INTERVIEWEE: ARTHUR KROCK

INTERVIEWER: T. HARRI BAKER

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B: Sir, to begin with, do you remember the first time you met Lyndon Johnson?

K: Yes. I wrote something about that in a book I recently published [Memoirs: Sixty Years on the Firing Line (1968)]. He was very much marked when he came to Congress by such distinguished persons as Justice [William O.] Douglas, who then was Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Douglas was anxious because he was a friend of mine and he also set great store--he thought I had influence over the arms of the government in my articles in the paper. He was anxious for me to know and appreciate Johnson as he did. So he invited me out to dinner one night for the purpose of meeting Johnson, and we three dined together--Douglas, Johnson, and I. Johnson had just been elected to Congress. I was very much impressed with him physically, mentally, and otherwise, and I thought he had enormous personal charm, which does not transmit through television and sometimes not in personal conversation, but to my mind is there and always has been there.

B: Did he give you an impression in those early days of ambition, too?

K: There seemed to be no ambition except to do whatever Roosevelt thought was right and to be a strong advocate of Roosevelt's policies and programs. He seemed not to have his own interests foremost, except that he subscribed to whatever his interpretation was of Roosevelt's political philosophy and wanted to advance it.

B: Do you know why Mr. Douglas singled him out?

K: Because he was new and Douglas knew that I didn't know him and he thought perhaps, I imagine he thought, that I could be of use to Johnson in his career and that Johnson would eventually be a man of influence that I should know because of my own trade.

B: It has often been said that Mr. Johnson in those days was also a protégé of people like Sam Rayburn and Carl Vinson. Was this relationship obvious, too?

K: Not at that time. He'd just come into Congress, but as the years went on it was quite apparent that Rayburn had developed a kind of fatherly affection for Johnson. So had Vinson--Carl Vinson is who we are speaking of, the chairman of what was then the Naval Affairs Committee, later the Armed Services Committee. And that to them Johnson was an up-and-coming young man who would take his place in the structure of leadership and that they set a very high store by his abilities.

B: Was Mr. Johnson very close to President Roosevelt?

K: Yes, he was. He became close to Roosevelt, and I never quite knew how that began, except for the fact that Roosevelt was conscious of Johnson's devotion, personal devotion and political alliance, and thought as a President must who has Congress to deal with, "This is a young man that can be very helpful to me, that I can rely on."

B: Did Roosevelt do the same sort of thing with other selected Congressmen?

K: Oh, yes, he did. There were several, too numerous to mention, really. But among them I think Johnson was very high. It was comparable to his appreciation of Lewis W. Douglas before he became President, and then briefly after he became President. Rayburn's attitude, Vinson's attitude toward Johnson very much the same as Roosevelt's earlier appreciation of Douglas who, however, was then a veteran in Congress.

B: When did you first as a newspaperman begin to notice that Johnson was moving into a position of leadership? Did it show in the House years?

K: I don't remember him much in the House except as someone who was advancing Roosevelt's programs as best he could, using Rayburn's favoritism and Vinson's favoritism to get committee assignments and thereby increase his own value. But up to that time until he ran for the Senate, let's say the first time [1941], I don't recall that he did anything of any great distinction in the House.

B: During those years when he was in the House, did he keep in touch with you?

K: No, we had no particular relationship. My concentration was on other things, and he made, as I recall, no particular approaches to me because there was nothing to approach me about. For instance, it never seemed to occur to him that on our then very slight acquaintance there was any point in going to me about my articles about Roosevelt, so he never did. No, I practically never heard from him in that way while he was in the House.

I met him socially a number of times. He was very complimentary, very agreeable, but he never said, "I wonder if we could have lunch together," or anything of that sort. No, not in the House.

B: Did you meet Mrs. Johnson socially in those days, too?

K: Once or twice.

B: What was she like in the early days?

K: Like she always has been, I think, a magnificent woman. One of the finest women that ever was in the White House, that's certain. And a great and soothing influence on him, then and now.

B: Soothing influence?

K: Yes, yes, I'm sure of it.

B: You feel that if he is inclined to go to extremes, perhaps Mrs. Johnson calms him down?

K: I think her voice would be against that, if she had an opportunity. But, of course, [I didn't realize then that] regularly consulted her the way John Adams did Abigail or anything of that sort, because in that period I gathered that if Johnson thought about women's relation to their husband's political career at all, he didn't believe that it was their function to cultivate or promote. Mrs. Johnson on several occasions, her calmness, it seemed evident to me, and her general approach to the amenities with people who were his critics or not his critics must have had a soothing influence in restraint of some of his impulses.

B: Many people say that she also has a very shrewd political mind and is at least one of the reasons for his success.

K: I think there's no doubt about that. I think her political mind is--and using that term may not be the one that occurs to us when we use it--but I believe that she had a sense of public duty and she had a sense of the needs of the people, rather than what would please them. So they were almost synonomous, but I think he instinctively felt that. She was a very good lobbyist with Johnson on behalf of moderating ideas, you might say, to some of his more impulsive attitudes.

B: I gather then that you would have first noticed by-then-Senator Lyndon Johnson during the Truman years after he was in the Senate?

K: Yes, from then on I began to see him. I would call on him or he would ask me to call on him. I would do it voluntarily, or he would ask me. We had lunch together alone innumerable times, particularly when he became Minority Leader and then shortly after Majority Leader.

B: Were these always business luncheons in the sense of discussing the affairs of the Senate?

