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transcript	Interview I, p. 28, line 22 [same sanitization 5/9/00 NLJ 00-105]	1/30/70	A
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Robert W. Komer Oral History Interviews

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INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 30, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT KOMER

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Mr. Komer's office, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

F: Mr. Komer, I know you've done this for the Kennedy people [John F. Kennedy Oral History Project] but very briefly I'd like you to get us up to 1963, how you came from birth to the attention of the President.

K: Well, very quickly, I went from college right into World War II as an intelligence officer and then a historian. [I] came out, finished the Harvard Business School and while I was searching to be a captain of industry at the age of 25 some friends of mine from World War II convinced me to join a new outfit called the Central Intelligence Group.

F: This is a piece of friendly exchange, when were you in Harvard Business School?

K: After I got out of Harvard College. [I] started in '42 and finished my degree after the war in February '47.

F: Well, the reason I asked, I did a post-doctorate at Harvard Business School. I was [there] in '48-'49.

K: Oh, did you really. Quite a place, isn't it?

F: It certainly is.

K: I left--I was one of the classes that was interrupted by the war, the February '47 class, spent--

F: CIA was a brand-new structure.

K: That's right. [I] went to the CIA before it was CIA and found that it was a perfectly fascinating career. These fellows said to me, "You know the war with the Germans and the Japs may be over, but the war with the Communists seems to be beginning and public service is just critically important. So with your wartime background--". Well, to cut a long story short, I worked for Vandenberg, and Sidney Souers, and Bedell Smith, and Allen Dulles, right on up through the Eisenhower Administration. I was one of the charter members of the national estimates business. We wrote the National Intelligence Estimates. I wrote some of the first estimates on the Soviet threat.

F: I might add we got Richard Helms, but Allen Dulles died before we could get to him.

K: Yes. That's too bad.

So I went to the National War College in '56-'57 and came back and was assigned as liaison with the National Security Council. Remember, Eisenhower had a very elaborate NSC structure. I was the deputy member of the planning board, so I had three years of seeing how intelligence linked up with policy and how the Eisenhower Administration formulated National Security Policy. I was rather unimpressed. I thought it was a gigantic papermill and that such things as arguing over whether we should be leaders in space--which later President Johnson and President Kennedy solved very quickly--occupied an incredible amount of time.

So, to make a long story short--when Kennedy came in, Bundy and Rostow called me up and asked me to come on over and be the first member of the so-called Bundy State Department. I was the first man recruited for the national security group at the White House,

Mac Bundy, Walt Rostow. Walt then left later to go over to State, so I was there right through the Kennedy years.

Through a chain of circumstance I became the Middle East hand in the White House, then the Africa hand, together with the Middle East, and Indonesia, and a number of things like that. It was because I was Middle East man that I first got to know Lyndon Johnson. I'd never met the Majority Leader. I'd never met the Vice President. He was, of course, a major figure in the Washington scene for many years, but when he was asked by Kennedy to go on that Middle East trip in the late summer of 1962, he said to President Kennedy, "I am perfectly willing to go, but I'm not very happy with the kind of staff support--substantive support and advice--I got from the State Department on that earlier Far East trip in 1961."

F: Do you have any idea why President Kennedy chose the Vice President? Was he an alternative or was that his first--

K: No, LBJ had gone on the Far East trip. LBJ told me that he didn't think that had been a terribly successful trip. I'm inclined to disagree with him. It's a fairly traditional and, in my view as a professional, a very useful way to use an activist Vice President. A President cannot get abroad very often, and when he goes, [he] had to go on these quick trips and come back.

F: Very restricted.

K: Exactly. A Vice President, as the number two man in the entire country, carries the weight, the prestige and the imagery second only to the President and he is much more available to travel. So in effect a President uses a Vice President as a surrogate on these foreign trips to those countries that want to have American visitors

in competition, frequently, with Soviet, British, French visitors, etc., but where the President is not available.

F: We sort of look on Vice Presidents in one sense as a also-ran, near-missers and so forth, but abroad the office of Vice President carries a great deal more prestige.

K: Infinitely more, and, of course, much more than the Secretary of State who is regarded essentially as a senior staff officer, whereas a Vice President is an elected official, elected every four years with the President. Eisenhower did it. Roosevelt did not, of course. I think Eisenhower really started the practice, but this was, I thought, a very useful exercise in Presidential diplomacy.

I must say with the wisdom of hindsight--I may be a little parochial on it--that the Middle East trip was quite successful. It was beginning of my association with Lyndon Johnson.

F: That's what I wanted to ask. He was dissatisfied with his staff help and I presume then you were, in a sense, volunteer.

K: Yes. This is sort of an interesting anecdote, because as I got the story from Bundy and Kennedy. LBJ said, "You know, with those State Department guys on the Far East Trip they wouldn't let me say anything. They wanted me to confine myself to sort of anodyne (?) crap and they told me some wrong things and gave me some bum steers." So he said to Kennedy, as I got the story, "If you want me to go on this Middle East trip, I'll go, but give me Mac Bundy. Give me your foreign policy adviser to go with me, so that we can make this trip into what you say you want it to be."

Well, in the first place, Kennedy would find it hard to spare Bundy, but, second, Bundy never did anything on the Middle East,

as he was the first to say. I was the Middle East guy and by that time they had come to depend on me, so Kennedy and Bundy replied to the Vice President, "Look, there's no point in taking Bundy, he's a tabula rasa on the Middle East. However we will give you Bundy's man Komer, who is the Middle East expert in the White House," and that was how I was sent over. I was called in, the President told me I was going to go on this trip, and the next thing I knew I had a call from the Vice President's office to come over and wait on him on Capitol Hill.

F: Had you done work with some concentration in the Middle East when you were with the CIA?

K: I had been head of the Middle East staff in the Office of National Estimates. I had worked off and on on Middle East matters, but I couldn't call myself anymore of a Middle East expert, or a Soviet expert, or a Western European expert, for that matter. I had been a generalist.

In the White House I had, by then, been spending about two years working on Middle East problems so I was pretty well up to date. I went over and presented myself to the Vice President, I recall.

F: Was that in EOB?

K: No, it was over in the Capitol in that magnificent office with those great big chandeliers and that huge long table. I was ushered in. I had never met him before in my life. Down at one end, all by himself, was the Vice President. Huddled at the other end was the Assistant Secretary of State, four or five of his spear carriers, and they were trying to brief the Vice President.

Mr. Johnson saw me and he beckoned for me to come up to his end

of the table which I guess was the first time when I broke through. He would listen to some of this fairly bland stuff that the State guys were coming up with, and then turned to me and said, "Komer, you're supposed to be a Middle East expert. What do you think about what that fellow just told me about Iran?"

Well, the fellow had just happened to say something I disagreed with vigorously. I had told the State Department for the preceeding six months I disagreed with it, so I figured I might as well get hung for a goat as a sheep. I said, "Mr. Vice President, as the people down at the other end of the table know, I don't agree with them at all on that. I don't think we ought to be giving the Shah all these extra military toys. What he needs in his country is a white revolution and I think if the Shah asks you on this trip for some more military assistance, you ought to go tell him to go peddle his papers."

Well, by golly, I could see a master politician at work. I reconstructed this afterward--I wasn't thinking of it at the time. He immediately sensed that he had a guy who differed with those guys so to make his point that the State Department didn't know which end was up he naturally said to them, "See, Kennedy's people don't agree with you on that kind of a policy. Why are you fellows telling me that kind of stuff?" So automatically, I became his ally against the bureaucracy.

Well, so be it. We took off from the White House lawn in the helicopter and since Kennedy thought he was sending me off on a rather tough chore--you know these trips are <u>hard</u>. They're doubly hard on the principal, but they're also hard on the staff because

what happens typically on one of these state trips is that the staff has to be with the principal all during the day and then at night when he retires the staff goes to work on the next day. So they never get any sleep! But we took off and Air Force One had not been airborne more than--oh, I would imagine--about an hour when I got a summons from the forward cabin that the Vice President wanted to see me. I walked in and sat down and he said, "Komer, you Kennedy people got a lot of good ideas, but you also do a lot of things that seem to me to be pretty silly." He said, "Now I want you to explain to me this India-Pakistan business." He said, "You know, I like Ayub [Field Marshall Mohammed Ayub Khan]. Ayub is a very good guy, and those Indians are the worst people to deal with I've ever seen in my life. Why is Kennedy switching around to more pro-Indian and less pro-Pakistan?"

I said, "Mr. Vice President, you asked me a good question. I like Ayub, too, and I think any American who had ever had much to do with the Indians and the Pakistani ends up liking the Pakistani a hell of a lot more than the Indians. In the first place, the Pakistani is the--their forebearers were the Aryan invaders of India, so they're more Western like us. And in the second place, the Indian-Hindo philosophy is quite antithetical to our way of thinking, whereas Mohammedism is much closer." And I said, "I've met Ayub a couple of times. I think he's fine, but, look, you don't make foreign policy on the basis of who you like and who you don't like. Pakistan has a hundred million people. India has over five hundred million people and if we're going to try and do something with South Asia as a counterweight to China, we better look at India as first priority

and not at Pakistan which is one-fifth the size."

I said, "Second, we built our policy on the assumption that the Paks were going to support us against the Russians and the Chinese. We have now found seven years later that the Paks are interested in one thing--India and Kashmir, that the whole Pakistani policy is centered around trying to find friends and big brothers as counterwedge to India. Well, we have no interest in helping Pakistan against India, and we have a hell of a strategic interest in building up India against China as a counterweight, etc., in strategy." I really let him have it because it was just sheer luck he happened to have pricked me on the one issue where I felt very, very strongly that John Foster Dulles had made a big policy mistake back in the middle '50's when we put our money on Pakistan instead of India.

F: To a certain extent it was almost a matter of vote counting, wasn't it?

K: Yes. Simple as that. Simple as that. I put it that way and I guess I was lucky that I said, "they have five [hundred] million and these other guys have only one hundred million." Well, by golly, when I was through, we talked. He seemed to be very interested so I kept going. We must have talked for perhaps a half-hour.

