

INTERVIEWEE: GENERAL MAXWELL D. TAYLOR (TAPE #1)

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE

DATE: January 9, 1969

P: This interview is with General Maxwell D. Taylor. Today is Thursday, January 9, 1969, and it's 2:15 in the afternoon. We're in General Taylor's offices in the Executive Office Building. This is Dorothy Pierce.

General Taylor, you are a very well known individual and I really don't feel that it's necessary for me to give your whole career by way of introduction. Since we are going to be dealing primarily with the '60's, I would like to make touchstones of your various services and assignments during that period. This is more for my benefit and to be sure that I have the times correct on them. You retired as Chief of Staff in 1959. This is, of course, under President Eisenhower. President Kennedy recalled you to active duty in 1961, and you served as the military representative to the President. From '62 to '64, you were Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; from 1964 to 1965, Ambassador to Viet Nam; and since then you have served as Special Consultant to President Johnson on diplomatic, military, and strategic matters. Just this March you have become Chairman of the military--

T: I became a member of the Intelligence Board at the same time I became a consultant. I then succeeded Mr. Clark Clifford as Chairman of that board when he became Secretary of Defense.

P: Also, during your career you've authored two books, The Uncertain Trumpet and Responsibility and Response. General Taylor, before we

begin I would like to find out if you have participated in any other oral history project.

T: Yes, I participated in the recordings for the benefit of the Kennedy Library covering essentially the period of time during which I was associated with President Kennedy. As you have indicated, that was from April 1961 until the President's death.

P: Have you any changes or corrections or additions to add to that tape here?

T: No, I don't think so. I went rather thoroughly over the events which were included in that period with which I was associated. They're available on file under the terms of access to them in the Kennedy Library. I would imagine that if I changed them now, it would be for the worse.

P: In an effort not to take your time and duplicate any statements that you have made, I will primarily pick up from '63, except for earlier associations with President Johnson and some overall pictures of the '60's which I'd like to get from you. Before we get into this, I'd like to just start with when you first met Lyndon Johnson and what the circumstances were.

T: I'm sorry to say I can't pinpoint the exact time. It was during the period when I was Chief of Staff of the Army, which was in the Eisenhower period from 1955 to 1959. He, of course, was Senator Johnson and I saw him frequently in connection with the Preparedness Subcommittee of which he was chairman. I testified before him on many occasions. I got to know him in that sense of the word, which was not particularly intimately, but I did see enough of his work in the field of national security to form a very high opinion of his interest in national security and also the vast amount of energy he expended in becoming thoroughly knowledgeable

with many complex subjects.

P: Is there any particular time, or times, that stand out in your mind during the period?

T: Yes, I remember very well an occasion--the year of which I cannot mention without consulting my diary--but it was known that the Joint Chiefs were very unhappy about the budget of that particular year. He [Johnson] called a full scale open hearing of his subcommittee and before klieg lights brought each one of the Chiefs, one by one, in front of the committee to testify on what they thought of their budget. It was somewhat humorous because the Chiefs, constrained as they are by the ethics of their position--in other words not taking advantage of an open hearing to complain about their civilian masters in the Pentagon--were in a very unenviable position. They had to tell the truth, yet they also certainly did not want to suggest disloyalty to the civilian leaders. It ended up something like this: that each chief would talk about his own budget and in response to questions indicate that he didn't think that budget was large enough. But then, at the end, the final question the chairman would ask, "Well, what about the entire Defense budget?"

"Well," they'd say, "We think that's all right." This led one of the Senators to say, "This is the most unusual situation, where four insufficient budgets add up to a sufficient overall budget."

P: Were there any other such occasions? [What was] did you think, the then-Senator Johnson's reasoning for bringing you in this setting?

T: Well, it was public knowledge that there was great unhappiness at the Pentagon. I presume I was the prime villain because these were the days when, as the Army spokesman, I was fighting the cause of flexible response versus massive retaliation. This was known about town but had never

been aired in a public sense. I would say that Senator Johnson recognized it was a highly important matter; that it was not really parochial inter-service bickering as sometimes it was described. But it was a question of two contending strategies of great national importance. To air the issue in this way would be a profitable and useful exercise.

P: And did you air it, sir?

T: Within the constraints to which I referred. I believe this was '58. The following year I retired and produced The Uncertain Trumpet, which was a formal statement of this issue in a more or less compact form.

P: Are there any other occasions during that period?

T: That stands out just because of its conspicuous nature, but I have nothing other than my recollection of many discussions with Senator Johnson, hearings before him, and his great interest, as I say, in the Armed Services and the problems of the men in uniform.

P: Did you have many sort of private sessions with him?

T: No, I don't recall any. I would see him occasionally socially around town. But again, this was far from being an intimate relationship.

P: Did you formulate any opinions at that point as to the possible political career of--?

T: He was known as very energetic and as a comer in the Senate. I would see his hand in the Pentagon in the form of questions, interrogations, expressions of interest on a thousand-and-one subjects which were conducted under the responsibility of the civilian Secretaries of the Pentagon.