K: Well, it usually concerned some public matter, some issue then before the people. But there was a person aspect to it, too, because he liked to

tell stories, and I enjoyed them, and I would tell him stories of Kentucky politics which he seemed to enjoy. And he would read me letters he had gotten, or he would tell me about some encounter he had with some other politician. As you will see in this file [of correspondence deposited at Princeton], one reference he made to Senator [Albert] Gore of Tennessee, who was one of his pet dislikes, is very revealing of the fact that the conversations were not what you might call all political but often were personal.

B: Did he enlist your help on publicizing favorably the various projects he had in mind?

K: Well, he did, but he didn't really have to do that much because I was very much on his side. I thought very highly of him as a Leader. I thought that his philosophy of government was excellent. His ideas of the function of Congress with respect to that of the Executive was, to my mind, in the fine liberal tradition and really a very effective one. So that I came to see him, I suppose, more on my own motion than he asked me to come to see him. But when he was in a jam or he had something difficult to do with his colleagues, he would then ask me to come around and have lunch or see him or take a ride with him, and he would ask me if I thought I could do anything to help, or perhaps I had already written something that of that nature and he wanted to discuss that and thank me and so on.

B: Can you remember a specific case where you helped him out of something?

K: The file shows there were a number of those. The most interesting one is on the Civil Rights Bill of 1957, in which he said that I was helping him greatly because we both were opposed to what the extremists--he used the word extremists--were trying to write into the Civil Rights Bill. That was the time when he was responsible for striking out Title III, a very

compulsory title which now, of course, is almost routine with his own support, which is quite opposite his attitude at that time. But that was one section of his activity that he did volunteer to me that we were in agreement and I had been very helpful to him.

B: Do you remember anything else in those days of his pet dislikes?

K: There were quite a few. I don't remember--I was so struck by his comment on Senator Gore that I don't remember much about the others. Of course, he was annoyed very much by Senator [Joseph] Clark of Pennsylvania. He also greatly admired Senator [Harry] Byrd [Sr.] of Virginia despite the fact that Byrd and he were often on opposite sides. Clark and Gore--what he called the liberals, the false-labeled liberals, because in his mind at that time that was not liberalism at all, that was much closer to an autocratic form of government with the compulsory and spending features uppermost in their concept, to both of which he was then greatly opposed.

B: What was his relationship in those days to Mr. [Hubert] Humphrey, who was in the Senate at that time?

K: Humphrey, I suppose, Johnson began by considering one of the extremists on the subject of civil rights. But he came to like and admire Humphrey at a time when I was very much surprised at that development. One day I said to Senator [Olin] Johnston of South Carolina [late fifties], who was by that time talking about supporting Humphrey for the presidency, the presidential nomination, I said, "Now, how is it that you are now in favor of Humphrey, you, who are responsible for the Democratic southern walkout of the 1948 convention?" And Johnston said to me, "He's changed. Humphrey has changed. He understands our problems. He's a changed man." And Johnson seemed to feel the same way that Humphrey had "changed."

K: Yes. I think Humphrey became a sort of pet of his, yes.

B: Did you see anything of the relationship between Senator Johnson and President Truman?

K: Well, I heard enough about it from both. They were warm indeed and cordial and each one admired the other very definitely. Yes, I would say they admired each other and there was affection on Truman's part for Johnson which I think was reciprocated.

B: Perhaps an even more interesting relationship was that between President Eisenhower and Johnson. Didn't they--

K: There was a great deal to that. We'll come to that in a minute. But let's stay on Truman for a little bit. Johnson felt that under Paul Butler particularly, the Democratic National Committee was complicating the leadership and the leadership concept that he and Rayburn had in common, and he was quite bitter about the ADA people like [Dean] Acheson and Joe Rauh, and I forget the various others, who were active in ADA. He and Truman were on common ground there, and Truman was very grateful to Johnson for resisting the efforts of the ADA to run the show.

B: Was Truman in a position, I don't recall Truman openly criticizing the ADA, did he use Johnson as a--

K: Well, he did privately plenty, and Johnson did openly, and there is a letter there in that file from Paul Butler to Johnson disavowing the reports that he was opposed to the Johnson-Rayburn leadership and was trying to break it up.

B: Did Mr. Johnson send you a copy of that letter?

K: Yes. He did, through George Reedy. He sent me a copy of Paul Butler's letter with some comment that I can't bring to mind just now, but it's all there.

B: To move on into the Eisenhower years, there again there seems to have been a very warm relationship between a President of one party and a Senate leader of the other party.

K: Well, that was only practical politics on Johnson's part, because he knew that the Presidential veto probably could not be overriden, so compromise was obviously the course in sight, and also because he had an idea of the proper relations in the public interest between an opposition-led Congress and a President of the other party. There is a document there [in the correspondence file] in which, criticizing Adlai Stevenson's contrary attitude, he attributed that to Stevenson's defeats and then set out his own view. It's all very explicit. So it seems to me that you can just insert that at the proper time in answering the question.

B: Do you feel that Mr. Johnson has thought out in a philosophical sense this kind of matter of relationship between Congress and Executive--that sort of principle?

K: He's given a great deal of thought to it. He, by early articulation, let's say, and by nature, I think believed that Congress and the President, regardless of whether they were of divided parties, had a duty to work together as closely as possible for constructive reasons, that they should never be partisan opponents for the sake of partisanship. And that he adhered to. The President should not seek to drive Congress, nor Congress to obstruct the President just for the sake of opposing things. He later came to do the very thing that he opposed and had expressed disapproval of in the time I speak of.

B: You mean when he became President himself?

K: Yes, when he became President himself.

B: Wasn't there also a personal relationship between Johnson and Eisenhower?

