INTERVIEWEE: DAVID K. E. BRUCE (Tape #1)
INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER
December 9, 1971

Ba: This is an interview with Ambassador David Bruce, it's December 9, 1971 and I'm Harri Baker. And Mr. Bruce, of course was Ambassador to Great Britain during the Kennedy and Johnson years, 1961-1969 --the longest I believe anyone has held that post, sir.

B: Yes.

Ba: And before that Ambassador to West Germany and Paris--the only man who has held all three of those and, before that, a long career in American diplomacy.

May I mention for this record, as you and I said before we started here, you have done an oral interview similar to this for the John F. Kennedy Library, have you not, sir?

B: Yes, I have.

Ba: Then, we'll just begin with your first acquaintance with Mr. Johnson. When did you first meet the man and have knowledge of him?

B: I first met President Johnson when he was a Senator. As you know, he occupied a particularly commanding position there and I had occasion from time to time in connection with my own activities, whether in public life as well as in some private affairs, to appear before committees of which he was a member. I can't say that I knew him other than casually. I always found his attitude as a Senator on these committees one of great courtesy, and he seemed to have a comprehensive knowledge of some of the intricate matters with which I wouldn't have believed he was probably familiar. After that, during the war years, I was abroad--

Ba: May I ask here at this point, the kind of thing you'd be mentioning would be--you say after the war years--your first acquaintance with him would have been before the war years.

B: Before the war years, yes.

Ba: Before World War II.

B: Yes.

Ba: And the kind of activity you mention would have been, I assume, political and when you were in private business?

B: I was, for example, Assistant Secretary of Commerce in 1947, in charge of International Affairs in the Department of Commerce under then-Secretary Harriman. In that connection, I had to make a good many appearances before committees because we had charge of the export control apparatus and all sorts of miscellaneous undertakings.

Afterwards, I was sent to France as Chief of the American Delegation on the Marshall Plan's aid to France.

Ba: That was after World War II.

B: After World War II. Because of that I was summoned before congressional committees from time to time. I had occasion then to see President Johnson, but again only casually. My real beginning of any close acquaintanceship with him was after I had been appointed Ambassador to Great Britain. When President Kennedy was killed, President Johnson sent for me and said that he expected and hoped that I would remain in the office there. I told him that of course I was honored and delighted to do so.

At that time, whenever I came back from London, I invariably saw him at the White House. Once again I'll mention, it always seemed to me such a remarkable thing in so busy a man, his great courtesy and the amount of time that he spent talking to and familiarizing his subordinates with some of his thoughts and some of his problems and also, with some of his hopes.

Ba: To back up a little before that, were you active in the '60 campaign?

B: In the '60 campaign?

Ba: Yes, when John Kennedy and Mr. Johnson ran.

B: No, I was not.

Ba: Did you see Mr. Johnson during his Vice Presidential years? Did any of his trips take him to London while you were there?

B: Yes, I did see him once or twice, but again it was, you know, doing these grand tours when you have no closeness really with the person who is undertaking the travel.

Ba: Did Mr. Johnson's rather flamboyant style go over well in London when he would visit there?

B: I believe the British generally considered him a picturesque character. They knew he was a man of great force. This is before he became President.

Ba: Did he have any knowledge of British leaders before he became President? Was he acquainted with Mr. Douglas-Home or the future Prime Minister, Mr. Wilson?

B: Whether he knew them personally, I simply don't recall. President Johnson, as you know, had a familiarity with the names and probably knew a good deal about the statesmen in almost every country that I've had anything to do with.

Ba: At the time of President Kennedy's assassination, you traveled back to Washington with the British delegation to the funeral?

B: No, I did not.

Ba: You did not? When were you first contacted by the then President Johnson after the assassination?

B: Within a matter of weeks. Then I returned to London and from time to time I would be sent for. As I say, whenever I came to Washington I was usually sent for by the Department of State, but the President always told me to come and see him, which I did.

Ba: At that first consultation after Mr. Johnson had become President, after I would assume as is normal in that case you submitted a resignation which was not accepted and so on?

B: Exactly.

Ba: Did he then in a briefing session with you outline any specific ideas he had on policy toward Britain or Europe generally?

B: No, he did not. We talked about a subject that has always interested me and I assume himself, also, and that was the movement toward some sort of unity in Europe and the various things which had been done in that particular. I told him a good deal about Monsieur Jean Monnet, who was more or less the father of that movement. Later when the President met him I think Monnet made, as he usually does, a tremendous impression on him--as President Johnson did on Monnet. But we had no problems with the United Kingdom during that period, at least, that were critical. There was always a discussion between the two governments about military affairs, about our respective participations in NATO and matters affecting the Alliance.

Ba: At the time, would that specifically have been any lingering repercussions of the Skybolt affair and the possibility of the MLF force?

B: The possibility of the MLF force was always there. I don't know what year it was finally disposed of, but it seemed to me it had gone on like the Old Man and the Sea, for years.

On the Skybolt, the feeling in respect to it, the interest in it--I'd rather put it that way--had been largely dissipated because so much had been said about it and so much had been done about it during the Kennedy Administration that the hangover was not of any special importance.

Ba: You know, on that MLF force, my layman's view is the same as yours, that just gradually you heard less about it. Did President Johnson or anyone else in the American government ever specifically say: "This is out; we're not going to talk about it anymore."?

B: To the best of my knowledge it was never laid formally to rest.

Ba: You know the British came up with sort of an alternate version of that, did they not? I've forgotten the exact term, but an Atlantic Naval Force or something to that effect.

B: Something of that sort, but that was never seriously considered here. I think the idea of an MLF didn't generate the enthusiasm some of our people had expected it to do in foreign countries. It would have been an intricate and expensive undertaking--fascinating you know in prospect. But I would have said it petered out.

Ba: At the time there was some time that at least one major motives on the American side was to somehow or another avoid specifically giving West Germany nuclear weapons.

B: That's correct. I think one of the motives behind which animated, probably the principle one which animated those who were intensely interested in the MLF was the hope that that would allay any German tendency or desire to have nuclear weapons of their own, but probably more importantly that it would give the Germans a greater sense of participation in the operations of the NATO Alliance and would tie them even more firmly to the West rather than subject them to any temptations from the East.

Ba: In reference to what you mentioned earlier about European unity and Mr. Johnson's interest in it, I would suppose at the time the practical first step toward that was British entry into the Common Market. Did we, the United States, do anything to try to help Britain get in the Common Market in those years?

B: Let me put it another way. I don't think in either the Kennedy or the Johnson Administrations that our principal interest in European unity was directed toward the Common Market. From the very beginning, if you will recall the circumstances, when the Marshall Aid legislation was passed, from that time on almost every year the Congress in making appropriations endorsed the idea of a coming together, of a coalescence, of the nations in Western Europe--an idea which we said we would heartily support inspite of the fact that it was evident in some of the economic aspects, and possibly later in some of its political conclusions, it might not be immediately favorable to our national interest. I cite agriculture as an easy example of that. So President Johnson, I think was a convinced European, so to speak--American-European--from the beginning.

Ba: You mean European in the sense of a advocate of European unity?

B: Yes. He had a mind, as you know, which grasped the larger aspects of problems with great ease. When he endorsed something in principle, it wouldn't be easy to shake him from it--given the strength of his convictions about all subjects.

Ba: Yes. You are putting charitably what other people have put a good deal more forcefully.

In those years, the main obstacle of that kind of European unity was from Charles DeGaulle. Did President Johnson ever discuss President DeGaulle's position with you?

B: Yes, he did, and in the most temperate way. He knew the obduracy of General DeGaulle would make almost impossible any real cooperation toward forging a greater unity in Europe because of the non-admission of Great Britain and, secondly, that DeGaulle was extremely troublesome from the standpoint of the general interest of NATO. I did have occasion to talk to him on a good many occasions about it--briefly always. I was not astonished, but I was struck by what I called his temperateness on this subject. I never heard him say a critical word about the General; but there were some critical words about what he thought was his lack of judgment, his failure to view these affairs in proper perspective, but always winding up with a tribute to General DeGaulle as a really great man.

