. He was the only one who violated the gentleman's agreement that the principal would always be there if he were in town. Fowler said, "I don't know my own job; I must learn it first." Hence, he delegated his position in the Special Group, and his delegate would often change, and that gave an unsatisfactory representation at the table. Then, when we called the lower echelons over to tell us what they could do or what they had done, generally speaking they were not a particularly impressive group of witnesses. Bob was very quick to note that.

HACKMAN: Okay, let me just think of the countries, let's see, that CI was assigned to monitor. Southeast Asia . . .

TAYLOR: First were the three Southeast Asia . . .

HACKMAN: Seymour Janow? Do you remember that name?

TAYLOR: Yeah.

HACKMAN: Was he one of the people who would frequently come?

TAYLOR: He came from time to time.

HACKMAN: Moscoso. Teodoro Moscoso.

TAYLOR: He testified from time to time. He was never a regular attendant.

HACKMAN: Those would be the two major areas, I think.

TAYLOR: One of the ground rules was we couldn't bring staff assistance with us. Everyone had to do his own homework and speak for himself, which was a very, very good rule. But on the other hand, we'd call in many witnesses to follow up on decisions that had been taken, programs that had been initiated, to find out really how they were doing.

HACKMAN: Did Robert Kennedy have anyone at all that you could tell that was frequently working for him on the foreign affairs, military affairs side?

TAYLOR: In his own staff?

HACKMAN: Yes.

TAYLOR: No, I really don't know that I do. Certainly nobody in the rare times he was absent ever took his place. He was there as an individual rather than representing an agency, as did, say, [Roswell L.]

Ros Gilpatric for Defense, Johnson for the State Department and so on.

HACKMAN: How does he treat people? Is he deferential to people on the Committee, the other members of the Committee, or is he. . . .

TAYLOR: When Bob respected anybody, he was a very fine person to work with. However, he was very impatient, and he could be very sharp whenever he detected soft thinking or inadequate preparation and that sort of thing. But his equals around the table, they were all men he had a high regard for. So as I say, we were all a very congenial group, but he was a little rough on witnesses from time to time when they didn't measure up to the standards he expected.

HACKMAN: Can you. . . . What can you remember about your early discussions with him of the whole question of counterinsurgency methods? How much does he bring in terms of reading or in terms of conversations with other people?

TAYLOR: Well, he was tremendously interested, of course. Again, whether his interest stemmed from the President's interest or whether it was in parallel, I never knew. But there was no doubt that he took it as a very serious requirement that this government get ready to face the kind of insurgency threat we were seeing in Southeast Asia and which was appearing elsewhere in the world. He believed it. He believed in the directive which we had as being something of real national importance and he just put his energy into carrying it out in every way. Now philosophically, I suppose. . . . I would like to ask him many questions now myself which I never asked at the time.

We were all growing up in this new business. We were learning and seeing the problem, and our concept was changing as we saw more of it. And soon we realized we were dealing with a problem of emerging nations. It wasn't just a case of getting out and shooting guerillas, by any manner of means. For the first time, I, at least, sensed the tremendous political and social aspects to this problem and the tremendous importance of anticipation of trouble, not waiting till you have a shooting guerilla war, but anticipating the social, economic, the political problems in the soft spots of the world and seeing what you can do, recognizing increasingly as time went on how little the United States could do. There are some things which we can do and should do, but we can't save the world, and I'm afraid at the start some of us had such missionary zeal that we perhaps thought we could.

HACKMAN: Can you remember who, either who within the government or who that you people were talking to and reading, particularly impressed you in that period? I mean people like [R.K.G.] Thompson, the British guy?

TAYLOR: I don't think I ever saw Thompson until I went to Saigon. I don't know. That's quite an interesting question.

HACKMAN: Or is [Walt W.] Rostow getting across to a lot of people in this period?

TAYLOR: Rostow, of course, was very much interested in counterinsurgency. He had written and spoken on the subject, but he was never a member of the Special Group, although he was in its environs all the time.