K: Yes, there was. How well he liked Eisenhower personally I don't know, but Eisenhower liked him immensely.

B: You mention in your Memoirs--you quote Eisenhower as saying that he thought Johnson was the best qualified Democrat to succeed him.

K: That's right. He did say so to me. And I imagine that he said so to Johnson, and, of course, he said, "Sam would be great," meaning Rayburn, but Johnson was the one that was more obviously a practical solution of the Democratic nomination problem. And then Johnson sent me, let's see, two pictures, one of him with Eisenhower looking up at him and Johnson clearly wheedling Eisenhower. It was a very amusing picture. And I think there was another one, I'm not sure, of him and Eisenhower. But they liked each other. They truly did. It survived all the political controversy that followed.

B: One gets the impression that it has even increased for Mr. Johnson during his Presidential years.

K: Well, of course, some of that is tactics on Johnson's part. He was wise enough and clever enough to know, once he became President, that the more he could associate Eisenhower in his own actions, the better likelihood there would be that they would be approved by the people. And so, as I said to Eisenhower once, "Why do you let them make this much use of you? For instance, stands that you took that are positive, you are now letting Johnson say that they were the same as his." And Mamie, Mrs. Eisenhower, who was there, said, "I tell him that, too." And Eisenhower just grinned and didn't say anything.

But Johnson knew that flattery, if it is cleverly done, is a very important weapon, and he used it with Eisenhower to the limit, and Eisenhower let himself be used to the limit. Of course, by that time,

as a former President, and particularly as a professional soldier, to him the Commander-in-Chief was the Commander-in-Chief and the country should accept his leadership and follow it as much as possible. So that was simply because he had been President and had been a General of the Army. I think had he been an ordinary politician, he would have said, "Look here, this fellow Johnson is trying to exploit me, and I'm not going to let him do it." But because of this background, he didn't.

B: That's interesting. There must be a number of Republican politicians who were very much--

K: They were very much chagrined, very much disturbed. Many of them said to me, "I don't know what to make of the General, he's letting himself be used by Johnson and falling into traps that a child of three could see a mile away" and so on. But Johnson kept it up; he would send a helicopter or airplane, a special plane, on the ground that he needed [Eisenhower] to advise him. Or he would stop on the way somewhere to see Eisenhower whether there was any business in hand or not. In fact, he just absolutely covered him with goose grease, so that the General didn't know whether he was coming or going, in my opinion.

B: Before we move on in the chronology, is there anything else about Mr. Johnson's years in the Senate that stand out in your mind?

K: Well, his pioneering of this space program stands out in my mind. His insistence that the Reserve should be called up and the war, the Korean War, be fought to a military conclusion stands out in my mind. It is quite in contrast to what his own record [as President] has been in matters of that sort.

But most of all, his management of this faction-ridden party and his dealings with the Republicans; that is, to my mind what stands out in his record--his magnificent quality of leadership of a very difficult body

in such matters as civil rights and the Korean War and moderate programs affecting social reforms, those things, rather than any particular piece of legislation.

B: Speaking of the Korean War, did you ever have occasion to hear Mr. Johnson privately express his opinion of career military people, as a group?

K: The one time I did was at Clark Clifford's annual New Year's night party. And Johnson and Rayburn were among a group of ten or twelve of us who were at the oyster bar and--let me see now, I want to get this absolutely right who that soldier was that came along--anyhow, someone important, some Chief of Staff or something of that sort came along and Johnson praised him and expressed great approval of him and deep respect for his judgment in matters where the national interests and military activities are combined. Also, I think that his own experience in the Navy had given him a very high opinion, which [John F.] Kennedy did not have, of the Chiefs of Staff as much and of the military establishment as such.

B: He generally respected it?

K: Yes, I think he did. I think he did, and does.

B: To move on. Again, you say in your Memoirs that in 1956, at the time of the Democratic Convention, you believed that Lyndon Johnson seriously wanted the Presidency?

K: I think he came to discover whether, as some people had told him, the party was so reluctant to renominate Stevenson--and Truman, of course, was trying to prevent this as you know--that there might be a chance for him. He came to discover [otherwise], he and John Connally. It didn't take him two hours, I think I saw him a couple of hours after he got to Chicago, and it didn't take him more than that to find out that he didn't have a chance. So it was then, feeling as he did that Stevenson's campaigning was on the wrong

basis entirely, and that he needed help, it was then that he sent word over that he or Rayburn were available [for the Vice Presidential nomination] in case Stevenson thought that he might find them necessary.

B: Yes, you describe the sending of the emissaries in your Memoirs.

K: And Stevenson indicated, "Thank you very much," but he didn't have that in mind.

B: Do you know if Truman said anything to Stevenson about the possibility of Johnson either as the presidential or vice presidential candidate?

K: In 1956? No, he had made up his mind that he might be able to put [Averill] Harriman over. And I think he gave no thought to substituting Johnson, or Rayburn.

B: Some have said that in the mid-fifties there Mr. Johnson was misled by his competence and his familiarity in the Senate into thinking he had more knowledge of national politics than he did. Is that a correct evaluation?

K: Well, he had a knowledge of politics, but he was regional in his experience, because leadership of the Senate is not that kind of politics. We are talking about election politics now, aren't we? Well, I think he did, yes. I think he formed the opinion that he knew how to discover or create voting trends that he did not really possess.