Ba: Had you known General DeGaulle back as early as the World War II days when you were then with OSS?

B: Yes, I did.

Ba: Were you able to give President Johnson any clues to the man's personality?

B: No. The only thing I remember saying to President Johnson about him was that I shared his admiration for him as a great man; and I thought he had attitudes toward nationalism in France, for example, that had served his country extremely well, but that they'd also colored, I thought rather adversely, his judgment on problems which required, and policies which required, the subordination of national interest, which happened also in our case, to those of a more far-reaching and necessary character. I was always, as I said, impressed by President Johnson's refraining from saying anything critical about either the personality, the character or the ability of General DeGaulle.

Ba: I get the impression the President's attitude must have been one of resignation--"This too will pass."

B: I think it was.

Ba: The reference you made awhile back about--you mentioned in connection with France's policies "in our case"--would that have been a reference to our Viet Nam involvement?

B: No, because at that time Viet Nam was scarcely on the horizon, you know. We were just commencing on it. I never had occasion to talk to the President about Viet Nam, because of living in England as I did during the whole of his Presidency, Viet Nam was entirely outside of my orbit. I knew nothing about it except as I read about it in the newspapers.

Ba: If I may postpone it, I was going to ask you about the one thing you would have been involved in, the Wilson and Kosygin meeting, but if I may postpone that for a moment.

B: Yes.

Ba: You mentioned earlier that there did develop during the Johnson years some discussion between the United States and Britain about weaponry. Would that have been the question of giving Polaris missles to Britain?

B: No, because that was already settled, as you know, at Nassau. So that was before the Johnson Administration. There was a constant interchange, of course, between experts--between then-Secretary McNamara and his counterpart in the British government on the subject of weaponry. There were people scurrying back and forth across the Atlantic, it seemed to me, without cessation. But their dealings were mostly on technological aspects of weaponry.

Ba: Not up at the policy level where you would have gotten involved?

B: No.

Ba: To shift gears slightly, what were President Johnson's reactions to Wilson's election to the prime ministership?

B: He viewed the results with no surprise, as was his habit whenever anyone came into office who had been previously in opposition. He extended, as I recall it rather quickly an invitation to Mr. Wilson to meet him, as he did soon, and commenced an interchange between them sometimes by telephone, although infrequently, but often by letter. I've seen a good many of the letters from either side because they were sent to me either by President Johnson or the State Department or by Mr. Wilson. But someday I should think the whole correspondence will be available and I think will be quite interesting.

Ba: I'm sure it will be, I'm sure it is in the Johnson Library now and will be made available in the course of things.

B: The records of the telephone conversations, I've never seen.

Ba: You know, that's one of the reasons why we're doing this kind of oral history project. Many of those telephone conversations just may not be recorded.

B: Yes, that's quite possible.

Ba: Hopefully, this sort of thing will fill in some of the gaps.

B: There's another thing which with his splendid memory, President Johnson may be able to fill in himself. Wilson also has a remarkable memory, an unusually retentive memory. Sometimes when Wilson and President Johnson met, President Johnson would take Mr. Wilson into a room and stay there with him without anybody else being present.

Ba: Did that happen frequently, sir?

B: No, because they didn't meet as frequently as that. But it did happen, before, for example, there was going to be a presentation on some subject and Mr. Wilson had his own people with him, and President Johnson had some of the members of the National Security Council or Cabinet officers. President Johnson politely would ask Mr. Wilson to go into the Oval room. They might not emerge for half an hour and then they'd come in smiling and say "We've had a good conversation." That's about all the rest of them heard of it because there were occasions when no notes were taken.

Ba: What sort of thing would be involved in that kind of meeting? I would assume that you would almost professionally have to make a guess, if you weren't told?

B: I would hazard a guess that much of it was concerned with Mr. Wilson asking Mr. Johnson about American politics, which he always was well informed of--domestic partisan politics. And in reverse, the same thing, President Johnson asking Mr. Wilson about the play between the three parties in Great Britain, on which he was well informed.

Ba: In your experience in diplomacy, is that kind of thing unusual, that two heads of state get together like that privately?

B: Yes, because I think seldom have two heads of state been such long-time master politicians in the domestic sense as those two. I think they found it extremely interesting to compare notes, as I'm sure was the case when President Johnson talked to Harold Macmillan, who was also a master of the political crowd in Great Britain.

Ba: Yes. Mr. Macmillan's memoirs are coming out now and I was glancing through the most recent volume the other day and there is a good deal of politics in them.

B: There's bound to be.

May I say one thing in connection with the, as I've said, the usually rather short and infrequent conversations I had the pleasure of having with President Johnson. I remember distinctly that after the death of President Kennedy, the first time I saw him, when we had disposed of what we'd been discussing vis-a-vis Great Britain, he asked me whether I had anything of a personal nature to say to him. I said, "Yes, Mr. President I have. I have been interested for years in the conversation of trees and have conducted some forestry operations for my own benefit and whatnot. But I think one of the crying needs--and it was brought to my mind by reading yesterday in the papers what Mrs. Johnson had in mind about beautifying America--that's a large undertaking. But if one went at it in segments, for example, I'm not sure that having the imagination to say you're going to beautify America is not something which certainly in part is realizable."

He said, "Give me an example."

I said, "I'll give you an example. I'm not a Californian, but the Redwood trees in California and in some other place on the Pacific Coast, the giant Sequoias, are unique in the world. And the number of them that still exist, some of them going back more than a thousand years, are sufficiently great that they ought to be considered an international heritage rather than simply a national one. And the second category there can be no question about--"

(Turned off tape to answer the telephone)

Ba: You were talking about telling Mr. Johnson that an example of practical beautification would be saving the Redwood trees in California.

B: Yes. I was impressed by his reaction to that, because of course the matter had been presented to him before, I'm quite certain, while he was a Senator even.

But what was to me so gratifying about any conversation with the President was that if you had an idea you advanced to him, he would take it seriously. He might dismiss it as being fruitless and all of that, or he might endorse it. But you got action. And I've never forgotten this he said to me, he said, "Who in your opinion is the person in Washington who might give me immediately some advice about conserving the Redwoods, and the Sequoias."

I said, "Well, that's easy, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. When he was Governor of California, he tried it." Whereupon to my amazement President Johnson taps on his machine of telephonic call bells to get to the Chief Justice, and he made an engagement for the Chief Justice to drop by and see him that evening. He said, "I'll talk to the Chief Justice about Redwoods."

I said, "That's fine, sir."

Then we talked a bit about planting trees along all the national highways. He said, "Are you familiar with how that's done in France, for instance?"

I said I knew something about it; it's mandatory in certain cases where there are government funds being used and trees have to be planted as part of the project.

He said, "Now the thing to do in that is get hold of the Secretary of the Interior and tell him to not spend any of his funds until I have a talk with him about planting trees." Whereupon there's another thing on the telephone and I've forgotten what the first name of the Secretary of the Interior was, but President Johnson said, "I've been talking to a friend about the importance of having trees along the highways; Lady Bird and I have often discussed this and we think it's essential; and I don't want any funds spent on these programs until we have a chance to talk about the tree part of it. Goodbye."

I must say that sort of thing makes a terrific impression on me because it made then, and continued in more minor instances later on, the readiness to consider an idea no matter how grandiose it might seem, no matter how difficult it might seem. But this thing for example of beautifying America is a tremendous project, and it is realizable. Nothing ever seemed to daunt the optimism of the President, that something, no matter how difficult, could be done. If it couldn't be done it better be seriously considered. Well, that was an early impression I had.

Ba: By any chance--I gather he impressed you in that episode, is there any chance you might have impressed him with what many people might think was unexpected knowledge of forestry and conservation?

B: He knew I had a good deal to do with farming activities over a period of years. Of course, we often talked about that.

Ba: That's right, you have a farm in Virginia, and he has a Ranch in Texas.

B: That's right.

Ba: Did you ever compare agricultural notes?