At the end of that he said, "Well, then, I'm not sure I agree with you, and I still think that we've maybe gone overboard and that we're not giving our Ayub a fair deal." He said, "But I want to tell you that that's a pretty doggone convincing explanation that you gave me." And then he turned to something else and I left. Well, that was my second experience with Lyndon Johnson.

My third experience with the Vice President came, and I guess

this was the one that really put us in business. Beirut was the first stop. No problems, very relaxed. He took me along with him, which I thought was damned decent of him. He said, "Komer is my senior adviser on substance. He goes with me on all these important meetings. If I go call on the President of Lebanon or the Shah officially, Komer comes along. I don't care whether the State people come along, I don't want them. I don't want to take an entourage to these private talks." Which was very good of him and he also happily introduced me as President Kennedy's Middle East expert, which I thought was very nice of him.

But he didn't warm up until the great episode of the landing at Ankara, Turkey. The second stop had been Teheran. The DCM from Ankara, the third stop, had flown all the way over to Teheran so we could brief the Vice President on Turkey while the plane was flying from Iran to Turkey, and this guy, Bob Barrs, was really scared. He said, "I've seen the tremendous welcome that the Arabians have had for the Vice President."

F: Now, who's Bob Barrs?

K: Number two, the DCM at our Embassy in Ankara. He said, "Somehow we've got to warn the Vice President, who likes crowds, who likes to get out and be with people, that he's not going to find this in Turkey for several reasons. First, the Turks are a solid lot. They're not like the Iranians or the Arabs." Second, he said, "It's the height of the summer in Ankara and it's a hundred degrees in the shade and any Turk who can manage it has gone either to the mountains or the sea, so, by God, there aren't any people left in Ankara!"

So everyone was upset by this. How would this affect the Vice

President's mood? Well, I said, "Look, this is what I get paid for. I'm along on the trip to tell him these things so I'll go in and tell him." They thought that was great, so I went in and told him. He listened impassively. I gave him the picture as I've given it to you, in somewhat more detail. He didn't react, and I thought, "By golly, this is so important, I'd better tell him again." So later on during the trip--I guess an hour and a half or two hour flight--I mentioned it to him, then we got Barrs in to see him about half-hour out of Ankara, and he took it all in good part. He hoisted it aboard quite clearly, but didn't react. So we get down at Esenboga Airport. Now remember, this is how I became Ambassador to Turkey, the incident which connects up several years later. Now, Esenboga Airport at Ankara is about eighteen miles out of town in the most Godforsaken plain, and there wasn't anybody in sight. So we started in this road. The countryside looks barren. There weren't any people, very few houses. We kept along this road for the first ten miles, not a soul except a few policemen up on the hill keeping a eye on the motorcade. And I settled back and said to myself, "Well,I'm very glad we warned him that there weren't going to be any people."

F: You were in a different car from him?

K: Yes, he was in the first car and I was about three or four cars--because whenever there was an official ceremony like this the press people had to be up forward. Liz Carpenter was up forward, etc., and I always stayed out of the way.

Oh, about eight miles out we began to see a few little groups of people by the road side. Six miles out there was about a single

line along the roadside and, by God, when we got about five miles outside Ankara there were crowds of people by the roadside. The motorcade stopped and I knew the Vice President was getting out of the car to shake hands with people and say a few words to them. Well, let me tell you! To cut that one short it took us about three hours to get the rest of the distance to the hotel. The place was absolutely swarming with more Turks than I'd ever seen in my life before. We were moving so slowly as we got into the outskirts of town that I asked the Colonel who was my escort officer, "Is there [a] way we can get out of this motorcade and get to the hotel, because at the rate we're going we're not going to get there by dinner time." "Oh," he said, "sure". So we went out on the beltway, turned around [and] went to the hotel. We were all staying together, I went upstairs, had a shower, changed clothes and with my first drink in my hand, I went out on the balcony to see the Vice President just coming into this big square walking--and the square was literally covered with people. Well there must have been four or five hundred thousand people out there! And I thought, "Jesus! What kind of a Godawful Embassy do we have here that they gave out such bum advice and then who was the guy who told the Vice President?"

I was, sure enough. See, I had no experience with Lyndon Johnson, sure enough. It took him about a half-hour to get back into the hotel, walking right through the crowd shaking hands. He was obviously having a good time.

[A] half-hour after he got into the hotel, the telephone rang. "The Vice President would like to see you Mr. Komer!" So I went right up. There was the VP. He had changed clothes--was in a shirt

and slacks. He'd just showered and he had one of those light Scotches that were so light that you could hardly see them in his hand, and he said, "Well, Bob!" He greeted me with open arms, "Well, Bob,"--the first time he ever called me Bob--we'd only known each other four days. He said, "Well, Bob, that was great advice that you and the State Department gave me. Great advice, I want to tell you. You guys really understand these Turks. There's nobody in town. They all went to the hills, hey, so the Turks are undemonstrative." "Christ," he said, "did you see them out there?"

I said, "Oh, yes sir, I saw them out there. I was right behind you all the time."

I lied because I didn't want him to know I had an even better vantage point from up on the balcony watching. God! They were cheering, and yelling. It was, I suspect perhaps the high point of an actual Turkish welcome for a distinguished American, because after that, of course, came the first Cyprus crisis of 1964 and the long--

F: As far as you could tell, no great effort [was made] to put the crowd out. It just came.

K: No, it just came, because I checked into that later. Now in Teheran there had been an effort and in Lebanon there had been an effort, but not that many people came to Ankara. The Turks don't go in for that sort of thing.

F: You were probably thankful for all who had taken to the hills.

K: Yes. Well, let me tell you. I got up there to his suite at six o'clock. I was still there at ten o'clock. I tried to excuse myself six or seven times. New people kept coming in, he kept saying,

"No Bob, don't go away, I want you right here," and he told the story of how I had quoted--not how the State Department--how I had quoted there wouldn't be any Turks. He told it at least a dozen times as each new group of visitors came in. He was in high good humor and he kept me there to listen to that thing 'till ten o'clock that night, at which point he finally said--most of the visitors had left by that time-- "Well, let's go downstairs and have some dinner," and he invited me to dinner with Mrs. Johnson and Lynda was with us.

I want to tell you that that was the start of my relationship with Lyndon Johnson. He was one up on me. Of course he kept offering me drinks so by 10:00 in the evening I was feeling no pain. He could have told the story a hundred times and I'd laugh.

F: By then you thought it was funny.

K: By then I thought it was funny, so I think that was the start of my real tour with LBJ.

F: He just liked to get somebody to play the straight man for him, didn't he?

K: Yes. Now there were a number of other episodes on the trip. I won't go into it now. We could do it some other time. At any rate, when I came back-- Well, there was one episode worth telling. You remember Buzz Busby. I thought Buzz was one of the ablest guys I'd ever met--modest unassuming fellow, just a very good mind--and he told it as it was--to LBJ, to anybody else, which I thoroughly admired.

Well, in Athens-- On the next to last stop of the trip, about four o'clock in the morning, Buzz and I were putting the finishing

touches on the Vice President's remarks for tomorrow and Buzz said the Vice President told me he wants such and such in there, and I said, "No, Buzz, I don't think we ought to put that in there. That'll cause us trouble. We better stay away from that sort of thing."

Buzz said, "But look, he said he wants it in there!"

And I said, "But it shouldn't be in there, he said he wants it in there but if I can explain it to him."

He said, "There won't be time to explain it to him."

I said, "Well, then take it out!"

Finally he said, "You know you're going to get in real trouble because he's going to remember that he asked to have this put in here."

I said, "Look! I'm not on"--you know Buzz and I had already had four or five drinks in the course of the evening. It was very, very late and we were both tired and a little frazzled, so I finally said something like "God damn it, Buzz. I'm not along on this trip to tell the Vice President what he wants to hear. I'm along to tell him what he's supposed to hear and I damn well think that shouldn't be in there. I've got very good reasons and he doesn't have any reasons except that he thought it would sound good, and if I can explain to him that he'll gain one brownie point in Athens and loose five in Ankara and Rome and Washington, I'm not going to have any problem!"

So Buzz said, "Okay, we'll leave it out."

F: Do you remember what it was?

K: No, I do not remember the point at all. LBJ may remember it. But when we got home I got a little note from him thanking me for my

contribution in making the trip successful--which I thought was a damn decent thing--but the way he put it was, he said, "I hear that you would like to be known as the man who said 'no' to Lyndon Johnson rather than the man who listened to Lyndon Johnson", or something like that. And he ended, "and I want you to know that I want to be known as the man who listened to Bob Komer." Just a very nice way to put it. I didn't know what the hell this was all about. I'd never put that thought in his mind, etc.

It turns out that as it was his wont, when he couldn't sleep he would wander the halls, and he had been outside. Buzz told me later that he told Buzz--this was several weeks later--he'd been outside when Buzz and I were having this argument. He had a ball listening to me argue with Buzz--"I don't care what the Vice President wants to do, I'm here to tell him what he's supposed to do." And he has told that story in my presence--I don't know how many times he's told it out of my presence, but that became his second favorite story. The first about how I miscounted the crowd, and the second how I said, "I'm here to tell Lyndon Johnson what he's supposed to hear,not what he wants to hear." He's told that story, Christ! By this time he was so great to me I no longer felt pain when I heard the story, but the first time he told it at the White House Mess to a group of about two dozen people, I almost dropped my teeth! So this was the second thing.

At any rate, that was the beginning of my association with LBJ, that Middle East trip. I think it was a hell of a successful exercise in high level diplomacy. I came back, and you know I wasn't beholden to the VP. You know, I didn't work for him. I'd never

met him before in my life. I liked him from that trip. I was pleased that he liked me. I'm a Missouri boy. I'm not part of the Eastern Establishment, even though I went to school there, but I felt--you know, he's got an instinctive feel for a lot of this stuff and everybody had told me, "God, watch him like a hawk, because here he is outside the United States and he won't know what to say and he'll put his foot in his mouth." I didn't find that at all. In fact, I found him exceedingly receptive when I made some suggestions as to substantive things he might say to some of these guys, instead of confining himself to sort of the banalities that Agnew has just confined himself to on his first exercise in Vice Presidential diplomacy.