B: Then, you say also [in the Memoirs] that from about that time dates a real rivalry between John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

K: From the time that Kennedy almost was nominated for Vice President at a convention where Johnson had offered himself. From that time on, I think the rivalry began. I first discovered it by Kennedy occasionally occasionally saying to me, "Why do you give all that space to Lyndon Johnson's achievements? Why don't you think of some of us younger men," or something of that sort. It was always on a kidding basis, but he was aware of his own chances because of this time, from the moment he

almost made the vice presidential nomination, Jack Kennedy began to run for president at that point, for the next nomination in 1960. And in his way, looking around, there was Lyndon Johnson, a very formidable figure in the path and that started, of course, a rivalry. Well, that brought it into existence.

B: Did Johnson ever discuss Kennedy with you?

K: Often, complaining usually about Kennedy and Kennedy's people and how he had given him the best committee assignments and helped him along and then Kennedy's people were saying critical things about him, Johnson; how he had summoned Kennedy on a couple of occasions to tell him if he went on with that, that Johnson would take some steps to counteract, which could only mean putting him on a lower committee or, you know, by depriving him of some of the favor that a Majority Leader can bestow--when you speak, the time you speak, the subject you are permitted to speak on, because the Senate can be well and closely controlled in those respects, and Johnson did that. So that this grew and grew and when Johnson, of course, made the great, important decision that his duty as a Majority Leader precluded him from going into a primary contest and found that, instead of being rewarded by popular approval and a sort of swell toward him, that Kennedy was profiting by it, not himself.

It reminds me of the lines from Idylls of the King, the one called "Arthur and Modred." One day, as Tennyson relates it, Arthur and Modred were playing on the sand, and Modred built a sand castle, and Arthur kicked it away, and Tennyson says, "And ever after, that small violence done rankled at him and ruffled up his heart as the cold wind blowing the whole day long, a little bitter pool about a stone on the bare coast." It was sort of like that. When the rivalry began, at the time I date it, their relations were bound to be those of competitors.

B: Does Johnson's decision not to enter the primaries indicate, then, that he still was not aware of the nature of election politics?

K: No, I would say--let's take it two ways. To give him full credit, let's say that he did this as a duty imposed on him by his office and damn the torpedos; regardless of whether it was profitable, it was right. Or, let us say that he felt--he never dreamed that Kennedy could sweep the primaries like he did and come to the convention with that great advantage. Take your pick; it all depends on what your judgment of Johnson is.

B: What was your opinion in those days of the idea that a Southerner just ipso facto could not become President of the United States?

K: Until it became apparent, as is demonstrated in this file and the correspondence between me and the Congressional Quarterly editor, who was then David Broder, [I noticed] that Johnson was voting more and more as a Westerner. That Johnson wanted to be thought of as a Southwesterner, but [with the] accent on "Westerner." And one day we were talking about that, about his not really being a representative, being typical of the Southern Senators, and I said, "Well, you are not a Southerner really, because geographically if you draw a line, a vertical line down Texas that passes through the airport at Fort Worth, on one side they have cornbread and hominy grits and fried apples for breakfast, that's East Texas; and on the other side, you have ham and pie and all the things that Westerners eat. You're really a Westerner."

When I decided that he was getting that [identity] by his votes and otherwise identifying himself as such, I changed my mind about him. I didn't change my mind about Harry Byrd or Walter George or any such Southerner as that, but Johnson, by that time, was looking like a Westerner to the people, and voting like one.

B: Do you feel that he was deliberately doing that to create for presidential politics a Western image?

K: I never will know. I doubt that he thought it out that way. I believe that he was aware, of course, of the difficulties a stamped, identified Southerner would have, but I believe that he was just following his views by that time and voting more as a Westerner than as a Southerner.

B: By 1960, what was your personal feeling about the best Democratic candidate for the presidency?

K: Oh, Johnson was eminently the best qualified. I said so on an interview in Texas; I got jumped on in Texas because their politics are very malignant. Jack Kennedy said himself that Johnson was the "best qualified of us all." I thoroughly agreed with that. I didn't know that the parliamentary art, of which he was a master, he could not translate into the governing art that a President requires. I thought he could bring that same art into this office, which he failed to do.

B: I know you were close to the Kennedy family, to Joseph Kennedy and to Jack Kennedy, too. Did you, by any chance, ever suggest to the Kennedy family that perhaps 1960 was not Jack Kennedy's year, for him to step aside and wait?

K: No, Jack Kennedy's father and I both agreed that he shouldn't make the bid for the vice presidential nomination in '56. But after that, when he showed so much strength, particularly in the South where it was least to be expected, and because that Southern support indicated that being a Catholic was not the bar we had thought it was, then it seemed to me quite natural that he'd aspire to the Presidency, and I certainly had no reservations from his standpoint. All I ever felt was what Truman said, "Are you sure you are ready for the country and the country is ready for you?" I wasn't sure, but I didn't feel strongly enough when asked to say, "I don't think Jack should try it this year (1960)."

B: Did you ever discuss with them the possibility of a Johnson-Kennedy or Kennedy-Johnson ticket?

K: That never occurred to me at all until it happened.

B: You mean you thought the rivalry was so great--

K: They were too antithetical in views, in records, and in everything else. It never occurred to me, also, that Johnson would ever be willing to play second fiddle to anybody, especially Kennedy.

B: Then you must have been surprised when it was offered and accepted.

K: I was very surprised, and I never understood how he could do it. In fact, I asked him how he could conceive of such a thing when it first came up. It was sort of a glancing conversation.

B: Was this before the convention?