B: We did in the early days and then I got rid of my farm. He thought that was bad. I kept the house.

Ba: Back to British policy in those years. There was talk at the time that--well, to put it bluntly--that President Johnson and Prime Minister Wilson did not get along well together.

B: I never saw any instances of it because when they met each other --their talks, which were lengthy, were marked by the utmost courtesy. If either disliked the other, or if either were suspicious of the other, no onlooker like myself would have been aware of it. I've heard all sorts of comments on it, what was said before and after by one or the other--rather accustomed to that in every country. But I can only say that I never saw a sign of friction during their meetings.

Ba: Did the fact that such talk did go around, whether founded or not, make your job as go-between a little harder.

B: No, not a bit.

Ba: Did the correspondence that you mentioned indicate anything of this sort?

B: None. I think they were both firm in stating their positions on policy of their respective countries, but there was no acrimony --really, extraordinarily polite correspondence, almost affectionate at times, even sentimental.

Ba: On a first name basis, I guess.

B: Oh yes. I'm not sure in the case of Mr. Wilson whether he called the President "Lyndon". I don't think--I don't remember. If not, I suppose it goes back to the tradition of Churchill whom everybody called by his first name, but he never referred to President Franklin Roosevelt except as Mr. President.

Ba: Of course, as a matter of protocol, the President of the United States is a head of state and a British Prime Minister is a head of government.

B: But in the British system, the frequency with which not only fellow cabinet officers, fellow members of the cabinet, but their social friends and ordinary acquaintances address the leading British politicians and statesmen by their first names is more frequent even than it is here. Although in ordinary social intercourse the use of first names is more infrequent than here.

Ba: That's surprising. There goes another stereotype about the reserved British.

B: Yes.

Ba: In other matters of policy in those years, these are just some things that I know were going on. What was America's reaction to the Rhodesian unilateral independence? Did the American government try to say anything about Britain's reaction to that?

B: No, my recollection is they did not. It accepted early on the idea of sanctions through the U.N. But our investments, and also our trade with Rhodesia, as you will remember, were extremely small. And so our national commercial interest for example, were not involved to anything like the extent as was the case with some countries much smaller than ourselves. So it wasn't a hot subject. Of course here the feeling was that something must be worked out so that the black majority of Rhodesia had a better chance than they were enjoying. But there was no bitterness about it between our two governments.

Ba: Speaking of trade matters, did we attempt to influence Britain to change its policy of trade toward Cuba and Red China and Eastern Europe?

B: That was almost perpetual, because of the--what is the name of that organization that screens the so-called strategic items? They were always at work and had always been difficult, as you know. The sale of computers even to the Soviet Union today, I don't know whether it's entirely free, but one would have to take those things up specifically because of the complete embargo on trade with China. The British had no sympathy with that, and the same thing applied to Cuba. I don't know. After we had said we were going to embargo trade with Cuba and China, which were the principal ones, the subject was just never brought up, except sometimes I remember in the case of the sale of some buses to Cuba that public statements were made here--I don't recall whether the President himself did--about how the British should not have made that sale. I happen to be familiar with it because one of the people best informed on the subject said to me, "The British were lucky to get the order for the supply of buses"--it was the Leyland Company as I remember--but I think the politicians better remember on both sides of the Atlantic that there were five other countries engaged in competitive bidding for that order. "The idea that Great Britain has violated American precepts in respect to trade with Cuba doesn't leave Great Britain as the only offender."

Ba: That episode was in Douglas-Home's government I believe, wasn't it?

B: Yes, it was. I think it was true also when Michael Stewart was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Great Britain, that there were some other discussions when he appeared before the Press Club in Washington. I think he was queried then about British trade with Cuba and certainly on embargoes of one country or another.

Ba: Also, I guess, sort of continuing during the Johnson years were the general financial difficulties of Britain in its foreign exchange.

B: Yes. That, as you know, is handled so much by the central bankers and here by the Federal Reserve; the Treasury, of course; Federal Reserve, by Al Hayes of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Mr. Combs handled the foreign exchange transactions for it. And they met in Basel and other places in Europe. It seemed to me that it was almost periodical, these crises affecting sterling. Sterling was much more affected then--or more frequently let's say--than the dollar is now. Those were carried on rather informally by experts--experts in the sense that the central bankers constituted the core of everything. Bill Martin, as Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and others, including the different Secretaries of the Treasury, were always involved.

But that didn't cause any difficulty in political relationships between the two countries, because it was considered, I think, more of a technical matter. It wasn't something which engaged the concern of the American public. It engaged the concern of the British public. It engaged the concern of the German citizenry because the Germans are so acutely conscious of anything that threatens to disturb the purchasing value of the mark. That goes back to their tremendous inflations of earlier days. In the case of the French they are much more aware of movements of gold and variations in foreign exchange than our people are because they again have been familiar with devaluations, and then they've got a viewpoint officially on the use of gold.

Ba: In '65 and '66, when apparently a real crisis point was reached in foreign exchange for Britain, there was some talk of--as to how it appeared to a layman at the time--there was some talk of Britain pulling back from NATO, which it would seem would make that a policy issue. And then there were reports about Henry Fowler, the Secretary of the Treasury showing up, and then there were loans forthcoming from the United States. Not to be too subtle about it, was there a deal made?

B: No. We were anxious in that connection, not because there happened to be a currency crisis at the time--an exchange crisis. We were anxious for the British to maintain more of a presence in the Far East than they were willing to do after their curtailment of some of their expenditures and also presence in military sense in the Far East--let's say East of Suez. This curtailment was dictated largely, as far as the popular impression in Great Britain was concerned, by financial reasons. Their expenditures were out of hand, seemed to be out of proportion to the political gains that might have been had as a result of continuing as previously. Our people of course were keen to have them continue to share the burdens which we had assumed in the Far East.

But there never was any difficulty between the two governments in the sense that we said, "If you will do this, we will help you, about your foreign exchange problems." Because actually what happened--happens also almost invariably in these crises in currency values--is the interests of all the rich countries are so intertwined that nobody wants to see a drop-out. So it's no longer something that is done on a bilateral basis; it is done on a multilateral basis. There is where the governors of the central banks in Europe have such vast influence in such meetings.

Ba: Then in that case in the '65 and '66 crisis, Britain did not devaluate the pound and instead ordered rather drastic emergency measures at home, a freeze. But that was their choice without undue pressure coming from the States?

B: We never advocated it as far as I know. Maybe somebody in Treasury would say differently. The devaluation of the pound, we considered that a matter for the British alone to determine upon. The governor of the Bank of England in those days, of course, was Lord Cromer, who is now the British Ambassador in Washington. He was of immense assistance to his government because of his thorough knowledge of banking--his own experience in that field--and also because of the confidence that the bankers of Central Europe had in him. He had an extraordinary standing.

Ba: What is his full name, sir?

B: Earl of Cromer

Ba: Oh, the Earl of Cromer.

B: Yes. He's the British Ambassador to Washington.

Ba: Then, is there any relationship between what you were talking about there about the British presence East of Suez and a couple of years later the discussions for some sort of joint naval force in the

Mediterranean?

B: The joint naval force in the Mediterranean was carried on on an interservice level. Although I was fairly familiar with it, I never had any direct participation in it. You know, people talked directly from Defense to the people in the Defense Department in Great Britain which is customary. Then it broke down into talks between naval officers on one side and the other. Of course that involved the whole NATO structure, in a sense. I remember there was quite a to-do over who was going to command at the Island of Malta. An Italian admiral was finally put in charge. But what command was he going to exercise over what? That's the sort of thing that goes on interminably. We never had any particular problem about the Mediterranean.

Ba: Was Britain sympathetic to that idea of a joint naval force?

B: No, because as I recall it, they thought that with our fleet there and with what they had in the Mediterranean, there were sufficient forces. What happened at the time of the Arab-Israeli conflict, I don't know. Whether some were rushed in or not.

Ba: You were not involved?

B: No, because that was entirely apart from the ordinary governmental transaction. Everyone was alarmed, of course, but I wasn't involved in whatever decisions were made here.