So I got back and I wrote Kennedy a memo totting up the accomplishments of the trip as I saw them, not the public relations accomplishments, or the public release, but the real score. The points he'd taken up and how the VP had sort of stared down Karamanlis in a session we had with the Greek Cabinet and what he told the Shah about land reform and the white revolution, and how he handled Makarios and things like that. I don't know, I suspect the Vice President never saw that memo, but I thought the trip was a success. I guess somewhere that memo exists.

At any rate, that began my association with the Vice President. I was one of the few New Frontiersman, even third-class, who sort-of was friendly with the Vice President's group. Now I'd met them all on this trip and they invited me out to dinner and I saw them socially in the next--I guess it was--about one year more. We got back in September, ['62] and of course, November '63--a little later, was President's Kennedy's assassination. But during that subsequent year

I made it a point whenever there was interesting matter in my bailiwick that I thought would interest the Vice President, I sent him a copy of my memos, or would send them down to Walter Jenkins. Busby wasn't with him then of course. I sort of tried to keep him clued, and I guess I saw him three or four times during that subsequent year. But at any rate, it must have stuck in his mind [that] I was an all-right sort, because, of course, right after the assassination it started out [with] much more important visits.

He asked me to come in and said, "Bob, I hope you're going to stay on because you're one of the guys I like." I think he called Ralph Dungan and myself in [at] the same time and had us to lunch on the second floor dining room, which was a gesture. I remember Ralph coming out and saying during the entire tenure of Kennedy he'd not been on the second floor of the White House. So--

F: Kennedy, in a sense--I'm not trying to be invidious--but the tendency on the part of Kennedy [was] to look on the people who worked with and for them as people who worked with and for them, whereas with Mr. Johnson, he really kind of embraces [them] as friends.

K: Yes. Much more so. LBJ is a completely different personality than Kennedy and at eight o'clock at night or so, when JFK went over to the Mansion, that was the end of business. He made a really sharp distinction between his personal life and his professional life. It couldn't be complete, of course, but we rarely bothered Kennedy.

Take Mac Bundy. Now Mac came from the same background as Kennedy, knew all the same people, grew up in Boston. Even with Mac Bundy you got the sense that Kennedy--he was not part of the personal Kennedy circle. JFK surrounded--some of them just weren't

very bright but they were very interesting people, LeMoyne Billings being a good case. Kennedy almost deliberately turned off the hearing aid when he left the Oval Office. LBJ--completely different. He lived the Presidency seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

F: Kind of like a fire station.

K: He really loved it. Now since I'm a guy who lives with my professional life that way, I could understand. I won't offer any value judgment, they were just two completely different people in their approach to that. Even down at the Ranch when he was trying to relax, when he drove me around a couple of times in that Continental, he was talking business in-between things--"can't you see those deer, etc." But that was my experience, my relationship with the Vice President. I guess I was one of the few White House assistants, even junior grade, who had had friendly personal contacts with the VP and had seemed to hit it off, and I guess that had much to do with the fact that he moved me on up the ladder sometime after that--

F: Of course, on a trip like that too, you're together so much that you get a kind of almost forced intimacy that accelerates the scale of getting acquainted.

K: Well, I often used to say to myself that one of the things I suspect made us hit it off was that he doesn't like stuffy people and I wasn't. I'm not a very stuffy guy--less so I guess than Bundy--much more like Walt Rostow. So that was that.

F: Where were you at the time of the assassination?

K: I was right there in my office in EOB. [I] couldn't believe it, so I just went right on doing my business. I've always been one of those never to fight the unfightable or joust with the inevitable. I

figured the best way to keep myself from feeling too badly was just keep on working. Now I do remember--this will be amusing--this stuff is not really history, it's more in the area of anecdote.

F: But sometimes it reveals.

K: The first real substantive job I had after the assassination was a letter to King Faisal Abdel Aziz al Saud, Saud. I guess it was still of Saudi Arabia. This is the one place in the world where we used to write nine page personal Presidential letters, because the Saudi Arabia Kingdom is puritanical. They're the Wahhabi sect--a puritanical throwback to the early eighteenth century--and they go in for the pure Arabic form, which is that in any official communication among people of distinction you start out with a long flowery introduction, then you slip in the matter of substance, and then you have a long flowery ending. Now our Ambassador out there, Pete Hart, used to insist that if we could get away with it, we should address King Saud--who was one of our allies, oil, and anti-Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser]--in this form, and the State Department convinced me and I had sold it to Kennedy. In fact, since we had an active correspondence it finally got so that Kennedy wouldn't even read the damned letters, but would say, "Bob, is this okay?" and I'd say, "Yes, it's eight pages of nonsense, and right here on page four is the one paragraph where we're telling him something," and I'd sidelined it or paperclipped it, or abstracted it, so he finally got to the point where he would sign without reading it on my personal assurance. Well, somewhere I slipped a cog--I didn't realize we had a new President--and I sent to him one of these nine page letters. Well I could reconstruct in hindsight what it must have been! All this bull shit! Page after page after page of--

F: A man who won't turn a sheet over for anything.

K: Yes! Now I had put a little note on the front saying, "Now this is a special deal, Mr. President. This is"--President Kennedy had approved this finally--"because of the Saudis. This is a flowery, Arabic letter. It is four pages of introduction, four pages of ending and one paragraph"--and I put it all right on the front, very brief memo. In other words I was sort of continuing the Kennedy technique, but I didn't realize that a little four paragraph from me is not going to be good enough. He took a look at that letter. He must have wondered, "What in the hell is this all about." So the letter didn't come back. After a week I called the Colonel--what's her name?

F: Juanita Roberts.

K: Juanita and I are great buddies. I called Juanita and said, "Juanita, you know I guess the letter over there to King Saud got lost,"

Juanita was on the trip. She and I were great friends, and I knew them all by then. So she said, "I'll try and find it Bob." Then about four days later she called back "I don't know where it is." I said, "Listen, look again, will you?"

Well, after about two weeks of my sort of calling over there--Juanita bobbing me off--and I tried, oh, I don't know whether Marvin [Watson] had come along or not. At any rate I was getting pretty worried. It came back--the letter--signed, but by mistake because you know in the transition sometimes the bookkeeping gets--by mistake back came the whole file. I didn't get the letter alone. I got everything attached to the letter. Quite clearly LBJ had said, "Boy, I'm not going to take this kind of stuff without checking it

out." He had sent the letter to Clark Clifford. He had sent the letter to Abe Fortas. He had sent the letter, I think, to Jim Rowe. I forget whether Dean Acheson was in it, but there were four or five members of what by then was being called in the press the Kitchen Cabinet. Each of them had read this thing and was clearly as mystified as he was! Each of them wrote back a little squibble, which said in effect, "Mr. President, we don't understand it any better than you do, but Komer's explanation seems to be pretty clear, and the letter seems to say what he says on his little cover note. And it seems to be that this is the way it's done." So they said, "We suggest you go along. We don't see any reason why you shouldn't go along with it." So he sent it out, and Jesus, boy, was I impressed! Here's Clark Clifford, and Abe Fortas reviewing my letters to some two-bit Arab. But he did, he sent it out to everybody. That was where it was for three weeks. It was out being reviewed! Which I guess he must have done with a lot of other things. But it came back signed and I, of course--

F: You'd really run a gauntlet there.

K: Yes. Very straight-faced I hand carried this thing in an envelope to Juanita and I said, "Juanita, I guess this belongs over in the President's file, rather than my files." Of course, I wasn't suppose to see it--that it had been to all these guys. So that was my first action. It's very hard for me because by that time I was conducting a lot of business with the President, for me to sort out without my files how much--what the things were, because here this was the end of '63. During '64 we had a lot of stuff, and in '65, you know, he promoted me to be the Deputy Special Assistant.

Then at the end of February 1966, when Mac Bundy left--Mac had resigned, you know. The word was out in November--late November or early December--he left at the end of February 1966, and for about six weeks there I was the acting Special Assistant. I had Bundy's job.

Now I want to tell you, that was one of the most hair raising periods of my life, because then I saw the whole panorama of stuff in the security field that a President has to deal with, and that the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs had to deal with. You know, all sorts of sensitive intelligence matters, or big military posture decisions, you know--reports on missile programs--should we build this, or should we build that--all sorts of stuff. And, of course, at the end of April, 1966, he calls me up to his office, and said, "I'm going to make you my man on the other war in Viet Nam." But in the period before [this] I guess my service with President Johnson falls very easily into these two groups: my service in the Bundy office and then gratefully as Bundy's acting successor and then, second, the Viet Nam stuff. Let me stop here and go back and mention what to me were a few of the highlights.

F: Let me ask you one question while we're going back and that is, on this trip with Mr. Johnson as Vice President, do you have enough time to get down and talk about the guts of things with your opposite number in the foreign country, or is it pretty much a cut-and-dried ceremonial affair?

K: It was not, and that pleased me. I wanted to make it more than a ceremonial affair. This has always been my view of life, that the Department of State wasted too much time. The State's view has

always been you can't trust politicians even if they're President or Vice President. You leave that to professional diplomats. So when you have these State Visits--because that's what they were--confine it to the big picture--the general, you know, "We're allies and we love you and President Kennedy asked me to tell you that he thinks you're great Prime Minister, or Shah, etc." I didn't favor that.

It was perfectly clear to me early on though I only learned this by participating, that the Vice President was equally unhappy at being relegated to this kind of non-substantive role and that that probably had been one of his complaints about the earlier Far Eastern trip. Well, here was an occasion where an activist adviser just happened to come into conjunction with an activist Vice President, and by this time I was sure enough of my footing in the White House, you know--not on the policy area--but I gave him substantive suggestions. I told him the real things to talk to the Shah about to the consternation sometimes of these ambassadors.