K: This was in Los Angeles, but before anything materialized because people were just beginning to mention it, only one or two people because it was a general surprise. It was only later that I learned that Rayburn was the one who was holding him back that it was Rayburn's approval that he required before he would go into this matter of accepting the Vice Presidency and that he really wanted it all along. I think the reason he did is this: in spite of the relations between him and [Richard] Nixon as of present [after the election of 1968], he shared the intense dislike of Nixon that Truman and Rayburn had, and the thought of Nixon as President was repugnant to him. So that that was eventually the factor: that if he didn't do it, he alone could save enough of the South and the Southwest, to keep Nixon from being President. And that argument prevailed.

B: I know you had an interview with him on this subject afterwards. Was there anything in that interview that was not covered in your New York Times story?

K: No, because I said to him, "Why did you do it? How could you do it, with your record and his?" And he said, "When Kennedy came to me and told me that it would save the party from defeat and the nation from Nixon, and Rayburn said, 'All right, that was a good argument,' I went along." He said, "I had no other reason at all. None. No other one."

B: Did you ever have any reason to believe, then or later, that possibly the offer of the vice presidential nomination to Mr. Johnson was not sincere, that--

K: No, I never believed that. I think Kennedy, by that time, had made up his mind that the people were right who said that he couldn't win without Johnson.

B: Do you feel that it did make the difference in the campaign?

K: Oh, yes. I'm sure that without Johnson he would have been defeated by Nixon, rather heavily.

B: During the next years, the years of John Kennedy's presidency, did you see Vice President Johnson often?

K: Yes, I saw him quite a few times until this business began, this little breakup over the Alfalfa [Club] speech, and the camel driver. Yes, I saw him.

B: Yes, we'll get to that in a moment. Did you get a general impression that Mr. Johnson was uncomfortable in the vice presidential position?

K: Yes, restless, uncomfortable. He was not used to playing second fiddle. The qualities I attribute to him: pride and a sense of wishing to be the boss and having his way and not having to defer to anybody. It was perfectly clear that these missions were arranged, some at his request, other Kennedy and his aides thought up to keep [Johnson occupied]. And Kennedy often said, "I don't know what to do with Lyndon. I've got to keep him happy somehow.

My big job is to keep Lyndon happy." Well, that was very plain, very clear.

B: Do you know if Mr. Johnson tried or was given the opportunity to volunteer advice on either domestic or foreign affairs?

K: Oh, yes, yes. But no more than courtesy and necessity required. For instance, when Kennedy sent him out to Viet Nam and he came back with that very belligerent recommendation. Now that was an example of it. Kennedy didn't have to send him to Viet Nam, but that was becoming a problem, and it would be a compliment to Johnson and keep him quiet and perhaps reasonably happy for awhile, and so Kennedy did.

B: You mention in your Memoirs that, although Kennedy and Johnson maintained a facade of good relationships, that there was a good deal of distrust and dislike behind it.

K: I think always. Always.

B: Was that--

K: And it ran through the family, too.

B: Well, I was going to ask if it was mostly on the part of Kennedy and Johnson themselves or mostly in the family and staff?

K: Well, it was the family and staff that were very strong, but Kennedy felt it. The thought of Johnson as President--I don't think Kennedy ever would have groomed Johnson as his successor had he been allowed to have two terms.

B: You mean you think Kennedy would have dumped Johnson from the ticket in '64?

K: Not necessarily '64, but certainly he would have built up somebody else for the leader to succeed him.

B: Oh, I see, after '68, assuming Kennedy had had the two terms.

K: I don't think he intended to dump Johnson in '64. He still needed him.

B: Do you have any idea who Kennedy might have selected for--?

K: Tried to groom?

B: Yes, sir.

K: Well, I'm sure it would never have been Humphrey. But I just don't know who. I have no idea. I think back, I can't give you a name.

B: This rivalry at the staff and family level. Did it take the form of active, intense dislike, or just sort of the case of the Kennedy staff and family ignoring Johnson?

K: It took the form of distrust and actual dislike of personality, of manner, of almost everything about Johnson. For instance, when the news came that Kennedy was dead, the consternation expressed by very close relatives--let's leave it [their identification] at that--of Kennedy's that "such a man as Lyndon Johnson" would be President was very, very violent and very deep.

B: This was general throughout the Kennedy family?

K: Through the family.

B: And presumably applied to those Kennedy staff, too?

K: Well, the family and the staff. As far as Kennedy himself was concerned, he was not a hater--he was a historian, too--and I don't think he ever quite accepted the ogre picture of Johnson that seemed to appeal to many of those around him. However, I don't think he, Johnson, was any personal favorite of Kennedy's as an individual.

B: Did it strike you as strange that at least in public Johnson was taking all this rather calmly and accepting it?

K: Well, in public, no, it didn't strike me as strange that he was doing it, accepting it in public. What else could he have done? It would have been very imprudent of him to have revealed any such feelings. But in private he revealed it plenty.

B: To whom? In conversations with you?

K: Oh, to people who have told me about his, you know, talking about his relations and about his job as Vice President. You have to take their word for it. He never discussed it with me.

B: Now we get to what I suppose is the incident that began the breach between you and Mr. Johnson--the Alfalfa Club Dinner and the camel driver story. I'll start. You were President of the Alfalfa Club and as such made the traditional speech.

K: I was the nominee of the Alfalfa Club for President of the United States. That's just a traditional form of joke that they have at every dinner. The Alfalfa Club resolves itself into a national convention, becomes a party. and nominates a candidate for President, who makes a speech of acceptance. That was me that year.

B: And you made a speech satirizing, among others, the Vice President.