Ba: To get to Viet Nam now, the major incident that stands out, of course, is the Wilson and Kosygin meeting. Was there anything before that, earlier, say as early as '65? Was there any attempt by the British government to play a mediating role or otherwise get involved in it?

B: I think the British government was always interested in trying to ascertain whether their own contacts could not be used in someway or another to bring about a settlement of the affair in Viet Nam. So they would embrace any opportunity that was offered to them. The large one of course, in Mr. Wilson's mind, was the meeting with Kosygin. Mr. Wilson had been in the Soviet Union often, and he had kept up a sort of--I don't know whether a flow of correspondence, or how he communicated--but he was regarded during his trips there as being friendly to them. And he had high hopes that maybe in personal conversation with Kosygin he might be able to bring about something useful. We were approaching that whole imbroglio through whatever avenues seemed to be open to us. In this instance we gave Mr. Wilson, if that's the proper expression, a good deal of latitude in informing him on what terms and in what respects we were ready, if possible, to arrive at a settlement.

Ba: Did that sort of activity include, oh, such things as--Patrick Gordon-Walker was somehow or other involved in attempts like that, wasn't he not?

B: He had been in the beginning, you see, the equivalent of our Secretary of State, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He always favored--most of the members of the British Cabinet did--if terms could be agreed upon satisfactory to the United States and seemed to be honorable, there be a cessation, a complete cessation of hostilities in Viet Nam. That feeling was strong.

Ba: Did the British propose formally a revival of the Geneva Conference with Britain and Russia as co-chairman to see if, through that mechanism, the situation could be dealt with?

B: That, as I remember, is one of the many things which they proposed from time to time. You see, as co-chairman the British were always anxious to have that committee, if one can call it that, play some substantive role. And it's a great pity that it didn't--a little like the control commission, Poland, India, and Canada, which has been relatively, almost completely ineffective because anybody can veto the decisions if they wish to. India is a so-called neutral state, Poland is a Communist State, and Canada is an out-side state, and they had great difficulty I think in making any kind of progress. It might have been possible had all parties and here I am going to say, the North Vietnamese were possibly the most difficult, if all parties were agreed there was something that could be done.

But the co-chairmanship is a different thing that goes back, you know, to the Geneva Conference. And the British repeatedly asked the Soviets to take some action with them as co-chairman that might result in a conference or closer conversations than we'd had before. But how important that was at the time of the Kosygin visit I don't remember. I don't think it was because it was something perennial--

Ba: Was there formal American support for the idea of reviving the Geneva Conference? Or what was the American attitude toward it?

B: You see, I was at the other end of the line, so what support existed here in Washington in the ruling circles, I don't know, I heard that we would agree to almost anything that seemed to promise development. There were difficulties alleged, always, proposed --rather attention was called to the difficulties of trying to settle anything, as one example, if China were not included. China was included in the first Conference but would they be included in the second?

There were any number of ideas put forward that a Geneva Conference would not be successful in this case unless there had been quasi-agreement reached in advance, between North Viet Nam and the United States, on the shape of things to come. That included, of course, the agreement of the South Vietnamese government.

Ba: Did the Wilson government support for America's Viet Nam policy, cost Wilson very much at home?

B: Yes, I think it was a daring thing for him to have done from a political standpoint.

Ba: Was Mr. Johnson properly appreciative of it?

B: Yes, he was.

Ba: You would think he would understand that kind of--

B: Yes, he understood it, that dangerous political course, yes.

Ba: Who in the British government were influential in that policy and support--George Brown for example?

B: I would have thought that was largely Mr. Wilson's own decision. All these decisions are reached in Cabinet, and the proceedings in Cabinet are never divulged. Although there were debates in the House of Commons, Wilson was the man primarily responsible for the policy. Now what went on within Cabinet, the British Cabinet,--

Ba: Did we try very hard to try to extend that kind of British support to actual British troops in Viet Nam?

B: No, the thing that was brought up a good many times in statements by some of our people in Congress and elsewhere--and no doubt in the Administration--was that it would be useful if some British troops were engaged in the war in South Viet Nam, and even to put it crassly, if some British troops were killed it would be helpful to the overall picture because it would possibly induce other members of the, say the world alliance--which is not a proper expression--say of the Southeast Asia Organization to extend themselves further than they had done.

Ba: But that, I suppose, was further than Mr. Wilson could go.

B: He couldn't possibly have done it, because I think it had been understood from the beginning that we were not going to help them --the British--in Indonesia, in the Indonesian attacks on Borneo and so forth. That was an area of their responsibility. To the contrary South Viet Nam had become an area of our responsibility and with the exception of a certain amount of advice and the presence of civilians and whatnot, some of whom were extremely helpful, like the famous Thompson, their guerilla warfare leader. It was an understanding that this was the way it was going to be. You couldn't possibly have done anything with the British in respect to that.

Ba: During these years from about '65 to '67, when the escalations were going on in Viet Nam, were you kept adequately informed of the American successive escalations?

B: Oh yes, because there wasn't anything secret about them you know.

Ba: I meant prior notice before public notice, so that you could in turn inform the British government.

B: They were informed and seemed to be au courant of all of these activities, in the sense of escalations--with the exception of, I don't know how well they were informed about the Tonkin incident. That was earlier on. But they were thoroughly informed, never any difficulty about that.

Ba: During those years, Averell Harriman had a roving assignment to coordinate peace negotiations. Did you work with him often? I know several times he was in London.

B: Oh, yes. I always saw Averell wherever he was. He kept me apprised of anything that might be useful to me in connection with any transactions which affected the British government. He's very good at that kind of thing.

Ba: If it's not too impertinent, when two men of your stature--you and Averell Harriman who had been old friends and comrades in arms for so many years--get together on occasions like that, do the conversations range freely over all kinds of possibilities?

B: Oh, yes.

Ba: What do you talk about?

B: We don't confine ourselves always to Viet Nam, you know. Averell has decided ideas on many foreign policy questions, and he's a man of vast experience. I worked for him, as you know, in Marshall Plan, and, also, I suppose I'm the only person in Washington to work for him in private business. I was in his banking firm.

Ba: Back in the 20's and 30's.

B: Yes. I've got a great respect for Averell's tenacity in pursuing any problem.

Ba: Do conversations like that include personalities?

B: Yes.

Ba: You're grinning!

B: You know Averell's active mind, his fierce--his enthusiasm over individuals, his dislike of others, has been true ever since I met him. In private conversation he talks freely.

Ba: Do such conversations ever involve say the President's personality?

B: No. I never had any discussion with him about the President's personality. Averell's an extremely loyal fellow. If he's working for a President I've never known an instance, even if there was something he might have disapproved of, that he would say to even an intimate friend in disapproval. He would have done it directly to the President.

Ba: I have a suspicion he would say exactly the same thing about you.

B: I hope he would because I don't believe in disloyalty to those you work for. There's always a remedy, which I have sometimes pointed out to younger friends. You always have--it may be inconvenient, and also distressing, certainly to oneself--but one has as a final recourse, resignation--resignation without talking about it.

Ba: Does that sort of attitude apply to Secretaries of State too? I mean to your relationship to the Secretaries of State?

B: Oh yes. I wouldn't discuss the merits or demerits of the Secretary of State even though I was a presidential appointee, because after all he's the President's agent for foreign affairs. If you disapprove violently enough about something which you have been instructed to be an advocate of, then if you can't carry out those instructions conscientiously, I think it's your duty to get out.

Ba: Back to the Viet Nam peace negotiations. Leading up to the Wilson-Kosygin meeting, Foreign Secretary Brown [George] visited Moscow just before that meeting.

B: Yes.

Ba: There was some talk at the time that Britain was a little dismayed that Brown was taking with him what later became the Phase A-Phase B program--that Moscow had already heard about through the Warsaw talks that were going on at the same time. Did that leave a bit of ill feeling or anger?