You know he could ask them when they briefed him ahead of time, with me sitting right there, he'd say, "Now you know, Bob Komer says we've got a big problem with the Shah in pushing him on land reform, and I sort of thought I'd tell the Shah thus and so." Well, it's pretty hard for the Ambassador to turn off the Vice President with me sitting right there knowing the whole picture. All the exchanges of cables, etc., so by and large, they were quite substantive discussions. We got into some very useful things, which is why I thought the trip was a success. Not just because of the imagery, which was also very successful, but he liked it and I liked it.

I discovered then, and confirmed much later when he became

President, that Lyndon Johnson, at least for this guy's money, has an innate feel for problems which extends just as much into the foreign field as domestic field. The only difference between foreign policy problems and domestic problems is, the people know less about the foreign policy problems. Their main career has been in the domestic field.

But he was a very quick study. Nobody has ever mentioned LBJ as a speed reader. I think he read faster than Kennedy. We never had complaints coming back--at least I never did--that I was overloading the circuit with stuff. He just went through immense piles and, occasionally, I'd have to put together that evening reading file. And, boy oh boy, he got about thirty items a night. So this was just from us--no, it wasn't. I guess it was domestic plus us. We made our contribution to it. But you know, to deal with thirty or thirty-five items a night. Now he didn't deal with them all, like any sensible man, on some of them he said, "I'm not going to bother with this for awhile," and put it aside and looked at it some other time. Others he could react very quickly to, say, "Hell, that's nothing and get rid of that." We had a very good staff but his ability to process stuff was prodigious.

I found that when I briefed him he'd remember what it was he wanted to say about the briefing. He didn't always agree with me. I would say, "You know, I think it would be great if you would try this out," and he'd say, "Well, has that ever been raised in a very high level with this guy before?" And I'd say, "Well, no it hasn't." "Did Kennedy ever talk to this fellow about that when this fellow was over at the White House two years ago?" And I said, "I don't

think so." And he said, "In other words you're trying to put me out in front on this issue," and I say, "Yes sir, I happen to think it's right." And he'd say, "What does the State Department say?" And I'd say, "I think they're half with me and half scared." Well, then he'd make his own decision and frequently he would not do, as I as an adviser--it's easy to be a staff officer, you know. You can be bold as hell when you're making recommendations. When you're the guy who has to speak, and, above all, when you speak with the authority of the United States as Vice President, you just got to be a little more careful.

F: When you were briefing him, as a rule did he just sit and give you that straight look, or did he treat you as an adversary or--

K: Occasionally, as an adversary, but mostly the straight look. I remember--

F: That can be unsettling.

K: Yes. Even after I had gotten to know him a lot better--when I used to wonder whether he was sleeping with his eyes open. When I'd come back from Viet Nam I'd come back--of course, I knew him very well by then. I've got this picture here of me giving him my chart because I didn't like Rostow's chart. He'd sit there and look at me with that heavy-lidded look and I would keep on and on because I knew that if he didn't want to listen he would tell me. But you always had the suspicion in your mind that he wasn't hoisting it abroad. He seemed disinterested, bored, but not at all! I found out that, by God, I would get messages later, or chits from him, or he would tell Rostow to tell me something that made it very clear that he remembered everything I had told him. That was just--I don't know why he used it. I could see where it would be disconcerting

if he didn't want to listen to somebody but I was sure he did want to listen to me, if only because-- He didn't have to have me in if he didn't want to listen to me. He could kick me out in three minutes if he wanted to. I was working for him--

F: In this interview you've talked rather explicitly and at times earthily. Do you think that gave you an advantage in working with him.

K: Yes. I talked the same way and I had the feeling that the President sort of enjoyed it. As I was saying earlier, it was rather clear communication and boy the way he talked to me!

F: He can get explicit too!

K: Yes. But I must say, I have heard all these stories--and I'll be perfectly candid to you--about the way LBJ was an absolute tyrant to his personal staff, about the way he used to go into towering tantrums and rages, etc., and call them all sorts of names, etc. Throughout my entire career with Lyndon Johnson, up to the time I last saw him before I went off to Turkey, I had never had the feeling that he was being really rude or abusive to me. Now sometimes, you know, he used, "God dammit, that's a pretty stupid thing to do." You know, the equivalent of that which in LBJese, is rather more colorful, but never personal abuse--never the feeling he was talking down to me, you know. When I made mistakes he sure let me know, but never what I keep hearing he occasionally did to others--not to me! I have never had any cause to feel that the President was demeaning me.

F: I wonder if some of that demeaning of people, or alleged demeaning, isn't the fact that they themselves are not conditioned to this type

of, what amounts to almost, a small town criticism.

K: Yes, could have been, could have been.

F: They just hadn't been exposed sufficiently.

K: There were times when LBJ made what I thought were fairly petty remarks about people or problems, but then I served for John F. Kennedy, who sort of has a big halo around him with most of the establishment intellectuals. I want to tell you John F. Kennedy got off some pretty profane and petty remarks too, and I happened also to get off pretty profane petty remarks from what I think it is. This is just sort of a way of getting things off your mind by getting things out of your system, etc. The hell of it is when you're President, even if you sneeze it's taken as a matter of State, whereas the rest of us lesser mortals can get away with all that.

F: They must once in awhile want to talk in something besides careful language.

K: Exactly, and I must say I never had any difficulties with his communicating with me.

F: All right, you were about to go back and pick up some threads.

K: I wanted to pick up a few threads. One of them I discussed with Charlie Bartlett, the Washington synidicated columist, one time, and it was the Lyndon Johnson response to the great Indian famine of '64-'65 when we ended up sending, I think, some seven million-- my memory for the figures is very bad but my memory for--

F: But figures can be checked.

K: Yes. For the real issue is still pretty good. Remember India had a famine, a bad--not a famine. India had a disastrous drought and a big shortage in production and, of course, PL480 was the obvious

remedy and the only ones who had enough wheat were the Americans. The only ones willing to give wheat away are the Americans. The Australians will sell it to them, or the Argentines, or the French will sell it to them, but the Americans give it to them. It was one of the great instruments of our foreign policy, this whole Food for Peace, as you remember there was considerable delay in the American response. There was also a great deal of sort-of grudging handing-out in increments. We didn't say to them we're going to give you seven million tons of wheat to meet your deficit, Mr. [Lai Bahadur] Shastri."

What happened was, we doled it out a million and a half here and after another three months [of] some argument and concern, [another] half million, and then seven hundred thousand tons, etc. I think there were three or four or five increments over the course of perhaps a year or longer.

LBJ got a very bad press on this. He certainly didn't get it because of me because he got the good press that was from me. I kept telling him that he was getting the bad press from the Indian Ambassador B.K. Nehru, who for some strange, inexplicable reason to me still to this day, LBJ liked! A charmer, B.K. Nehru, but one of the most arrogant Hindus I have ever met. I used to think my first real conversation with Lyndon Johnson was when he said Ayub is great [redacted] SANITIZED Here somehow B.K. Nehru could always get around him. Well, B.K. Nehru was leaking all this stuff about the delays, and how the White House was holding it up, and how Lyndon Johnson wouldn't feed starving Indians, etc., whereas I was putting out the counterstories, which had to be put out much more delicately because if we revealed the full story we

would have lost the purpose of the exercise.

I want to tell you what the purpose of the exercise was. I would say that President Johnson had more to do with the grain revolution in India than any other living American and probably than any Indian with the possible exception of Subramaniam, who was the Minister of Agriculture at that time. The Indians had typically neglected their agricultural sector in their five year plans and put all their money and all the aid into agriculture. They may have made a smart decision. You could always depend on Uncle Sugar to make up the deficit in wheat and rice, which we had been doing for years.

Well, by this time our aid policy was shifting around and so was their development policy, to a realization that a developing country better stress agriculaturebecause we were running out of surplus and it was a very expensive burden on the American taxpayer, too. So while the intellectuals and the theoreticians were arguing that they should do this and that and we had big proposals for the Indians--they ought to build more fertilizer factories, ought to have more American companies come in and invest in fertilizers, so we didn't have to give them the factories free, or as part of long-term aid loan.

LBJ, in his way, used the leverage provided by the fact that we were the only country that could meet the Indians food deficit, to force the grain revolution down the throats of the Indian government. In other words, he said, "You tell those guys that I'm tired of giving--of paying for their mistakes all the time. Now when they can prove to me that they have really done the job on fertilizer, when they actually closed the deal and sign the contract for these

fertilizer plants, then I'm going to be more liberal, but they are not doing their job. They're leaving it all to us to do." There were a number of policy changes and program changes we wanted out of the Indian government in their own interest! It didn't make any difference to us! This was to make Indian's agricultural sector work better.

Well, he sort of got this, and you know how he always used to play his cards very close to his chest. Now, for example, he explained to me, though only infrequently and fairly elliptically what he was after. But by this time, you know I could take a sentence and erect a policy because I'd been working with him that long. But the State Department could not understand what he was doing. And I was the man who had to explain to Orville Freeman even, and the State guys, what he was trying to do. They were coming to me every day, you know, by this time. Orville Freeman would ask the President once and get blown out of the water and then he would come around and say, "Now, Bob, the President seems to be a little mad at me on this or the other. Why don't <u>you</u> go in and ask for it?", and depending on the circumstances I would try, but I had to explain this.