K: Yes. Satirizing the Administration and particularly the nepotism that was going on. The kind of thing you would do if you were to make, were making what you hoped was a satirical speech. And then I went into a little about Johnson's restlessness and unhappiness in his job, and the endless effort to find something to keep him quiet. And that's what irritated the Vice President. It was then he made that slashing speech against me personally.

B: Did you hear afterwards President Kennedy's reaction to the whole affair?

K: Never. I never heard anything about it.

B: And then shortly after that, I believe, was the camel driver story, the satire on Bashir Ahmed.

K: I forget the dating of that. Well, that was after he was sent on that visit by Kennedy to Pakistan. That was later, I'm sure. Yes, it must have been later.

B: And he took umbrage at that, too.

K: Well, apparently so. The file doesn't disclose it except by indication but I told you a moment ago that was what--Johnson sort of muttered about the camel driver piece when somebody said, "You and Krock ought to resume your old relations." That was all he ever said; he evaded it, and I never heard from him. When I retired, the usual letter or comment was not forthcoming, and then when I had my eightieth birthday and there was a celebration around here with some friends, Johnson ignored that, too, though I think a couple of people told him it was going to happen and that perhaps it might be nice for him to send a message or something. He never did. But I inspired none of that.

B: You mean--what it amounts to is that--

K: He crossed me off.

B: You've outlined this in the Memoirs, but there is a delay here. He apparently was angered by the camel driver story, but he crosses you off after he becomes President.

K: Yes, yes. He had been President for about a year when the cross off came. Because, as I say, we have been invited to a couple of state dinners, my wife and I; I'd had luncheons with him and seen him at the White House a couple of times privately, or several times; and he gave me a cowboy hat, had his picture taken in solo and with me and wrote, "Your all-time friend, Lyndon Johnson." So something happened after that or in the middle of it. I never will know.

B: Do you ever get any hint that perhaps he might resent your continued closeness to the Kennedy family?

K: I think he knew by that time damn well that my closeness to the Kennedy family was over, too; that my criticism of the [1960] platform and of Jack Kennedy's

running on it, and of some of his public acts, had ended my relations with the Kennedys very, very definitely. So he knew that. I was no more an intimate of the Kennedys by that time, which he knew well.

B: Now, to move on chronologically, I don't believe your Memoirs cover your personal reaction to the assassination. Was that a deliberate omission?

K: I was horribly shocked and very, very unhappy that this man I had known as a boy and as President of the United States had been assassinated, a dreadful, unforgivable, and an inexplicable crime to me, and I grieved over it very greatly, but I did no more. There was nothing for me to do. I wrote the usual kind of comment which was only one kind: what could you say except how dreadful this was. And also that had he lived, I thought he would come to, perhaps, even to greatness, would have gotten his programs through that Johnson finally pushed through--more moderate, however, than Johnson's. And that's about it. And I wrote his parents and that's all I can say.

B: You were one of those that Mr. Johnson called soon after the assassination. Do you recall what he said?

K: Yes, I do. I was dining at Alice Longworth's house a couple of days, not very long after the assassination, and Johnson had gone back to his ranch for something before he returned again. And the occasion was--maybe there was no particular occasion--anyway I was called to the telephone, and it was the President, and he said, "I've been trying to locate you for three or four days" or something like that. And he said, "I need your help. I need your help particularly. I know I'm going to have it." I said, "Yes, Mr. President," and so on and so on, the usual thing. And he said, "I can count on you; I know I can. I need all the help I can get. And you are in a position to render a great deal to me." And that was that.

B: And then the occasional letters, Christmas gifts, continued for awhile--

K: Yes, for awhile.

B: And stopped, as you said, before, without--

K: Well, the first thing I think I noticed was no deer sausage that Christmas [1963], which sort of amused me because I--I attached no significance to it--but I was just glad not to get the damn stuff. But there was nothing of any more definite nature except that he did invite me over to see him at the White House for lunch, and invited us, as I say, to these state dinners, and--

B: Were these affairs small enough for you to have an opportunity to have conversation?

K: Oh, no. The state dinners were those great things out in the Rose Garden and in the White House, things like that. No, I had no conversation except the ones on the telephone and the luncheons I speak of.

B: Did this break between you and Johnson also affect the operation of the Times' Washington Bureau?

K: No.

B: It didn't apply to Mr. [Tom] Wicker?

K: It never applied to anything in the news coverage of the Bureau because I never let such things intrude.

B: Well, no, I didn't mean from your point of view; I meant from his point of view.

K: Oh, he, of course, was then shown great consideration by Wicker, [Max] Frankel, and a few Times people like that, and he made himself very accessible to them, on his own motion.

B: This brings up the whole relationship of Johnson and the press. Would you agree with what has been a good deal of public criticism that Mr. Johnson does not understand the press and cannot live with it?

K: Johnson never was, at any time that I knew him--as Majority Leader, etc.--never was satisfied with any version of any action of his that was not

absolutely favorable or that didn't state the case the way he wanted it stated. So that he tried to effect that by news management--they all do, but he did it much less deftly, in fact crudely, whereas Kennedy had done it very artfully and with that personal charm thrown in that Johnson didn't have, managed to make it very effective. Johnson made it [attempted news management] ineffective because it was so crudely done and so obvious that the reporters drew back, realizing that the effort was being made to use them. In Kennedy's case, it was so subtle that it charmed some reporters out of their minds. They may have known that this was an effort to use them, but there was a grace about Kennedy andaa kind of companionship with the reporters which Johnson could not approximate because he is not that kind of man.