B: I remember George Brown was disturbed himself over what he said was the lack of having been fully briefed on what was being done elsewhere by the United States Government. Whether it might be private communications with Ho Chi Minh, whether it was these Warsaw intermediaries, whether it was somebody in Rumania, as I recall, that was supposed to be mixed up in something. George has a very low boiling point on some occasions. I think he felt that he hadn't been fully cut in, yes, but that was all transitory. George is a great friend of the United States. An interesting man.

Ba: At that point we sent someone over to brief Mr. Brown, didn't we, didn't--

B: Yes.

Ba: Chester Cooper came over to--

B: I think he came on that occasion. Chet came so often that I don't recall the exact circumstances because this was something that wasn't major within the British government.

Ba: Was Wilson thoroughly briefed before the meetings with Kosygin?

B: Oh yes.

Ba: By you and--

B: Yes, chiefly by Chet. Chet worked in perfectly harmony and conjunction, but he was much more expert and of course infinitely more familiar with Viet Nam than I was and they asked that he remain. I was strongly in favor of that. He was there during all of the talks with Wilson and Kosygin.

Ba: Was Wilson getting a good deal of encouragement from the United States for his talks with Kosygin, relative to Viet Nam?

B: I think we regarded him here as over optimistic and the people who were in charge of Viet Nam matters in the American government were pessimistic about what might be done. But they thought it might be a good thing to have him take a run and see what his chances were.

Ba: There was talk at the time, perhaps at the gossip level, that President Johnson might have thought that Wilson was pushing too hard with some implication of self-aggrandizement.

B: It obviously would have been a great coup for Mr. Wilson politically, and for the British in general, if they had been able to act in a mediating capacity in a fashion that produced results at the end. Mr. Wilson may have been too optimistic about what could be done. And the whole thing now, if you read the records of one or another author, read journalistic comment, you might believe that there had been really quite a crisis in the relationship between the American and British governments over the non-success of the Kosygin visit.

Ba: That impression is left in most of the writings. Could you describe the Wilson-Kosygin meeting as you saw it from your viewpoint?

B: It's difficult, when you don't know what's in the mind of somebody else, to try to speculate as to what might have been done that wasn't done. To me the most significant thing clearly demonstrated was that any message given by Wilson as a mediator--as a go-between, let's say--between the American government and the Soviet Union would be transmitted, if we so wished, to Hanoi.

They had communications. The responses were sometimes slow in coming because they had to be routed through Moscow. But I thought the temper in which these conversations were being carried on in London were conducive to maybe the opening up of some larger transaction later on, in which obviously the principals were going to be the American government and the North Vietnamese government.

Ba: Did the confusion at the time over Phase A and Phase B really cause a serious difficulty--that is, there is this issue there that during the talks, we, the United States, reversed the order of stopping bombing and stopping infiltration.

B: I would on that, hesitate to say, to answer, because I think the whole thing has probably been correctly set forth in Chet Cooper's book [The Lost Crusade: America in Viet Nam].

Ba: I was going to ask your opinion of it, I read it myself.

B: Yes, I think he's rendered a faithful account as far as I could see it from the other end of what took place.

Ba: While he was up in the room at Chequers, you were down having dinner with Wilson and Kosygin. Did anything transpire at the dinner?

B: No, I wasn't at that dinner.

Ba: Oh, you were not there at Chequers? I'm sorry, I was under the impression that you were.

B: No, not when Kosygin was there. I never saw him, but I used to see the Prime Minister during that period every day and every night!

Ba: Did Mr. Wilson remain optimistic throughout that meeting, or did he have his low spots?

B: Up until the last moment he felt frustrated at times because there was a misunderstanding as to what it was we were propounding in Phase I and Phase II, and there seemed to be a reversal in some respects although I think it was largely due to phraseology than anything of real substance in the presentation because that, in the eyes of the British and also in the eyes of many of our own people, is the kind of thing which arouses suspicion. And with people suspicious as the Russians are, they may have attributed to the changes proposed at the last moment, some deep-seated design which was non-existent in the minds of the people who made the changes here. That I will never know.

Ba: See deviousness where none was intended?

B: Yes, yes. It was a difficult thing because there was a change. Now, how serious that was, I don't know. I don't believe that Kosygin was in a position to make a deal. Wilson overestimated what could be done in this respect. What he was in the position to do was to open up another avenue of communication.

Ba: By not being in a position to make a deal, you mean not as influential over the North Vietnamese as perhaps it appeared.

B: He didn't pretend that the Soviets had a decisive influence. I'm only saying that because of what he told Mr. Wilson, from what I understand. But he had to in turn, if he made any recommendations --and nobody will ever know what recommendations he made, if any, to the North Vietnamese--they had to be approved of course by Brezhnev and others in Moscow. So it was rather a dog-leg even in the matter of communications.

Ba: Was it believed in the diplomatic community that Kosygin might have been acting on his own, without necessarily the approval of the rest of his peers in Moscow?

B: I think he made it absolutely evident to the Prime Minister Wilson that he was not in position to act on his own nor did he intend to delude anybody into thinking he was, that anything he did there was going to be submitted to Moscow.

Ba: Maybe we at home get an oversimplified view of that kind of thing.

B: Yes, with Khrushchev it might have been different. With Kosygin, I think he was perfectly candid about his own limitations and also--I don't know, they don't divulge their hands--what sort of real interest he had and on what terms he would have liked to participate in bringing this thing to a settlement. I think all those things are very trying, you know.

Ba: Chester Cooper in his book describes a phone conversation you had with Washington presumably with Rusk or someone equally high up, at that time over this question of extending the bombing halts.

B: Yes.

Ba: To whom were you speaking then?

B: I don't recall. He refers to it as a telephone conversation. I sent quite a long telegram on the subject and it was very simple. It seemed to me that, given the necessity for any message sent by Kosygin for eventual transmission to Hanoi, passing by Moscow, it was a fearful mistake not to--not a fearful mistake but would be a mistake--not to allow the man to return to Moscow and have a chance perhaps personally to inform his colleagues of his impressions of what had happened in London before we resumed our bombing. Now here, again--this is only my understanding --people felt advantage had been taken of this lull by the North

Vietnamese to send a great many troops down into the South and resupply equipment and whatnot. The favorite expression of course of the newspapers is, "Don't you understand that the American boys are getting killed every day that the bombing is ceased, is in suspense?" Therefore, the bombing of the North was resumed rather abruptly. Now what would have happened had it not been resumed for another week, I think is purely chancy. Those decisions have to be reached. I, myself, thought the important thing was that the bombing should not be resumed while Kosygin was in the air.

Ba: Excuse me a minute, sir, let me--this is just about to run out. Let me stop this.

INTERVIEWEE: DAVID K. E. BRUCE (Tape #2)
INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER
December 9, 1971

Ba: This is the second tape of the interview with Ambassador Bruce. You were still talking about the Wilson-Kosygin interview.

Later, Prime Minister Wilson called that a "missed opportunity," publicly so, in Life Magazine and other things. Is that your view too? Did we really miss a practicable opportunity to do something constructive?

B: Again, I think that's such a speculative thing to comment on that one can't do it with any assurance. No, I think the fact that the meeting took place, the fact that Mr. Wilson had been given, in some measure, the confidence of the American government to discuss these affairs with Kosygin was useful. Although he attributed to me in his memoirs the statement that I thought that "he had it in the bag," I think that was hyperbolic. I was skeptical about achieving a result. I was in favor of his taking a try at it. I think that's the distinction.

Ba: I don't think anybody would assume that peace would have been declared immediately, but would it have been possible, for example, to get the talks started 18 months earlier than they did?

B: Once again I can't answer that for a very simple reason--at the time I was unfamiliar with Vietnamese affairs, in comparison with the limited knowledge I acquired later when I was in Paris--the unknown in all of this is Hanoi. We were dealing indirectly with a government which, as far as I can ascertain, is probably the most secretive of all Communists governments in the world, or any government in the world. They really play their own game. And although they are dependent on China and on the Soviet Union for their military supplies and to a considerable extent for economic sustenance, I don't think any outside nation controls the Politburo in Hanoi, I believe they really are very hard nosed.