He played it so close to his chest that half of the people, and the insiders in his own government, didn't realize what he was doing. But it was a great example of how a master politician can pull the lever and get something done. Something which, by the way, we had been advising the Indians to do for, I think, the previous fifteen years! They had a Harvard economic mission out there that was constantly telling them this sort of thing. Well, by God, he

made them do it, because he saw the opportunity--the drought. He saw that he had the lever--the release of the wheat--and by golly, no authenticated cases of actual starvation. He said, "Well when you get an authenticated case, you tell that Ambassador out there of mine, Chester Bowles--you tell that guy to go over there and when he's got a real authenticated case pack up his bones and send them back here then I'll believe him." So everybody [was] thinking--the Indian Ambassador was leaking that Lyndon Johnson was condemning untold thousands of Indians to starvation because he wouldn't release this wheat. Well, by God, no Indians starved to our knowledge, and they were using that argument on LBJ, just like people are using arguments that we're all going to be dead from pollution in ten years, just as they used to use the argument that if we build hydrogen bombs we'll all be dead from this or that in ten years and we still seem to be here, etc. The second thing--

F: Before you do that, was he using B.K. Nehru, or was he using Chester Bowles? How was he getting the word, the pressure put on?

K: He used everyone, everybody. We used Bowles. I had to send messages out to Bowles. State sent messages out to Bowles. He called B.K. in--used to talk to B.K. Nehru very much. The trouble was when he talked to B.K. Nehru he was a great big old softie. This was the reason for my earlier complaint. Then B.K. would come around to me and say, "What do you mean telling me that Lyndon Johnson wants reform. I just saw him. He just called me in last night for a half-hour chat over a Scotch and he told me, 'Now don't you worry, B.K., I'll take care of you.'" And then I'd say, "Okay, Mr. President, sign this release," and he wouldn't do it. He'd just sit on it.

He used every channel. He played poker on this situation. You know, he'd use me! He used to have me out saying one thing thinking I was carrying out his will and simultaneously he was not only telling B.K. Nehru another thing, he might be telling Dean Rusk another thing. But since I was sort of his staff officer at the center of the stage I knew more of the plays than most other people did and I could see what the real decisions were when he signed off on something. As long as he wasn't signing off I knew what the trouble was. I don't care what he told people. And those guys, you know it got through to them, and they did sign some fertilizer contracts, and they did come up with a revised agricultural policy. You go over now and read what the Indian economists are saying and they are all very pleased with what they've done in the agricultural field.

Let me give you another little example, because this is an aspect of his-- I think this is an important foreign policy issue, and one where LBJ just looks much much better to the insider than the public ever saw. One of the big questions was how fast we could ship this wheat to India, and the initial pitch was the Agricultural Department that got the ships etc. The initial pitch was that it would take, as I recall, fourteen weeks to load wheat at Galveston. Fourteen weeks from the time the decision was made. The President authorized us to load the wheat down at Galveston, get it on a ship, get the ship on the way over there, unload the wheat at Bombay and get it to the famine areas. So the first time I went in I said, "Mr. President"--I used to do the staff work, we had the deadlines--I said, "Mr. President, here is the problem. It looks as

though the deficit in Bikar Province is such-and-such and if we don't have a lead time of fourteen weeks, we aren't going to get the food there in time. So the last day in which you can do this is next Tuesday." The first one of these I sent him, I got a little scribbled note back in that angular script--he writes like my father--"go back and ask that fellow Freeman if it really takes fourteen weeks."

Well, I had two choices. I didn't know why the President asked that question, but I also knew that that was also the kind of issue I was going to go back and ask for an explanation. So I asked Freeman, and Freeman said, "Well that's what my people tell me."

I said, "Well, Orville, before we go back to the President on this, he may know something we don't know. How about checking in and seeing if we can't shave that fourteen weeks a little bit?"

Orville called me back up in a week and he said, "Well that allows ten days for bidding procedures and stuff like that and, actually, I guess we could cut that down to three days. It was more like thirteen weeks, and then we can get a little faster ship and we can do it in twelve weeks."

I went back in and told the President, "Mr. President, it's not next Tuesday, it's Tuesday two weeks from now, Orville has rechecked it. You were right, it only takes twelve weeks."

He asked me that question three times and by the time we were through we were down to about eight weeks. Now I bet he didn't know a damned thing more about what it takes to ship wheat to India than I did. We were both illiterate on the subject but he had that sort of inner instinct that the bureaucracy always allows itself

all sorts of protection. When he was playing poker against the Indians to get them off their butts on this food business, he just doggone well knew that he could push Freeman and Komer and the State Department and everybody else to streamline this procedure.

[End of Side 1 of Tape 1, Interview I]

INTERVIEW I continued

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

K: I'll have to consult the files of the Johnson Library to get the dates and the details, but if I can just get a look at the memos I sent to him on this subject--which I guess are all down there in the chrono. My secretary kept those magnificent chronos, but I could get more of it. But this is something which deserves more discussion. That is, he just did a brilliant job. I might--just to cap it off--say, to our knowledge, no Indian died of famine. We got all the wheat over there in time. All the stories about how he was using starvation as a weapon of foreign policy, you know, were baloney, and what we really got out of it was that this man got something done that the rest of us in the U.S. government--and the Indian government, for that matter--had not been able to do for fifteen years--force the Indians to do something about their agricultural sector.

F: Then the Indians took credit for it.

K: Yes, sure. Now that's not bad.

F: Do you think Nehru ever understood what was going on?

K: This was after Nehru's time--

F: No, I mean B. K. Nehru.

K: B. K. Yes. B. K. was more than smart enough because B. K. could put two and two together. We kept saying, "When were the fertilizer contracts signed?" That was my job. I was supposed to--you could never put it directly because if B. K. could ever catch me in a

quote, or could ever catch us in a piece of writing, he'd give it to the New York Times the next day and say, "See the American using starvation as a weapon of policy!" It was pretty thin ice!

Now I did background Charlie Bartlett on this. Charlie Bartlett wrote a syndicated article--his column is in the Washington Star and sixty to seventy other papers--on this. And if I recall correctly, after the episode I was so impressed with this, I went out and sort of told this story where I thought it would do some good. You know, after the event, when it was proven that we had no starvation and we got the agricultural change-over. Then it looked great! But, of course, you know the press if it's yesterday's story, they--

F: All this must at times, though, have left you a little wondering on your own part. Is he up to something I don't see? I'm not talking about his specific instance but so often his refusal to take certain stands that look obvious--I've wondered sometimes, you know, [he] pulls some rabbit out of the hat, or is he back there scrambling--because it's easy to get critical.

K: Now let me put it this way. Much less concern of that sort, I think, on foreign policy because there the room to maneuver was less in a sense. The ability to be very cooney (?) about it. There were legitimate delays. I had the feeling the President had learned through a long and active life that whenever anybody tells you anything you always discount it by about 20 to 25 percent. If he says, "You better sign on the dotted line tomorrow or you're never going to get a chance to invest in this oil well," the guy will be back again a week later. You don't have to decide when people tell you you have to decide.

I felt in foreign policy there was less dissimulation because he had other things he was playing with. I think it was more to force people to really make their case. You know, Komer comes in with one memo, or Rostow and you sit on it or refuse to face up to it. Then if he never comes back again, he doesn't have much conviction in it. If Komer doesn't come back with a second memo saying, "Hey, boss, this is serious business and I meant it." Well then maybe I wasn't that serious after all. When I come back a third time--you know really, "Hey boss, you'll lose a great chance if you don't do something <u>now</u>, <u>now</u> <u>now</u>!" then he knows. I don't think so much dissimulation on that score.

However, he was very cagey on what I will call the imagery stuff--the rabbits he pulled out of the hat in the foreign policy field where I was involved--the Middle East, Africa, that sort of thing--were much more in terms of a surprise visit, surprise speech, the surprise gimmick at a State visit. He was very inventive about all that kind of stuff. You know, let's walk arm in arm down to the gate and talk to people down there when he had some visitor, or let's get in the helicopter and take him down--or get in the Jet Star and take him down to the Ranch--very inventive and he plays those very close, because, you know, there you get into the area of his personal idiosyncracy about his personal plans that everybody used to complain so about. It didn't bother me, I think a President's entitled to--

F: Did you get the feeling that he got a certain therapy out of these visitors of foreign dignitaries? Or just an interruption?

K: Some yes, some no. Some of them are god awful, dull people. Some of them--

F: I just wonder, with some of them if they really had anything to talk about--whether in effect he got briefed on them, leaving out the fact that sometimes like the elephant who never forgets anything, that fifteen minutes later he could have remembered them if he met them on the street--if they weren't just almost that much of a passing parade?

K: Sure, some of them were. You know, any President has to see so many people and one who is a President cum politician, like LBJ, saw even more. I used to complain that he didn't take up some of the things that I thought were terribly important in the briefs I would give him. Incidentally, Johnson--like Kennedy--just thought the stuff the State Department sent over for a foreign visitors, the briefing papers, were terrible. They sent over telephone books and then we'd tell them to cut down, but they--you know, bureaucracies can't change very fast--they never could seem to cut down. So I just talked--

F: Can't leave anything out.

K: That's right. You know, let's say they leave something out and the foreign visitor asks about it, that's the cardinal sin. That never bothered me. I was much more interested in looking at the positive. I'm not a half as worried over whether somebody left something out, as I was if we didn't put in the <u>three big points</u>. I'm much more interested in getting the three big points in than worrying about whether point fifteen is left out. So we finally, in desperation--I guess every White House staffer did this--we wrote our own memos to him. I took all the State stuff, read it very carefully, and then sort of summarized in my own words, the way I thought it would

communicate best--I guess you get to be a fairly competent staff officer to a President when you acquire enough of a feel for how he operates so you can put it to him in a way that gets to him effectively. So I would give him four or five points to take up with some Indian potentate, or something like that, and he maybe covered three of them and left out two more. Well that's actually batting five or six hundred--which ought to put me in the major leagues--but I remember being very unhappy that he didn't get point four and five too! And I used to say, "Christ, is he being lazy about this, or [does he] forget them, or what?"

F: Were you still playing with India in your own personal career at the time that the Chinese came over the hill?

K: No. The Chinese things was in '62. It was in the Kennedy years and I was heavily involved with that. The Indo-Pak thing happened in '65. Wasn't it '65?

F: Yes.

K: And I was heavily involved in that one. Was that '65 or '67?

F: I'll have to check that out. Did that cause much coneern?

K: Yes. I thought the President was very cool on that one. I thought quite rightly so.