There was also the credibility gap because he would deny things uselessly that had happened or were sure to happen and did happen. He would hold up news, he would evade questions that he could have answered perfectly candidly. If any appointment were rumored or reported, he would then try to change the appointment and not make it, or postpone the event so long that people had forgotten it had ever previously been reported, and so they just--. His personality and his effort together grated on the press. Especially when they thought they were being misled, deceived in a way that was obviously constructed, whereas Kennedy's application of the same intent was done so differently and much more attractively.

B: Do those characteristics of Johnson apply with his relations with the press in his Senatorial years, too? Or is it something that developed in the presidential years?

K: Well, of course, the field was so much narrower and there weren't so many things that he could conceal or misrepresent. They were not there. Things were fairly obvious. He would be making deals under cover that he would

decline to discuss, but nobody minded that because everybody could read into it without any trouble. When you are dealing with presidential activities, then that's quite a different thing.

B: You feel that Mr. Johnson just didn't understand the distinction between handling the Senate and the Presidency?

K: Well, he may have understood it, but he didn't seem to change his course of action as a result of it. That he didn't understand it I can't believe, because I think he did know. I think he has always known. But he always felt he could cover something up or couch it in some misleading way and get away with it, whereas he never had to do that when he was Majority Leader.

B: His lack of subtlety in handling the press: does the famous episode about you and the gift of the cowboy hat fit into that category, too?

K: Well, I didn't like the cowboy hat, and I didn't like to have my picture taken with him, and have him so obviously believe he was paying me a great compliment and doing me a favor. No, I didn't like it--I didn't mind it much, but it was a type of approach that I'd rather he hadn't made. So I hid the hat in the White House until I could get somebody to fetch it for me.

B: Were you ever the subject of the Johnson anger? He's been known to call up reporters angrily.

K: Never.

B: Never with you?

K: He quarreled with me a little bit about an article on Texas politics or a couple of other things, but he never showed any anger. No. There was a hurt, or there was a criticism, but never, never anger. Never any show of anger at all. Except to that speech to the Alfalfa dinner; yes, that was an angry speech. Except for that, that's the only experience.

B: That was the speech in immediate reply to your satire.

K: Yes, that was his reply.

B: Sir, another question that arises in connection with the presidential years is the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy. Would you say that there there grew up the same kind of rivalry that existed earlier?

K: Well, he knew that [Robert] Kennedy tried to prevent his brother from offering him the vice presidency, he knew that. He knew that Kennedy personally did not like him, resented the fact that he succeeded his brother. He knew that the various Mrs. Kennedys didn't like him at all and resented some of his mannerisms, his personal mannerisms, his personal manners. He knew that perfectly well. He never liked Bobby, and Bobby never liked him. Ted, I don't think, has the--he's more like his eldest brother, Joe. He hasn't got a vindictive strain at all, whereas Bobby did have.

B: Did Robert Kennedy have the ruthlessness that he was often attributed with?

K: Well, yes, I think at times he did have, when it was invoked by some situation. Yes, he didn't hesitate to be ruthless.

B: Do you think he was consciously aiming at the presidency?

K: After his brother died?

B: Yes.

K: Oh, yes. Of course I do. He wanted very much to be nominated for Vice President in '64, and Johnson circumvented him by saying that no member of the Cabinet should be considered or should make an effort. And, of course, he resented that very much because that convention would have nominated Bobby Kennedy instead of Humphrey [as Vice President].

B: Were you close to Robert Kennedy in those years?

K: Oh, for a long time.

B: Well, I meant in the years after 1963. You mentioned earlier that--

K: Not close after that, no. I was never invited, for instance, to Hickory Hill at any time. My wife and I were never invited. He would ask me occasionally, or call me up, for some favor involved, or to contribute to a book about his father, things of that sort. But we were not--no, we were not close at all. We were very friendly when we met, but we were no longer close.

B: Was that at his option or yours?

K: His option, entirely.

B: To go back to something you mentioned in passing earlier that I think is worth exploring further. You mentioned several times the difference between President Johnson and Senator Johnson.

K: Yes, I tried to explain that a moment ago. He was master of the parliamentary art, but he proved he was not a master of the executive art. I thought one would flow into the other; they didn't.

B: Do you think that--can you attribute a reason for this, why he was not able to exercise the same kind of power?

K: I think it was inborn, that's all. There are a lot of limitations on people's abilities. I think this is one. Which I didn't foresee at all.

B: Do you think perhaps it has something to do with personal mannerisms, the kind of personal traits that seem to be convincing in private or in small groups--

K: Well, you see, it was back-room stuff in the Senate. He would just get Senators in and he would work these things out and so he could do it all under cover. It didn't have to be done publicly. As President, he was in the big glare so that everything he did, no matter how much he tried to conceal it, somehow, would be discovered. And that affected him.

B: Do you agree that one of his problems is that he cannot present himself to the people at large well on television?

K: Yes, of course, that's very, very important indeed, especially when he puts on a Johnson that doesn't exist--a benign, fatherly character with that fixed, periodic smile of benignity and so forth. Yes, he doesn't make a good impression. Also his voice, and to some extent his accent, are not popular types.

B: What do you think of his judgment of men, of the people he has gathered around him as staff and appointees?

K: Well, good and bad. Not all one way or the other. Certainly his choice of [Clark] Clifford was a very excellent one. All he asked of [Dean] Rusk, Rusk has given him, which is dog-like fidelity.

B: Who else can you think of as examples?

K: I think he misjudged [Bill] Moyers because I think Moyers is very much on the make and Johnson--no President wants anybody under him to be on the make. He wants them always to be for him, on the make for him, not for themselves.

B: Do you think Johnson was unaware of Moyers' personal ambition?