Ba: You mean any outside power?

B: Outside power. Therefore when one says, "What could have been accomplished at this meeting," or any other meeting--the one directly between President Johnson and Kosygin--I don't think there is an answer because the unknown remains there, namely the setup, the convictions, the plans, the problems of Hanoi--of which I feel completely ignorant. And I've never heard anybody expound them intelligently, though many French who were there in the old days have attempted to do so.

Ba: I might add that anyone using this would know that American experts on Vietnamese government go, you must be right up there at the top now after a year as chief negotiator at the peace talks.

B: You don't learn anything negotiating peace talks of this character. They are propaganda used by the other side purely for propaganda purposes, therefore their statements made have no substance at all. Its a technique, if I can qualify it as such, of a big lie--repetition, repetition, repetition. Finally, you're likely to be confused, if you're present yourself, whether black is black or white is white. But if you hear this strain poured out everyday in news conferences and whatnot, it does finally create a popular impression that these people must be anxious to arrive at a deal. I don't think they've had, certainly in my time, the slightest desire to reach a settlement. Their original ambition was to take over South Viet Nam. If they arrive someday at a point where they think that they will not ultimately succeed in that, then I should think that they would reach a settlement.

Ba: You have mentioned in passing that you have repeatedly heard Frenchmen speak of Vietnamese. I assume, those would be the old Saigon hands, or whatever the French equivalent is?

B: Mostly Indochina hands.

Ba: Based on your later knowledge of the Vietnamese, did you find their assessment accurate?

B: No. I don't think it's accurate, but I don't think it's necessarily inaccuarte.

As is the case of many of the British colonial administrators, they knew a lot about the countries where they lived and the psychology of the people. The cultural influence of France is still strong throughout Indochina. Cambodia is a good example of it, and what they've done at Angkor Wat.

But I don't think their political judgment is necessarily correct because they know no more than we do about on what conditions a settlement would be possible. They know and read Madame Binh's seven points or eleven points. There's always a new addition of points, which I think are completely unreasonable when analyzed. And they say well why doesn't the American government accept them. Many of our own people say the same thing. Anything to get the boys out. Anything to stop the American participation.

It's not as simple as that. It might have been simple in the beginning, not to have gone in, but once engaged in something by what process of agreement do you get out? At Paris it was striking that the members of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong delegations did not speak, and never spoke to the members of the South Vietnamese governmental delegation. Whatever can be worked out between those two, the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese, or North Vietnamese including the Viet Cong representation, would be far simpler for them speaking the same language, knowing much more about their countries than we do or any outsider does, than it would be for us to try to mastermind the thing. But what they want is to pin all responsibility on the Americans who in turn would issue orders to the South Vietnamese to cease and desist defending their own country. I really do think it's almost as simple as that.

That's got nothing to do with what has happened in the structure of our own society or the rights and wrongs of how we've been engaged there. I'm talking only from the standpoint of diplomatic negotiations. It's difficult with people who will not talk to each other for outsiders to do so, especially when you realize the men in the South Vietnamese delegation, some of them at least, are schoolmates or college mates of the ones sitting alongside them speaking the same language. Never a word passed between them.

Ba: That's not just the facade of the peace table?

B: Oh no, not at all, it applies to everything.

Ba: Total relationship.

B: Total.

Ba: Were there any other missed opportunities after the Wilson-Kosygin meeting?

B: No, I don't think so.

Ba: Did that sort of take the steam out of Mr. Wilson for this sort of attempt?

B: Well, there wasn't any followup. I think Mr. Kosygin, who got along well with Mr. Wilson--they appeared to get along very well together--had been asked to renew, if he cared to do so, such conversations in which case Mr. Wilson would be glad to participate further. But nothing came of it. I don't know whether it was ever followed up internally, but you know the idea was, "Well, maybe we'll meet again."

Ba: I'm not sure I understood that. Was that a direct attempt by Mr. Kosygin to continue such talks which Mr. Wilson did not take advantage of?

B: No, no. I didn't express it properly then. I don't remember the final communique, whether there was anything in it on this subject, but the interchange as told me between them before Kosygin returned to Moscow, was that perhaps they would have discussions on this at some future time.

Ba: Oh, I see.

B: If any tentative has been made by either side since then, I'm not aware of it.

Ba: I see. The statement just proforma conversation.

B: Yes, I would have thought so.

Ba: Do you know if at the Glassboro meeting between President Johnson and Mr. Kosygin shortly after that, any echos of that showed up?

B: I never had any information on that meeting, what was discussed there. I never read a transcript of it. I wasn't there.

Ba: Was it getting much more difficult by that time for Mr. Wilson to maintain his support of United States policy in Viet Nam?

B: No, because he clearly limited the extent of that support by saying that he could not support our policies there if we--take one example if we bombed Haiphong and Hanoi. That was early on. He was fiercely criticized for that by some influential Americans.

Ba: I assume this kind of thing was communicated directly to Mr. Johnson as well as you.

B: Oh yes, I think he said it publicly. Well, it's in his accounts.

Ba: I asked because I know by '68 Britain too was having peace demonstrators. In fact I recall one incident in which you were, I suppose, besieged in the American Embassy in London.

B: I was besieged there practically every Sunday for about six months. I'm sorry to say that some of the most effective demonstrators, in the way of resorting to violence, were Americans.

Ba: In London?

B: Yes. Well they'd come down from the universities all over the country and organize. They're rather given, as you know, to participation in demonstrations, and they got very heated up. I understand that. I think it is a pity in a foreign country for them to attack their own Embassy.

Ba: Did you ever try to talk to any of them?

B: Oh yes. I was their scapegoat. The last meeting I went to was one I was invited to address at Churchill College and I never could finish my speech.

Ba: You were shouted down.

B: Demonstrators all over the place. The principal shouters actually were American students.

Ba: Are you implying that they were leading the British--that the British students might not have been so vehement if it had not been for American student leadership?

B: No, no, I think the British students would have been vehement. I think the American students carried a little more weight, in my estimation, because they were as Americans attacking American policy in a British context. It seems to me there is some difference between doing that in a foreign country and engaging in peaceful demonstrations.

Ba: I was wondering if that sort of thing would have had an increased affect on Mr. Wilson's political problems. It certainly did on Mr. Johnson's.

B: It did here. No, it didn't there because I think few people outside of the American Embassy, American colony perhaps in London, were aware of the extent to which Americans participated in these demonstration. And I'm confining myself almost entirely to those against the Embassy because that was where the largest number of Americans were engaged in such activities.

Ba: Incidentally, how can you tell? If you're looking out at a thousand students demonstrators--

B: You can't if you have 10,000 people. You don't know how many are Americans. But you'd get all sorts of reports of people who had been picked up for carrying arms, and the police had a pretty good idea because these things are organized in the colleges. Suppose you came there from the north of England, from Leeds, or someplace like that, you get a pretty good rundown on how much of the student body is foreign, how much of it is British who had come down to London for a jamboree. Thanks to the British police force these things are always well controlled. But there were narrow squeaks at times. I don't know what would have happened if it had ever broken down, as they always tried to do, the glass doors at the Embassy and pillage the Embassy. I just don't know.

Ba: At the time, you had high praise for the British police.

B: Oh, it was a marvelous performance. So many of them were injured, too.

Ba: In the spring of '68 there, was President Johnson's decision not to run for reelection communicated in advance to Mr. Wilson?

B: No, no.

Ba: Was it communicated formally through diplomatic channels before Mr. Wilson heard about it publicly?

B: I should not have answered the first question by saying "No" because I was here in Washington when President Johnson made his speech, so I don't know. My guess is that it was not communicated to anyone. Maybe in President Johnson's memoirs he says, because I know he discussed it--I just saw this in some critique, a review of his book, that he had discussed it with certain people. But I don't think he could have informed or did inform anybody abroad; it would be too much. I'd be surprised if he had.

Ba: I might add by the way, I don't want to mislead anyone, I really have no knowledge of diplomatic protocol that requires such a thing.