F: In what way?

K: Well, he didn't get overly excited. People in the State Department were getting all jumping up and down--what's going to happen here--but he said, "Look, our policy will be a plague on both your houses." So we suspended military aid and everything else to both of them and I think that was one of the contributing factors to bringing that episode to a close. Plus the fact my Indians beat his Paks,

which I suspect surprised him more than it did me.

F: Did he ever get disillusioned with Ayub Khan?

K: Interesting question, which I think you'd have to ask him, because I am probably quite parochial on that. I used to counsel him from that very first meeting. I kept sort of clueing him on this. Now when the Paks played little double-dealing games with us, like about the Peshawar Base, where they told us they didn't have any Chinese tanks, and it turned out they did. Or they weren't playing footsie with Peking, but it turned out they were. I always used to take certain malicious pleasure in making sure that the right tidbit got to him and with a little twist in there so he knew doggone well I was sort of saying "See, this is your buddy Ayub!" Of course, Ayub was the victim of bum advice. I don't blame the Paks from their point of view. After being patsies for them for six or seven years, we just sort of pulled the plug and I think the President always felt--I don't blame him, I like Ayub--but I think the President always felt it was sort of two-timing a friend for reasons of national policy, you know.

He used to needle me. Oh yes, "India lover" that was the thing he used to say to me and to Bundy that used to hurt, "Yes, you India lovers, [redacted] SANITIZED SANITIZED At one time he said to somebody in my presence--I forget who it was, Dean Acheson or somebody--he said, "Yes Komer and Bundy and the damned State Department and all those India lovers are always in here telling me to love up Indira Ghandi, and love up Shastri and love up those Indians." He said, "They're constantly telling me the Paks are no good, that they're two-timing us."

"That's India lovers," and I am sure with my not being there he has several times said "Christ," he said, "I'm glad I'm talking to you; that God-damn India lover Komer! All he gives me is that pro-India stuff and that anti-Pak stuff." But that was one of the phrases he used that hurt, and he knew it hurt, and every now and then he [would] trot it out.

F: It must have made Mac Bundy wince once in awhile.

K: Oh yes, yes, but you know, this is an interesting case. I feel the Paks really conned us--taking advantage of the fact that they were much more presentable, that they talked much more our lingo. They looked like brown Englishmen, you know, the Pathans and the Punjabis are tall upstanding guys, and little Shastri comes over dressed in his white habit, little high pitched voice. He doesn't look like much. Pretty tough minded little guy. But sure I remember going out and getting drunk back in '57 with a couple of Pak colonels and brigadiers. One of them said he could drink me under the table up at the Khyber Pass. He holds out a whole bottle of Haig's Five Star and said, "I can drink this faster than you can drink it," and I said, "Buddy, I'm not even going to try!" He was seven feet tall anyway so he had a lot more room to fill up, but sure, the Paks are terribly likeable.

F: You could have put Ayub Kahn out in Texas, you know, they'd taken for granted he was some Mexican-American running a ranch.

K: Sure.

F: Did you get in, in '65, on any of this NATO Minister's Conference--on the planning for it?

K: Negative. That was not my bailiwick and--

F: You stayed out of that completely?

K: Yes.

F: Did it really make any difference in your duties between being a Deputy Special Assistant and a Special Assistant--

K: I'll tell you in all honesty, absolutely none. That was a reward and I must say LBJ was always damned decent about that sort of thing, at least as far as I was concerned. No. I got promoted and Francis Bator, because here we'd been doing the job of a deputy special assistant for over a year. I think Bundy sort of went in and said, "You know, you've got two good guys here in Komer and Bator and you ought to give them a little something more than a pat on the head occasionally. Why don't we give them a title." Incidentally, it made no difference, we still got the same salary. It made no difference whatsoever, except we were called Deputy Special Assistants, which by the way, I don't think had existed before. I think it was the first time that the special assistants for National Security Affairs had a deputy or two, and I was the general deputy and Bator was the deputy for economic affairs.

F: How did you happen to ease into Viet Nam?

K: That's a good one. You'll have to ask "Himself" about that, as Buzz always used to call him, "Himself", or Marv Watson always said "Himself."

Now before that, I want to mention a very important historical point. Bundy kept trying to drag me into the Viet Nam business. I'd always kept saying, "Look Mac, there are too many cooks stirring this pot already," you know, "the President's spending more time on this than anything else, you're spending, McNamara's spending,

Dean Rusk is spending. Let's have at least one guy who's looking out for the rest of the third world and worrying about the African, the Middle Easterners, the South Asians, etc."

I suspect, with the wisdom of hindsight, that Mac--the Ford thing may have come along in mid-'65 or so--started to get into negotiation. I don't know when and I'm sure that I knew well after the President knew, but Bundy was trying to ease me into his job, I think. You know, Mac recommended to the President--and this will become germane in a minute--recommended to the President, because he told me so, that I be his successor, that I get the Rostow job, and instead I got the Viet Nam Job. But, Bundy insisted that I come down to the Ranch with McNamara and Dean Rusk in, I think, early December, 1965. It turned out to be the big discussion before the long, thirty-seven day bombing halt. Now I was not down there because of Viet Nam. There were a couple of relatively--

F: You were apparently there on December 8 according to my--

K: That's it. They apparently--I was down for two small items that could have been settled in ten minutes in work, but what I think Mac was doing, was trying to get me educated on the way the Boss felt about Viet Nam and other issues because the number one discussion of the subject down there was a long afternoon session in the living room on the bombing halt. The reason I mention this is because I was perfectly fascinated by the way the President handled it. McNamara made a strong pitch. Bundy made a good pitch. Dean Rusk confined himself to saying he agreed with them. The President asked a few questions, but the main question that Lyndon Johnson asked, and he asked it three or four times, is, "Fellows what happens if this doesn't work? Can I turn the bombing back on again?"

That was the thing he was looking at. I remember this as if it's still written in words of fire. The President's main line of attack or inquiry was, "Okay, so we try this out for two or three weeks, what happens after that? Can we go back to bombing them? Can we step up the bombing?" McNamara said to him. Bundy said to him. Rusk said to him. And at one point he turned to me and said "Bob, do you agree with that?" and I had very little to do with it, and I said "yes, sir." They all said, they all believed, I believed after hearing--I found them very convincing. "Mr. President, if you stop the bombing for as short as two weeks and the other guy hasn't responded, you're home free. And, by the way, we don't think he's going to respond, but everybody in the world will think--you domestic critics, your foreign critics--if for two weeks we stop the bombing and they haven't given us an iota of response, we really have reestablished our credibility, our peaceful intentions, and everything else." They said, "It's a snap, Mr. President." Why are you asking that naive question was the implication?

And he went after them and they kept telling him. In fact, very clearly they thought it was sort of a silly question to ask. It was so obvious. Why the hell was Lyndon Johnson badgering about how you turn it back on again? Well, let me tell you. They were <u>all wrong</u> and I was. We were all wet and LBJ kept that thing on for thirty-seven days and nobody gave him a God dammned bit of credit for it and all the critics kept saying he should have never turned it back on again. He got Zilch. Well, he got a little more than that--I'm overstating the case, but it had turned out that his instinctive feel for the gut issue was it, and all these brains

sitting around including myself, we just flubbed that one right and left. Well, boy, does he remember that.

F: He smelled something there that wasn't quite right.

K: His instinct for the, you know, "what have you done for me recently?" Nobody looked back and said, "Ah, it was the President who turned it off," and nobody looked back and said, "Ah, you've had it off for thirty-seven days." They all said, "What are you starting it up again for," as if we were starting the bombing all over, you see. He saw that loud and clear and, boy, does he remember that, because I have sat there at the Tuesday Luncheon, or in our late little meeting when other proposals for bombing halts or for this that or the other thing came up, and he would always say, "Never again, you told me we were going to be home free, that either they would respond or we could escalate again and you were so wrong." I heard him say it to McNamara. There were other bombing halts proposed, but this was in December of '65. There were others. We had a very short one as I recall at the end of '66, and there were many proposals for this kind of controlled deescalation. Every time he brought back this question and he really ground it into them, and that gave me a real lesson in the difference between a man who thinks about the whole problem and a bunch of very bright guys who look at it intellectually without looking at it in human terms--human terms and human nature. Very interesting. Boy, was he right and were they wrong. Were we wrong. I should include myself because I voted, simply because he'd done me the courtesy of asking me. It wasn't my business.

F: Were you involved at all, more than any staff member would be, but

in the campaign of '64?

K: Not at all.

F: So you just kept your nose to the grindstone and did what you were supposed to. Did you try to counter any of Mr. Goldwater's assertions during that campaign?

K: He stayed so far away. You know, I'm not sure that Goldwater knows yet where the Middle East is, or Africa, or places like that. My issues simply were not involved. I would never have hesitated and I might be able to go back and find certain things. I am one of those fellows who believe that if you're working for a man who you respect and admire and it's his administration and you're part of it you go out and fight. You don't say, "I'm foreign policy and we don't get involved in politics." Hell, foreign policy and politics are like this! They're completely intertwined. So, in fact, I don't think the President ever asked me whether I was a Democrat or not. I don't think he ever asked me a political question.

F: He just wanted you to be right on what you were doing.

K: That's right. He thought of me as a professional, and not as a political type.

F: Were you concerned with Cyprus?

K: Yes, I was concerned with Cyprus.

F: Well, we might as well get into this and go on to Viet Nam.

K: That is a good one to get into. Cyprus was handled by LBJ and George Ball. George, as Undersecretary of State, was, in effect, made the senior adviser on Cyprus to the President. The President did this. I had a God-awful problem with George Ball because I was the White House man whose bailiwick included Cyprus. I happened to think

that George Ball's advice was very good. There are only a few things--I was 90 per cent in agreement with him and only 10 per cent dissagreement with him so I don't want to criticize the advice he was giving the President. I was also sending memos to the President, but Ball is one of these guys who, when he's got the ball--to coin a phrase--sure as hell doesn't want anybody else in the act. He made it very, very clear to me that God-damn it, he would be clueing the President, he was carrying the can on this one and he didn't need my help. He was willing to let me come over and sit in on the top meetings, etc.