We were constantly talking counterinsurgency with many people. We had the problem of police training. I found two or three people in the police field, in AID, who really had the vision, so to speak. In rare places we found someone who by his own unaided devices had formed a concept of the problem, but there weren't very many. My military friends

were one of my problems. The average senior officer, when I would assert the need of reviewing our training methods, our military objectives and all that sort of thing, would say, "Well, look, that's old stuff. Our troops are always trained for guerrilla fighting, which is just one aspect of limited war." They were right to a certain extent. But it took about two years to get acceptance of the idea that the "War of Liberation" really was a new kind of warfare, a new department, so to speak, for which people had to be trained specifically and trained in a coherent way, not given little bits and pieces over a long career, but packaged up--using training methods and training devices and training doctrine so that the graduates of the training, so to speak, the alumni, would have a vision of a new kind of threat which is taking form for which we had to adjust ourselves in a drastic manner.

HACKMAN: You can't remember, in the early days, though, passing particular books or articles or things written within government to Robert Kennedy or to the other people like this?

TAYLOR: No, there wasn't much being written at the time except what we were generating. We generated a lot of things such as country internal defense plans and things of that sort and the government papers on doctrine which were hard to get written in a satisfactory way, never have been written entirely satisfactorily, I think. That kind of document, yes, we passed around all the time, but I don't recall any outside authorship.

HACKMAN: How were decisions made on what groups, what countries the Special Group for CI would monitor?

TAYLOR: It could happen in several ways. One was that we could recommend to the President that a certain country be assigned to us, because we were constantly watching the intelligence in the so-called soft areas, talking to ambassadors when they came back to Washington, talking to the desk people from State. So that we

as a Committee had a fairly good feel of where the danger spots were. From time to time we would suggest that a given country be given to us or later on that it be taken away. On the other hand, Dean Rusk from time to time made the same kind of suggestion. I don't recall the President personally telling us to take on a country, but it might have happened. But I would say the sources were self generation or the request from State.

HACKMAN: You don't remember any that Robert Kennedy was particularly interested in pulling in, do you?

TAYLOR: No. He was, of course, very much interested in Latin America, and it was a question of selectivity as to what country to watch because there were so many of them that had symptoms of trouble. That was always a problem in a committee of our sort--we were not full time; we were all part time labor; everybody had a lot of work to do back in his office. We had to avoid trying to do too much. There was a clear limit of practicality on what we could undertake.

HACKMAN: What exactly did monitoring a country mean? In your first interview with Elspeth Rostow you, I believe, described it as just "looking after" these countries, but what exactly . . .

TAYLOR: Well, it came to mean, first, verifying that there was a country defense plan--internal defense plan I think we called it at that time--which had been approved as a guide for the ambassador. And then it meant for us to watch the intelligence coming out of that country, talk to the officials, and to be in a position to raise a red flag if the situation seemed to deteriorate or if it seemed to need something that it wasn't getting--that kind of thing. So we were really trying to be trouble shooters, anticipating trouble.

As a Committee we never did anything, but as individuals we'd say, "Look, Gilpatric, will you go back to Defense and do so and do?" Whereupon he would. So we'd get things done by that device. We became also, of course, a means of alerting the President. If we got worried about country A, we'd pass the word across to the President, "We're worried about country A, we're watching it," along with any additional information we thought he needed. In a sense we were somewhat in the intelligence business as well as in operations.

HACKMAN: Were written reports made by this group to the agencies represented, or was it basically just . . .

TAYLOR: We made periodic reports to the President. At least, as I recall, twice a year--once or twice--he'd ask for a special report, which was little more than a tabulation of what we'd been doing, just for the record, largely.

HACKMAN: In terms of getting action, then, you said Robert Kennedy was primarily a goad within the group. How much would he do on the phone outside of the group? I mean, would he get involved in the Defense Department or with people down the line in the military or with the State people?

TAYLOR: I don't think so. I never saw that. He had the means to get things done by working at the top, and there was no incentive for him to get into the lower level business. He was very much interested in some of these things. He was interested in Fort Bragg just because of the counterinsurgency activities going on there. He visited there I know at one time; I think maybe more than that.

HACKMAN: Yes.

TAYLOR: I always tried to interest him in those things which I wanted to interest the President in. One thing was the small battlefield nuclear

weapons, which I thought had great possibilities to reinforce our conventional forces. I took him out to Nevada for the first firing of the Davy Crockett, a very small weapon with a fractional kiloton yield. They put on an attack and fired the weapon, and I thought Bob had a very good time in watching it and reflecting on the possibilities of the weapon. He would get into such things which had no real bearing on his business, either because he was interested or somebody wanted to interest him. And I was guilty of the latter.