B: Oh no, it wouldn't. That was a domestic decision.

Ba: You had been called back for consultation? To Washington?

B: Yes, but not in connection with that.

Ba: Yes, I assumed so.

B: I just happened to be here the night he made the speech.

Ba: Surprised?

B: Oh, absolutely astonished. Astonished. I greatly admired his decision. It must have been difficult, I know he brooded over it for a long time, but I think it was a really great decision. I hope I'm not naive in attributing to him the motives of a man who had painfully arrived at the conclusion that the best thing he could do for his country was to reach what I advisedly called a great decision. I admire him vastly for it.

Ba: Did you ever discuss this informally with Mr. Wilson. One would think that Mr. Wilson would be interested in, if nothing else, the personalities in politics in that kind of decision.

B: I don't remember ever discussing it afterwards because when I got back there it was all over, you know. He wasn't going to turn up like a penny from the pavement at the last moment in the convention. I think some people here thought he might but it was considered irrevocable there.

Ba: At that time or shortly after that, the peace talks did start and Mr. Harriman was the first negotiator there.

B: Yes.

Ba: Were you by any chance ever considered for that position?

B: No, because I was still in England. Then after President Johnson retired and a new President was elected, President Nixon asked me to stay on during his visit to Great Britain before there was a changeover there. So the question of the Paris peace talks never came up as far as I was concerned at any time. As I had had no connection with Viet Nam, I would have thought it very improbable I was ever mentioned in that respect.

Ba: But you did it later.

B: That was different. I have had time to reflect a little on the matter. I'm glad I did it. I accomplished nothing, I'm sorry for it. I'm glad I did it.

Ba: As an educational experience, or?

B: No, I think it is awfully grandiloquent to say that's a patriotic duty but I was in a position where I could go. It was only a matter of personal inconvenience to do so and I thought that as we were seeking for a Chief of Delegation and seemed to have some difficulty in finding one, it was worth exploring the situation in the hope that maybe something constructive could be accomplished.

Ba: What was the reason for the difficulty in finding someone to--that would be to replace Henry Cabot Lodge.

B: You see Cabot had left long before. He left in December, and the statement had been made repeatedly by the North Vietnamese that unless the President appointed a Chief of Delegation instead of one ad interim--the extremely competent Phil Habib, a foreign service officer, acted as chief during the interval, that they would not have their delegate attend the meetings. And they made a great of this thing--equal rank and all that sort of stuff. As a matter of fact, the whole thing was in a minor key anyhow. The chief of the Vietnamese delegation has been their leading propagandist for over twenty years. Able man. He's not even a member of the politburo and I, as a Chief of Delegation, didn't represent any political influence at home, except as an appointee of the President. So I think there was some baloney in that.

But after all, it was a place where the meetings were in progress and it seemed to me worth while if this was an impediment to searching out the possibilities for negotiations, it seemed to me a pity if it wasn't tried.

Ba: I don't know how to phrase this without sounding somehow or other you were a second or third choice, but did Mr. Nixon have difficulty getting someone?

B: I don't know. It never was mentioned to me. He just asked me if I would do it and I said yes. He may have asked a number of people. I wouldn't know.

Ba: Do you think of yourself, by the way, as a partisan Democrat?

B: No.

Ba: I'm sure no one else does. I think it would probably be fatuous to ask if there is a little politics involved in a Republican President appointing a Democrat to those negotiations.

B: That I don't know. I think it was necessary probably, although it's a minor thing, it's not subject to approval by the Senate to have someone if he's drawn from outside life, private life, who is not deeply immersed in partisan politics. I always thought it made things a little easier.

Ba: Before I shift gears here slightly is there anything in the U.S.-British relations during the Johnson years which perhaps should be included in this kind of record?

B: No, I don't think so. You know, President Johnson had a strong feeling about England. I was rather surprised by it in the sense that coming from Texas, my own family having been away from England and Scotland for generations and generations, there remained in him a sort of atavism about England. He's very admiring of the British people--its's absolutely genuine--of their best qualities, of their vigor under hardship, of the skill in which overall they conducted their world affairs and administered their global role for a couple hundred years or more. I would say he was strongly attuned to the British race, if you can call it that.

Ba: Was he knowledgeable too, not solely in the sense of contemporary politics, but in the sense of history and culture?

B: I can't answer on the second because I know nothing about his knowledge of culture. As far as that includes painting and literature and whatnot I never had any occasion to discuss it with him. I would say he's knowledgeable, as he is about almost any place he's ever been, about recent history; also knowledgeable in the case of Great Britain about the background of its history. If he could run down the Plantagenet kings, I wouldn't know.

Ba: You don't have to do that to know generally what's going on there. You have also been, during the Johnson years, to social occasions in the White House. I know of one major occasion when you and a group of other men presented the bust of Churchill to the White House. Is President Johnson different on social occasions like that from the public man?

B: I think, and I have had occasion to be with him quite a few times, at meals, dinners, formal receptions, formal banquets and that sort of thing--I think Mr. Johnson is one of the most courteous human beings I've ever met, and I regard him, as I do the admirable Mrs. Johnson, as a wonderful host and hostess. Don't forget--I stayed only a short time at his ranch in Texas--don't forget the sort of tendency toward hospitality of the Johnsons. You get it in their house, whether it's the White House or whether it's the Ranch in Texas, you are their guest. And everything is yours. I was very struck by what I regard as his social grace.

Ba: On what occasion were you at the Ranch, sir?

B: He asked me one time when I was here--Chip [Charles] Bohlen and myself, had just been made--had already been made Ambassador to France or already been there for a time, I think--just to come down and talk to him about any thing that we wished to discuss--it was at his invitation--about our respective missions in Britain and France. We spent a day with him. We went out and looked at the cattle and had a couple of meals. Then we went and had a look at the Air Force operations in Austin, absolutely fascinating. They have a big air field there, you know. They had a lot of what was classified as secret stuff at that time.

But I can't speak too highly to President Johnson as a human being. Always the thing that, not amazed, but impressed me most about him was the pervasiveness of his personality. I'm not frightened of him, but I must say that when he entered a room, particularly if you were going to be the only person in it, somehow the room seemed to contract--this huge thing, it's almost like releasing a djinn from one of those Arabian Night's bottles. The personality sort of fills the room. Extraordinary thing.

Ba: In a long lifetime of that kind of thing, you've seen an awful lot of important people enter rooms.

B: I've never seen anybody who had quite that facility, from whom power seemed to emanate in equal degree.

Ba: Did that ever get overbearing? It is common knowledge that there are many people who consider this kind of phenomenon that you are talking about in less gracious terms to be overbearing.

B: Yes, I've heard that. It certainly never occurred in my relationship with him--ever. But then I never saw him when he was lecturing a group, or never saw him lose his temper about anything. He usually wound up with some funny story.

Ba: Sometimes unprintable, I understand.

B: I've heard that said.

Ba: In some matters about the operation about the State Department--I ask these questions with some hesitation in view of what you were saying earlier about loyalty--but for example there has been some talk that perhaps Mr. Johnson should have changed his Cabinet, including the Secretary of State, and that perhaps it would have been wiser if Mr. Rusk had not stayed on. Do you think it was wise for Mr. Rusk to continue as Secretary of State although he had been appointed by another man originally?

B: Oh, I wouldn't comment on that, no. I have high admiration for Rusk. I think everything he did during his whole career, even as a young man, was dictated by high standards of character. I like him. I admire him as a man. But what difference it would have made if he hadn't been Secretary of State I haven't the slightest idea.

Ba: I was really thinking of not so much policy as personal relationships.

B: I just don't know.

Ba: I understand and I think anybody would that these are all almost impossible questions. Did the State Department work well in those years in the sense of the flow of information both ways, the frequency of consultation and all of that?

B: I thought in my experience as Ambassador to Great Britain it was excellent. I was thoroughly, consistently briefed and informed in the fullest degree. I have nothing but praise for the liaison that had been established. I thought it was better than it had been in any previous post I occupied -- that it was better administered, better coordinated.