F: You could listen.

K: And I bitched to Bundy about this. I said, "God-damn it," I said, "George is sliding slightly off this way, and I think I ought to go to the President, or we're going to run into this problem and the President ought to know," etc.

Mac said to me, "The President is the one who told Ball that he's the guy on Cyprus. Ball has direct access to the President, and I am not going to join you in causing trouble to George when you admit that George is doing a pretty good job in keeping the President clued on this."

So, my direct role in Cyprus was less than my role in any other--the '64 crisis, the '67 one I was already in Viet Nam. My direct role in the Cyprus thing was less than on any other major foreign policy issue in my bailiwick during the Johnson years, or during my period, before I became a Vietnamese, and it was an exceedingly frustrating thing.

F: Did you get the feeling, though, that the President really paid any

attention to the person's position in the hierarchy. In other words if you could get his ear he'd listen to you just as carefully as he would to George Ball or anyone up and down the line?

K: Yes. I think he called it with respect to advice on the basis of his confidence in the man, and I think that I am probably as good a proof of that as anyone. Now you take these Kitchen Cabinet types--there's just no question as to the intellectual capability of a Clark Clifford or an Abe Fortas or a Dean Acheson or a Jim Rowe, who happened to be the four who I knew. There are probably others but I didn't get into the people he knew on the domestic side. But, incidentally, I was also heavily involved in Cyprus because I'm a great Dean Acheson fan--worked for Dean Acheson at one time on NATO matters before the New Frontier and Great Society.

But I have always had the sense that the President had over this Middle East trip back in '62 when our subsequent associations sort of decided that he liked the cut of my advice--that we seemed to be on the same frequency and I seemed to know what I was talking about and to know a little bit more than the State Department because I'm sure he was asking the same questions of Dean Rusk. So the fact that I was a totally unknown fellow, I was a junior grade professional type sort of--first nothing, then a deputy special assistant. I think I'm living proof, and I've batted about six or seven hundred with him. I don't know whether he would feel that, but I think on the basis of what I sent in, 60 or 70 percent connected one way or the other. There's proof that he listened to advice from guys with whom he had confidence whether they were major public figures or not, and I suspect very much that on some

big Middle East issues--because by that time my professional record was pretty good on the basis of what he knew I'd done in previous times--I suspect that on Middle East issues he sure as hell listened to me as much as he listened to anybody, and maybe more than most.

F: What about the Six-Day War?

K: That happened after I went. Incidentally, that's another big issue. LBJ's policy toward the Arabs and Israelis. He was very anti-Nasser, but we had disengaged from the "Try to do business with Nasser" policy before the assassination. He used to needle me a little bit on--"Komer you're a God-damned Nasser lover too. You're one of those guys who used to tell Kennedy to give all that wheat to Nasser and look what it got us," but by that time I had switched too and realized--I still think it was a sound policy gambit but by that time we'd gotten into the Yemen War and I, too, had concluded that it was probably too late to try to do business with Nasser.

Johnson's handling of the Israelis was very, very good and I was heavily involved in that. You know we did the tank deal with Israel--which is a very secret deal still. We did the plane deal with Israel, and I was involved in that. He sent Averell Harriman and myself to Israel on a visit in February, 1965. [It was] one of the first trips I took as a Johnson emissary, and Averell saying what hard cases the Israelis were, and knowing what trouble this would get him in New York Averell copped out after three days of head-to-head--two days--and went on with the plane to India, leaving me. I sent word back to Bundy, "For God's sakes let me come home, I'm getting nowhere with these guys." He sent me back a two-line back-channel message, "The President says you can stay there until

you bring home the bacon." He made me stay there! Lyndon Johnson kept me there! I used to send these messages to the President, you know, knowing Bundy would bring them in, because this was sensitive stuff, "Let me out! I can't do it!" And he kept me in and we worked out a deal. I was personally very closely involved in this.

F: Were they excessively demanding or were they just intransigent?

K: They are the toughest barkers in the world. What a bunch of real pros. Sure they're excessively--you know they start out asking for the moon with green cheese and they end up taking your pants, and that's better than giving them the moon with green cheese. But there was a strategic rationale. We didn't give things to the Israelis because we loved them. We didn't give things to the Israelis because there's a great big constituency that any Democratic President is very sensitive to--Republican Presidents, too, but Democratics more so. There were some very sound strategic reasons for our positions and LBJ hoisted them aboard like a shot. I'm glad you mentioned that because I was quite heavily involved, particularly since Mike Feldman left before I did.

You know, every President has his minority to fight, and David Niles, who was what? Roosevelt's. And then there was Max Robb, for Ike and for Kennedy, it was Mike Feldman, who worked, even though his business was mostly domestic, he was the pipeline through which the American Jewish community came to the White House. And Kennedy used to take great pleasure in matching his White House Jew, Feldman, against his White House Arab, Komer.

Now I'll say this for JFK, he never let anything come in through

the Feldman channel without getting an opinion as to where it fitted into the Komer channel, and I would say in my arguments with Mike, I won three out four, partly because I had right on my side. Mike would come in and give stories about how the Egyptians would have nuclear rockets and such. It was simply horse-stuff. Mike continued to perform this function for LBJ but when he left which, I guess, was about after a year to form his own law firm, Harry McPherson--poor guy--Harry inherited that nasty job. Harry and I are good friends so my role in the Israeli business, not just my role in the Arab-Israeli business--my role in the Israeli business got much bigger after Mike left because by this time the President had confidence in me and I used to have to deal with some of these birds who came down to tell him how the Egyptians had nuclear rockets and were going to knock off Israel within six weeks. You saw what happened when the Israelis finally decided to do something--the Six-Day War as you put it. So that was an important thing.

You know it's funny, I'm delighted you're asking me these questions because I hadn't really focused on them on so many of these things.

F: I'm not sure it's germane, but I have picked up the notion that President Kennedy had a little bit of the Irish let's say distaste for the Jewish community--a little anti-Semitic, not blatant.

K: Not blatant. I wouldn't think so, but he was--let me put it this way. LBJ got along better with them--I would say significantly better with them, talked their kind of language much more so than Kennedy. Let me put it that way. So Kennedy came through, but he was rather more distant.

You know an interesting thing. Here is a President who came in a sense from a religious minority on the American scene, our first Catholic President, and I sort of have the feeling he was quite standoffish with all pleas that had a minority tinge--quite standoffish--not quite standoffish--but just a little more careful so as to make sure that he would not be tagged as being pro-Catholic or pro-Jewish or anything.

F: Whereas Johnson could say you damned Jew--

K: That's right--and did. Gee whiz, that was really a fascinating education in politics to be involved in that one because that was one of the problem areas where domestic and foreign considerations got quite--

F: How did you break down the Israelis besides the fact that you were desperate to get home?

K: No, actually I was--well, by just two things. One, showing them that we weren't a bunch of damn illiterates, that we really did do our homework and we knew as much about the strategic balance in the Middle East, as they did. Now, I was one of those. I was the first man in the White House, probably, who was a professional expert on the area, and I used to read all the intelligence.

Now the Israelis went in for gambits like this, "You know, the Russians just gave a thousand tanks to Nasser" and I would say, "Now look, I know your intelligence is better than that, and I'll tell you our intelligence is sure as hell better than that. They gave 352 tanks to Nasser, and they weren't the fancy new models, they were that second-hand old model" and made a whole series of allegations. This was part of the game played--they wanted to overstate the Arab

threat so we would provide them more help and being a professional I was able to conduct that debate on a professional level.

I think this used to please both Johnson and Kennedy that I provided them with the kind of answers that permitted LBJ to look Abe Feinberg in the eye or look Mike Feldman in the eye when Mike said "Mr. President I've got to tell you, we're in deep trouble," and the President would say, "Bob Komer just told me that the intelligence indicates that that's grossly inflated."

So that was one technique, to get the debates back onto a professional level and, after all, as the Six-Day War proved, the Israelis were crying much more and much more shrewdly than they needed to. Let me tell you their estimates were sort of the same as ours--their real estimates--because they were very confident about what they could do and they proved it. In fact, they proved it three times.

The second was to be very tough-minded with them. I think that LBJ would agree and that Kennedy would have agreed and that Mac Bundy who was probably the best witness of all because he saw all of this go on--the memos float across his desk etc.--that I was very tough-minded. I had no political stature. I was not involved. It was not my career as a politician that was going to be hurt. I was just a staff officer and I always let them have it very straight-forwardly. You know, on Jordan policy, they used to say, "Why are you sending those planes to King Hussein, the brave young King of Jordan." And I would say "Listen you guys, we're only keeping Jordan alive for you. We don't have any independent interest in Jordan. There isn't any oil in Jordan. Jordan's costing us fifty

million a year just to keep it from being gobbled up by Iraq or by Nasser, and why are we spending our fifty million a year? So that Israel can live with an Arab state that is not strong on its eastern frontier." It's longest land frontier as it so happens. "So add that to our annual aid bill, fellows." I said, "I regard aid to Jordan as aid to Israel." You know, this is very sensitive, of course. And I really ground that into them, and they knew it. So they couldn't come on "No, Jordan doesn't make any difference. Let King Hussein go." And I said, "Yes, and you'll have Egyptians there tomorrow, and while Egyptians ain't all that hot, the Egyptians are much more dangerous than Jordanians."

See, the Jordanians were the only Arabs who shared a common interest with the Israelis. They both wanted to divide up Palestine. That's why King Hussein got us fascinated in 1948, because he was willing to make a deal, whereby he'd get half of Palestine and the Jews would get the other half. [He] was fascinated by it.

But anyway, I don't know, I think, myself, that we Democrats really can be faintly proud of ourselves because we did a quite good job in the Arab-Israeli business from 1960 right on--1961 through 1968. I think the press would sort of give us credit too now that the Nixon Administration is sort of wobbling around.