HACKMAN: Were there many problems while you were chairman, and then from what you could see after Alex Johnson or Secretary Harriman took over, in keeping him focused on the business that the group was considering?

TAYLOR: I think you would probably say that as time went on the business diminished and his interest also diminished. I thought so as I sat there as a member. This sounds as if I was going to say when I was the chairman they got a lot done, and it ceased to be the case when I was no longer Chairman. The point was that the first year of the life of the Special Group everything needed to be done. We had endless things to be started. But then after a year or a year and a half our initiative had been pretty well exhausted, and it became the rather dull business of following up and seeing how things were going. So it affected us all. I think we lost that feeling of excitement which existed at the outset.

HACKMAN: Did he ever have any problems in understanding any of either the written materials that you gave him or the discussion that was going on?

TAYLOR: No. We had many military debates during the Bay of Pigs, and, of course, I'd accuse him of becoming a field marshal after the first week. But we'd get on and argue the tactics of the landing and what was reasonable and what was unreasonable. And every now and then in later years he'd say whenever I would

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criticize his position on Viet Nam, "Well, you're the man responsible. You taught me all these things about not taking armies into Asia." Of course, he was a very quick intellect, and he was very perceptive, also he was a good listener during a period of time that he wasn't sure of himself. Then after when he knew what he was talking about, he didn't hesitate to make his views known.

He also had a good sense of humor and an ability to laugh about himself which I've never heard commented on. He could kid himself in an awfully nice way--a very, very appealing way.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any major gaps in sort of his. . . . You have something else?

TAYLOR: No. No, I was just thinking about some of his comments on military matters.

HACKMAN: Can you remember some anecdotes of . . .

TAYLOR: No. I'd have to think about it. Of course, he was like. . . . His brother also was always ribbing the military, and I was the only fellow in sight to fight back, so I was always trying to rebut their charges. With limited success sometimes.

HACKMAN: Okay, I was going to ask you if you can remember sort of his overall approach to foreign affairs, politico-military, however you want to phrase it, the major gaps, I mean. . . .

TAYLOR: Well, obviously he didn't know all about foreign affairs, nobody does. And he himself was going into a lot of matters which were new to him. But the point is he was an activist. He was a doer. He was impatient with theory. And I used to flatter him, saying, "Look, you could have made the 101st Airborne Division. You're the kind of guy we wanted around to take a hill or hold a trench." And he would have. He was that type, and I think that was one of the common bonds we had throughout our friendship.

HACKMAN: You'd commented in that first interview that frequently Robert Kennedy had to act as the, I think you said "hatchet man" for the President or at least he had to do many of the unpleasant tasks. What kind of things do you have in mind? Do you remember having specific things in mind then?

TAYLOR: Well, some of them I've just heard about and not actually observed-how in the campaign he was really the fellow that did some of the unpleasant tasks, that in some of the unpleasant relationships with LBJ he was the go-between and that certainly made more difficult their relationship after President Kennedy's death. But the President was frequently sending him off to see so-and-so who was causing the President trouble. He was the negotiator on kinds of business which I had nothing to do with. I simply knew that he was being engaged in that kind of thing.

HACKMAN: Primarily in the United States or do you mean like [Achmed] Sukarno in . . .

TAYLOR: No, I'm thinking more of activity in the United States. I know also that on these trips abroad he carried the President's message and undoubtedly was a very effective emissary.

HACKMAN: You mentioned General [William P.] Yarborough. Can you remember people within the military that were particularly effective in following up on the counterinsurgency, sort of the turn to the counterinsurgency approach?

TAYLOR: Once the word got around that the President wanted a certain thing done everybody, everybody put his respective shoulder to the wheel. Yarborough was down at Bragg a good part of this time. The Joint Chiefs of Staff set up the position of SACSA [Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities]--I think that was the non-euphonious abbreviation for the position which General [Victor H.] Krulak held for a long period

of time. I've forgotten the exact time he came into the job, but he was outstanding in handling that work for the Chiefs. If you wanted something done in counterinsurgency by the military, you got on the phone to Krulak or to his successor or predecessor, and you were really at the focal point of all military activity directed at counterinsurgency. That business of getting key contact points set up was a very important part of the organization for counterinsurgency because until the Special Group came along, everybody was in charge or nobody. Eventually we got these focal contact points throughout the important places in government.