Ba: Was there any distinctive change between the Kennedy and Johnson years?

B: To my way of thinking, none at all. You never noticed any transition.

Ba: Whom did you consider particularly outstanding in the State Department during those years?

B: The man who I had the most of my dealings with, comparatively minor of course, was George Ball. Whenever I was home I saw Dean Rusk. But George is a man of phenomenal energy, and I think of great ability. I'm not talking about his conclusions with respect to the Vietnamese war or China or whatnot, but I think George is a powerhouse. He was a man--again, an activist--who got things done. I don't know how he got around to caring for his multifarious activities.

But that's the ordinary procedure. You don't go and bother your Secretary of State with everything. It's a great mistake to be running to Presidents and Secretaries of State. They've got bigger fish to fry. There's always somebody in the Department, and the key in the Department of State has always been the Undersecretary of State for the management of ordinary things. Now if there's some question between yourself and Great Britain or between your government and that of the British, you'd probably in the first instance, at least, go to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. Then he might have to buck the thing up in order to get a final decision from George Ball who in turn must get the approval of Dean Rusk.

Ba: From the viewpoint of an Ambassador, does the fairly recent establishment of the, what people call the "Little State House in the White Department" give you trouble--The National Security Advisory in the White House?

B: No, you see. I had it before under Mac Bundy, Walt Rostow, and then Henry Kissinger. Not the slightest. I know nothing about whether there's an internecine feud or has been at times between the White House and State Department. That in bureaucratic circles is almost inevitable I would have thought, the way the State Department, Defense Department, and at times the Department of Commerce or Interior gets into the act. Everybody likes to mess around--not mess around--likes to participate in the making of or execution of foreign policy. And there are certainly strains and irritations, of course. I have been abroad for most of my official life--for that part of it passed in government service and so it's never impinged on my own consciousness. I know all that is said about it, and I think it's inevitable that there's a certain amount of friction.

Ba: I'm going to ask you a question that absolutely verges on the impertinent, and please feel free to just ignore me. Do you miss not having ever been Secretary of State?

B: I don't know whether I should answer the question but I will, which I've never done on this subject for a public record, but it will be put away for many years.

If I'd ever been offered the job of Secretary of State, I would not have accepted it under any conditions whatever after I realized the nature of its responsibilities.

Ba: I know, at least in one administration, and possibly others, you were seriously talked about. Since I've been that impertienent may I be so impertinent to ask why not, sir.

B: No, no, I won't answer that except to say it was never formally offered me. I would have found it incompatible with the amount of ability which I estimated I had in handling affairs of that nature. I couldn't have done it.

Ba: You must be talking about the domestic political aspects of the job, or the internal politics of the administration, I suppose.

B: Oh, I don't know. If a thing like that would have come up when I was forty-five, I might have hesitated. When you get on in life and realize what the job really entails, I just wouldn't have felt up to tackling it.

Ba: Do you mean the foreign relations aspects of it, the aspects of having to keep your fingers on--?

B: The whole thing.

Ba: --or the relationship with the President and the Cabinet members.

B: I don't think I would have minded the relationship with the President or other Cabinet members or the Congress, but I just think that one has to analyze as best as one can one's own ability to do certain things. I wouldn't have thought myself fitted to be Secretary of State.

Ba: Sir, as you can see, I'm now down to where I'm asking outrageous questions. I have no right to, which means I'm at the end here. This has been delightful and I think informative. Is there anything we've left out? Is there anything you would like to say? I could for example ask you to compare Presidents.

B: Oh no, I couldn't do that. They are such a varied lot. I wrote a very poor book once of essays on the first sixteen American Presidents [Revolution to Reconstruction (New York: Doubleday, 1939] and I've often thought to myself of continuing--it requires a lot of research, quite a lot of research, to bring them down from Grant through Nixon or President Johnson. I don't think I could do it, and I'm not at all certain from what I have read in the way of biographies and essays when you get down to a president as recent as Woodrow Wilson that one has yet got the perspective to write properly about them or to estimate them. My guess is that in domestic policies, since the foreign ones are still so controversial--Viet Nam, I am thinking of almost entirely--President Johnson will be considered a great president in respect to his domestic legislation. I think his courage in activating so many principles of civil rights, the most ticklish problem probably in the United States in my opinion, I think its absolutely admirable and only he could have done it.

Ba: Only a Southern president?

B: Only a man with that knowledge of how to get things done in the Congress, and a Southern president, which is even more of a struggle. But I don't think that you can estimate the success or failure of presidents contemporaneously. I suppose the saddest one in a way was a highly gifted man, Woodrow Wilson.

Ba: Yes, it is almost like observing a Grecian kind of tragedy, a man with great gifts which in some ways became faults.

B: Yes, they did.

Ba: As a matter of fact, someone had said that about Lyndon Johnson, too.

B: Yes, yes--who and how do you manipulate people and things?

Ba: Or what do you do when you come across people you can't manipulate such as the way you were describing the North Vietnamese while back?

B: Well, there's no answer to that.

Ba: Is there anything you would like to add, sir?

B: No. I've enjoyed very much talking to you, and I wish I could have been more constructive about things.

Ba: I've enjoyed it enormously myself--and I think you have been constructive.

B: My memory is fallible, of course, but I think what I've said is more or less accurate as I recall the events.

Ba: We assume on these matters that human memory is fallible and we are at the mercy of posterity's scholars to check exact dates and things like that.

B: Yes, you must.

Ba: We assume that that will be done and generally we warn that it will be.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By David K. E. Bruce

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, David K. E. Bruce, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

~~2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.~~

See the following

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed David K. E. Bruce

Date 11 April 1972.

Accepted Harry J. Middleton - for
Archivist of the United States

Date March 3, 1975

Preparation of "Gift of Personal Statement"

A. If you do not wish to impose restrictions on the use of your tape and transcript and if you do not feel the need to retain literary property rights upon the material, please sign the enclosed statement and return it to the Oral History Project.

B. If you wish to restrict the use of your transcript for a period of time beyond the date of the opening of the Johnson Library, a new statement will be prepared (either by you or by us) deleting paragraph 2 and substituting the following, with one of the alternatives:

> It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument available for research in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. At the same time, it is his wish to guard against the possibility of its contents being used to embarrass, damage, injure, or harass anyone. Therefore, in pursuance of this objective, and in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 507 (f) (3) of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) this material shall not,
>
> [✓ for a period of 10 (Ten) years]
>
> or
>
> during the donor's lifetime
>
> or
>
> for a period of ________ years or until the donor's prior death
>
> or
>
> for a period of ________ years or until ________ years after the death of the donor, whichever occurs earlier
>
> or
>
> for a period of ________ years or until ________ years after the death of the donor, whichever occurs later
>
> be available for examination by anyone except persons who have received my express written authorization to examine it.

C. If you wish to have the restriction imposed above apply to employees of the National Archives and Records Service engaged in performing normal archival work processes, the following sentence will be added to paragraph 2:

> This restriction shall apply to and include employees and officers of the General Services Administration (including the National Archives and Records Service and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library) engaged in performing normal archival work processes.

D. If you do not wish to have the restriction imposed above apply to employees of the National Archives and Records Service, the following sentence will be added to paragraph 2:

> This restriction shall not apply to employees and officers of the General Services Administration (including the National Archives and Records Service and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library) engaged in performing normal archival work processes.

Yes
Please add
D.K.E.B.

E. If a restriction that extends beyond your lifetime is to be imposed in paragraph 2, the following paragraph (appropriately numbered) will be completed and added to the end of the "Gift of Personal Statement":

> I hereby designate Evangeline Bell Bruce (Wife) to have, after my death, the same authority with respect to authorizing access to the aforesaid material as I have reserved to myself in paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 above.

F. If you wish to retain the literary property rights to the material for a period of time, the phrase in paragraph 1 "and all literary property rights" will be deleted and either of the following paragraphs (appropriately numbered) added to the end of the statement:

> The donor retains to himself for a period of ________ years all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument. After the expiration of this ________ year period, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

or

> The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. After the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.