F: Did we ever try to press for social reforms in Arab countries?

K: Much more so in the Kennedy period when we were trying to turn Nasser inward. In other words, our case to Nasser was, "For God's sake, why don't you spend your time trying to take care of the people of Egypt and spend less time trying to be the big wheel in the Arab world and upset all our friends--Arab friends too, not just the

Israelis." You know the Yemen War had nothing to do with the Israelis. That was Nasser trying to get at Saud or Faisal, who was one of our best friends, and by the time LBJ came along it just didn't work. The chances of getting much movement with most of the Arabs were limited but with a guy like Bourguiba, with Faisal and the Saudis, LBJ was great. He was quite a populist in his foreign policy thinking as well as his domestic thinking and I very quickly got the sense that he was very receptive to suggestions along these lines. And that sort of point he always brought up with the visiting leader.

F: He could transfer his enthusiasms to someone like Bourguiba?

K: Yes. Oh God, you ought to hear him talk about water, you know, and how down in Texas--

F: He's just going to make the whole North Africa bloom.

K: That's right. He had only one idiosyncracy that I thought was excessive--he was a fanatic and you tell him I said so--on rural electrification! Good God, you could drive me up a wall. He wanted to have rural electrification in Viet Nam as part of the other war, and Good Lord, I used to say "Boss, why don't we win the war first. Then we'll turn on the lights!"

But he was very good and that's the next point too to bring up that--and I would have to go through some of my papers to pick up some concrete examples--but if it was social and economic reform, especially rural reform, he was very, very good on that. That was the kind of point he would pick up. He would when I'd make some nasty point about the politics of some country, or military points--he's not as impressed with the utility of military tools as I was. In fact, I remember him telling me several stories about how you

have to deal with the military. "You've got to really hit them over the head." [He] didn't think much of the brass, as he used to keep calling them.

F: Did he get on with the Shah fairly well?

K: Extremely. Now for the President of the United States, the Shah will push a peanut with his nose if it's necessary to get along well with him. There are very few people, I guess--you see, the guy had so many of these pipsqueak parishes, so I was involved in one hell of a lot of Presidential visitors and meetings and things like that. There are very few people the President did not get along well with. There were a few that he didn't particularly care for, and I have the impression that one of them was old George Papandreou, the Prime Minister of Greece at the time of Cyprus. I think the President really liked old Inonu [Ismet], even though he had to hit. Boy, we really hit the Turks then, and that was one of the times I didn't serve the President well because I didn't scream loud enough. It was partly my fault, partly Bundy's fault but this is the famous Johnson letter of June 1964 when, in the middle of the Cyprus crisis--the first Cyprus crisis--the Turks were about to invade Cyprus and we sent them the famous Johnson letter, which really turned them off. George Ball wrote the Johnson letter and dreamed it up in a hell of a hurry because, as you know, as the intelligence came in it was-- He must have written it between eight and ten at night and I remember being called down and told by Mac Bundy I had a half-hour to comment on this and I--

F: Not much time to think beyond--

K: Not much time to think beyond, but very interestingly, I said,

"This is a strong letter. A strong letter is needed but it's too strong. And, in particular, it included two phrases about NATO"--and I forget what the other phrase was--"which are really going to hit the Turks below the belt and they're going to cost us. And I think the letter is just as strong without those two phrases." In other words, in my judgment--boy, that was one of the toughest letters anybody ever wrote anybody else, and it had to be done! The guys were getting in the landing craft and taking off and LBJ really had to stop them cold. He did and it nets out a great success, but I complained about the letter.

Bundy said, "Look, we're going to see the President at eleven o'clock." In fact, he said, "You're not going to see him because I'm going to handle it and because George Ball's going to be there and if you come up and get in an argument with George Ball it's going to do nobody any good." And he said, "You know how these late night things are. You can't quite fine-tune the thing and the President's not going to be very eager to argue over the fine print."

I said, "Mac, for God's sakes, at least raise these two points."

He said, "Okay, I'll do that, but I'm not going to fight hard for them." They sent the letter out--

F: As was.

K: As was, Bundy claims he raised the two points, and George Ball said, "Now look, we can't take the next three hours fixing this. They're about to get in the boats."

And the President said, "George is right." We sent it off and the very two points I picked were the two that had most rattled the

Turks.

When I got out as Ambassador to Turkey, I had Inonu, who was Prime Minister then, saying to me, "How could my friend, Lyndon Johnson, have written me like that?" And here I was. I never told him I was the guy who tried to take that stuff out, but there I felt I should have screamed louder.

F: If you had kind of thrown your body in front of the car--

K: Yes, and if I got run over well--but I did raise it.

F: In this Cyprus bit, as well in the Israli-Arab relationship, was Ralph Bunche's presence in the UN of any assistance to the United States other than the fact that he's a good diplomat. I mean the fact that he was--

K: During the Kennedy, as well as the Johnson years, Ralph Bunche played almost no role of which I am aware in the Arab-Israli business and, particularly not at the White House level. I'm sure our mission up at the UN was consulting him. I'm sure that Adlai and Arthur Goldberg talked extensively with him but Ralph Bunche wanted to stay out of that.

F: He was not a sort of bracketed extension of the State Department?

K: No. Absolutely not. Frankly, and my memory--that's a big question and my acquaintanceship with it covers seven years, or six years. Frankly, I cannot recall an occasion in which Ralph Bunche was a significant actor on the Middle East business during the time I was there. Now of course, in the earlier perios--the '50's or '40's he could have been very important. There may have been a couple of proposals to use him, but they were very quickly knocked down, either by him or by somebody else. Ralph Bunche is not a name that

I would normally think of as having an significance in U.S. Middle East policy '61-'67.

F: In '61-'67, was there an attempt to keep a U.S. policy in regard to the Middle East clarified with people like Dobrynin and the other Russians, or did you do the best you could?

K: We did the best we could. There were a number of proposals brought up at one time or another by the guys in state that we ought to try and work things out with the Russians. As Viet Nam got hotter, which of course it had by the time LBJ was reelected in '64, there wasn't much chance to talk to the Russians about anything else because they'd immediately bring up Viet Nam. No, and I would say the discussions with the Russians today or in the last year sort of proved--or even in the post '67 period--sort of proved that there was not much play in discussing the Middle East with the Russians. My position has always been very simple. There's an asymmetrical interest. They're interested in causing trouble or in getting the West kicked out. We're interested in stabilizing the situation. Why should they give us something?

F: Was the oil import question part of your problem?

K: Never. Moreover, I will say this, on the negative side. I never had an oil import question cross my desk or was ever consulted on it. I will, also, say that in no time to my knowledge in the Kennedy period or the Johnson period was oil diplomacy regarded as a significant factor in our Middle Eastern stance. Nor was I ever aware of great pressure on the part of the American oil companies. I think this is one of the most overstated myths about American Middle East policy--

F: I can corroborate that with other tapes--

K: Really?

F: Some of them non-diplomatic at all, just the mere fact that the idea was that oil shall not be a factor in the White House.

K: Yes. Very interesting. We never really discussed this. If I ever put in a consideration about oil, I put it in on my own initiative, like saying, "You know, obviously we've got a billion dollar stake in Saudi Arabia."

Now I did make a big point about Libya. I feel that one of our failures in the 60's and, in the Nixon regime even more so, was that we didn't realize that we were skating on thin ice in Libya where we've now got about two billion in oil investment. It was always our making the case. Even in the Arab-Israeli business, even the Yemen business, there were of course guys like young Chris Herter who I see is back in State now as a special assistant--he's sort of a light-weight--but never any sense that Presidents were being pushed by oil companies. Never any sense that I, as an adviser, on whom they may be more likely to zero in, or Bundy, never at any sense at all.

F: What happened in Libya--just underrated?

K: No, here's this old King, who was in his seventies. His son and heir--I don't think he was even--yes, his son and heir, Crown Prince Yussuf was a weakling from the word go. It was clear that it was only a matter of time before there was going to be some kind of upset in Libya, and that the odds are it would be an anti-Western upset unless we did something about it.

Now this is my idea of preventive medicine. I kept pointing

out, "Look, we're heading for trouble in Libya, let's start building up our defenses, because that place is worth a lot to us. In the first place if we're trying to hem in Nasser, we don't want him grabbing Libya and Libyan oil. That just prolongs our agony. And second, we've got Wheelus Base, which was a big training base, etc." I feel this is one of the examples where we did not do enough preventive medicine. I did have to go to the President on this. I kept beating on the State Department and Defense Department and not getting anywhere. I might add, that in the Kennedy period, I was constantly blowing the whistle on Cyprus saying "We're heading for real trouble in this one. We're going to end up with two of our allies fighting each other." And Phil Talbot who was the Assistant Secretary at that time handsomely acknowledged they should have listened to me more. I happen to be a strong believer in anticipating and then using preventive medicine. Its cheap. You know, we could have prevented trouble in Libya. Just let me give you--you can't work it out in dollars, but it would have cost us twenty million dollars to do some pretty good coppering of our bets in Libya. For want of twenty million, we may lose a billion.

F: How would you have done it with twenty million?

K: Oh, help the Libyean police force, and a better intelligence effort. We didn't know anything about the lieutenants who took over. More of a military--

F: They really did slip in, didn't they?

K: They slipped in. You know you've got to keep tabs on these guys, more advice to old King Idris. He left his country and went to Turkey for the cure at Bursa--the Spa at Bursa. A guy like that

should never leave his country. Somebody was asleep at the switch. The Brits and ourselves not saying, "Don't sneak off."

F: Did you spend much time in the Middle East trying to counter the French or did you pretty well conceal your own policy and let the French go their own way?

K: We pursued our own policy because the French didn't add up to very much by that time. They were sort of chasing after us. We didn't have to chase after them. The big French opportunities came, you know, essentially '67--or '68, after the Six-Day War, which gave them sort of a free ride with the Arabs.

F: Which is not part of your story.

K: No.

[End of Tape 1 of 1, Side 2, and Interview I]

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