HACKMAN: Did General Krulak frequently appear before the Special Group?

TAYLOR: Yes. Yes, when necessary. He worked so well. . . . Usually when you got called over you'd done something wrong or hadn't done anything. His performances were always good.

HACKMAN: Can you remember problems in getting the other agencies then to respond particularly to. . . .

TAYLOR: Only those difficulties which were inherent in the kind of organizations they were. State is not an operating organization. It's not built that way, and the requirements we were placing on it frequently were new kinds of things, new kinds of tests. AID was always shifting its personnel, yet they had a very important role to play and I would say their batting average was not very high, not because they didn't try, but they didn't know how. They didn't have the people that knew how to operate. CIA is well organized, well structured. I would say their part was done well, generally speaking. Defense also had the benefit of organization, so their performance was pretty good. USIA had very little to contribute. They again are not structured--no continuity of personnel. So those were the strong and weak points, and they came about not from ill will or good will, but simply by the nature and personality of the organizations.

HACKMAN: I said I was going to let you go.

TAYLOR: Yes, I'm going to have to break off about 2 o'clock. I've got some other things I can't. . . .

HACKMAN: Let me see if I can just shoot. . . . very quick. Maybe we can, if you're willing, go on again sometime.

TAYLOR: All right. All right. That might be a better way if you want to look over your notes and find out what we have and haven't touched.

HACKMAN: Well, let me just ask you--and maybe this will help me some next time--can you remember, of the countries that were monitored in that period by the Special Group, the ones where there were particular problems in getting the country team together?

TAYLOR: We couldn't answer that too well, because you never can appraise a country team without going to the country and sitting down and really examining the rôles played by the principal participants. That was one of the obvious weaknesses of the Special Group. We had no field force of our own. We had to depend upon the responsible departments reporting on themselves which is far from ideal, yet, incidentally, it's the only way the President ever gets anything reported. He has no inspectors of his own. So in that sense we never got, at least I never got, the feel of what was inside a given country team except when the results were poor. In that case we called in the responsible State officer or the ambassador himself and went over with him the situation. I'm quite sure that the quality of the country team was highly uneven as is always the case, some very good and some quite poor, and usually reflecting the leadership of the ambassador.

HACKMAN: Can you remember specific missions to the field that came about basically because the Special Group was interested?

TAYLOR: Well, I would so characterize a great deal of the police programs in these countries. As you know, in Latin America usually there's very little between the protection afforded by an untrained policeman in a given town and the use of the armed forces. We were convinced that one aspect of anticipatory planning to prevent insurgency situations was to develop good police methods in the cities and also rural police, which called for police training. This was resisted in many countries where the military thought the policeman was invading their prerogative. And I'm quite sure it was U.S. pressure which in turn was generated by the Special Group in many countries that gradually beat down that opposition--not entirely, but at least it made progress. And I think the improved quality of the police forces in many countries today can go back to that.

HACKMAN: That's something I wanted to get at. I think I phrased that question poorly. What I really meant was--when I said missions--was, can you remember people being sent to the field, say from State, to evaluate country teams?

TAYLOR: There was a little of that done. There was one. . . . We had recommended that from time to time mixed teams representing all of the departments, which in turn were represented in a given country, make a round of countries. And that was done for several Latin American countries. I've forgotten the exact circumstances. And it dug up a lot of very interesting things, but we found that it was very unpopular apparently in the missions abroad. They felt they were being inspected, which they were, and I don't think State ever enjoyed it particularly because when you got the reports back, they raised endless questions to follow up on, and then finally it was hard to get qualified people to do it. You can't just pick up anybody--put him on a mission and send him into a country--whose judgment will be worth paying much attention to. If you didn't have qualified people, it was better not to impose that kind of visitation on a busy ambassador.

HACKMAN: Are there instances when someone, say, at the assistant secretary level is sent out on something like this?

TAYLOR: It has been done, but I don't recall it being done in connection with our activities. The record might show differently. I just don't remember. The assistant secretary himself is almost chained to his post here in Washington. He in turn has no inspectorate of his own. That's one of the great weaknesses of our overseas business is that independent and responsible, qualified eyes don't look over what we're doing. Instead we have to depend upon the actors themselves to report.

HACKMAN: Okay, why don't we cut there today?

TAYLOR: All right.