K: I think he became conscious of it, yes.

B: You've said earlier, too, that you believe that the Kennedy programs would have been passed anyway.

K: If Kennedy would have lived, and been reelected, yes.

B: But you also said they would have been more moderate.

K: Much more moderate. The great factor of compulsion which is very high in all the Johnson programs, Kennedy would have modified a lot. The Great Society programs are all compulsory. If you don't do, follow certain norms and certain standards, if you're not, for instance, for what are actually impossible forms of integration, or what is called discrimination,

then the government comes, takes you into court, puts you in prison, or fines you. Kennedy would not have gone so far. His father would have, of course, very much objected to it, and I think that would have had some influence with him. Mind you, Johnson was against that very thing [compulsion of social conformity] when he was Majority Leader.

B: That's what I was going to ask you. You also indicated earlier that this is a departure from Johnson's--

K: Yes. There are letters there showing what he thinks legislation should be like that contradict what he did as President.

B: Can you attribute a reason here, too, a motive for the change?

K: I could only do that if I had been a Majority Leader and then a President and experienced what changes can come in that transition. I don't know. I don't think any man who hasn't had both of those offices could possibly answer that question.

B: You also mention in your Memoirs that you believe that John Kennedy did not believe the "domino theory" in Viet Nam and--

K: He told me he didn't.

B: And therefore by implication would not have gotten involved so deeply.

K: He would not have been involved so deeply, I think, had he had enough confidence in himself on the subject. When he sent Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow out there, he was dead against the domino theory of getting deeply involved beyond Eisenhower ['s actions]. When they came back with this report recommending the expansion and the use of American advisers in the combat zones in American airplanes, I think he thought they knew more than he did. He was young and inexperienced, and they were professionals. God knows why he thought Rostow was, I don't know. But Maxwell Taylor had been Chief of Staff and was a General. And I think they just persuaded

him that he didn't know enough to have doubted, to have disbelieved the domino theory.

B: It has been said that after the Bay of Pigs affair, John Kennedy resolved never to trust the professional military people.

K: Well, he told me expressly for publication [that] he had lost all confidence in the Chiefs of Staff, which is very unfair, because the Chiefs of Staff had recommended the enterprise on guidelines that he then abandoned himself and thereby left these people (the Bay of Pigs invaders) at the mercy of [Fidel] Castro.

B: That's the issue of the air cover, the second air strike?

K: The second air strike. Yes. Tom White, who was Chief of the Air force, I said to him, "Did you really recommend, approve this Bay of Pigs thing as it was carried out?" He said, "Of course not." I said, "Had you known there would be a revocation of the second strike, would you have favored it?" He said, "Of course not." Kennedy, however, had forgotten all about that part of it when he criticized them.

B: Then you feel that the war in Viet Nam is Lyndon Johnson's war?

K: Yes. Kennedy had left it, however, in a situation--by going in as deeply as he did--where it, having become a quagmire, you either went in deeply or pulled out completely, or almost completely into the Gavin Theory of the enclaves. But Johnson, remember, had favored this kind of militant expansion in his memorandum to Kennedy after he came back from Viet Nam.

B: You have also mentioned in your writing that in the Korean War, Johnson favored an all-out war.

K: Calling up the Reserves and everything else.

B: Then you feel Johnson's problem has been doing neither one nor the other?

K: Yes, Johnson's <u>failure</u> has been doing neither one nor the other.

B: Do you feel that, again, as is written by many people that the failure in

the Vietnamese war has also caused the end of his domestic program?

K: Well, it's still on the books and there are so many commitments, it's very hard to withdraw from them. The only thing Nixon can do is to temper them, to space over a great deal of the obligatory things, and then to try to reverse the concept of the welfare programs and the things of that kind; to reduce the spending, to get rid of a lot of unnecessary and wasteful government activities. But that's about all he can do for four years. If he gets eight, he might be able to do much more.

B: Do you know Mr. Nixon well?

K: Very.

B: What's your opinion of him?

K: I've always thought very highly of Nixon. I think he's very able, a good administrator, very wise politician, a cautious man as far as it is necessary to be cautious, a bold one when it seems advisable to be bold, and a very deep scholar of political action and government process. No, I think highly of Nixon. I think his behavior when Eisenhower was incapacitated one of the models of its kind. I talked to him a great deal about it. I have something about that in my book, too.

B: Sir, to come to the close of this, what do you feel are Mr. Johnson's greatest strengths as a man or as a President?

K: He's a very strong man. He's a very intelligent man. He's a very resolute man, not much affected by doubt. He's a demanding man. And I think he's, in general, a very compassionate leader of the people.

B: Does Mr. Johnson have any interests or knowledge or resources beyond public affairs?

K: No, I don't think, on the cultural side, that there is much there. I found once that he didn't know anything about the writ of habeas corpus,

Lincoln's writ of habeas corpus and the litigation that followed, and the argument with the Supreme Court which ended in Ex parte Milligan after the [Civil] war. He didn't know much about that. I don't recall that he ever discussed or talked about any books, any literature that I can think of, or music, or any of that sort of thing.

B: What about Mr. Johnson's weaknesses, sir? What are his greatest weaknesses or faults?

K: I tried to sum that up, but I don't think I can do any better than I did in the appraisal in the book [Memoirs] which I would appreciate if you would just appropriate because actually I can't add to that.

B: Well, I think you've covered most of them in the general conversation here. Is there anything else you would like to add to this record, sir?

K: No.

B: Certainly thank you, sir. We certainly appreciate your time.

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By Arthur Krock

to the

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