P: What, in your judgment, do you feel has been the major foreign policy, Defense-related problems of the 1960's?

- T: I think the easy answer is Southeast Asia--Viet Nam, Secondly, I suppose, the Middle East situation. That's certainly true today, and I think both of those problems, of course, have roots well in the past.
- P: This, of course, would cover part of the Kennedy period just prior to this, the Cuban missile crisis was of course involved in that era.
- T: I might say that my first involvement with President Kennedy was as a result of the Bay of Pigs. I was in private life in New York at the time and was called down two days after the Cuban Brigade surrendered to meet with President Kennedy. Vice President Johnson was present at the time in the Oval Room. I was facing a very shocked new Administration [over] this serious disaster--disaster from a military and political point of view--and complete uncertainty as to what really had occurred. After about twenty-four hours of discussing it with President Kennedy, Vice President Johnson, McGeorge Bundy--the principal actors of the White House--I agreed to undertake a review of the Bay of Pigs. I was to be chairman of an investigating committee, the other three being Bobby Kennedy; Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA; and Admiral Arleigh Burke, who was CNO at the time. So it was through the Bay of Pigs that I was recalled eventually to active duty in mid-summer, and then stayed on until 1964 when I went to Viet Nam.
- P: General Taylor, in President Kennedy's campaign in 1960 he did, of course, concentrate very heavily on defense problems and posture. Had he had any contact with you?
- T: No, I was living in Mexico at the time and looking at this election campaign very much from a distance. I did, however, receive a letter from him while I was still in Mexico saying he had read The Uncertain

Trumpet, and congratulating me on it--just a few lines. That was the only contact I had with him, and I had no idea that I would ever be associated with his Administration.

P: When you did come into his Administration--this sounds like a loaded question, but did you have any indication that you would be going into the Joint Chiefs position?

T: No, not in the slightest. I came down first hoping to get back to Lincoln Center, where I was trying to build buildings for the Performing Arts in New York; and deliberately set up a very tight schedule for the investigation of the Bay of Pigs so that within a month or a month-and-a-half my report was ready to be filed. But at that time, when that work was drawing to an end, Bobby Kennedy, as a go-between for the President, started propositioning me, so to speak, about coming back to active duty. I had no desire to do so, but it's awfully hard to say "no" to a President, especially one that's in trouble, and he was in trouble at that time. After some negotiation it was agreed that I would come back with the title of Military Representative to the President assigned to [the position]. I had no idea that I would ever really go back into uniform, although I was technically on active duty. I worked in civilian clothes and was in effect military and intelligence adviser to the President.

P: During this period did you have any dealings with the Vice President?

T: Only occasionally. I would see him at NSC meetings, for example; special conferences on various things. But he was usually just in a listening role. He very rarely took a leading part in the discussions of that period. In October 1961 I was sent by President Kennedy to Viet Nam with

Walt Rostow and four or five other representatives of the government to examine the situation and make recommendations--which turned out to be a rather historic mission because it was a turning point in our relations with South Viet Nam.

Upon return, one of the first things President Kennedy asked me to do was to see the Vice President and go over the whole thing with him. I went down to the Capitol, I recall very well, and sat with him for an hour or more going over all my impressions; first my report which I was about to file with the President and all the circumstances and all the impressions related to it. We had a very warm discussion of it in the sense that he showed a great deal of interest and, I thought, a rather unusual understanding of the seriousness of what we were recommending: that this was indeed adding to a commitment which had for awhile seemed to progress favorably but had fallen into very bad times the previous year.

P: This is of course taking on what we call the advisory role in--

T: The expansion of the advisory role, I would say, because we'd had advisers in Vietnam ever since 1954.

P: That's right. Do you recall anything about the meeting or his response or reaction to your report?

T: Well, just about as I indicated--great interest in all I was talking about. I would say--my impression at the end--that he acquiesced rather reluctantly--didn't put it in formal words--that there were many uncertainties in this course we were going down, but it still looked like about the only choice we had.

P: Any other particular occasions during his Vice Presidency?

T: No, I wouldn't say so. Nothing stands out.

P: Of course, in 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated, you were in the position of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Were there any changes in your activities and your responsibilities when President Johnson took over?

T: Yes, very much so. One of the first things the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs would think about at such a time was "Does the new President have all the information he needs in relation to a sudden surprise attack, nuclear type attack--that sort of thing." He has a very complex role to perform, extremely serious decisions to make regarding even the threat of nuclear attack. They're all recorded in a so-called black book which is carried wherever the President goes. So one of my first concerns was to get time in his schedule, which was tremendously crowded, of course, with all the things he had to do, a new President suddenly carrying those heavy responsibilities. My task was to get to him and to take the black book and to go through it and remind him of what he had to think about in a crisis.

He at least had to know where the sources of information could be quickly found in the case of crisis. I made that explanation to him. It's not easy. It's a complex matter. I frankly didn't feel that I had been too effective in getting all the principal points across. [I] then sought another appointment, which I got some weeks later, to go over a second time--the contents of the famous black book.

In those early months, also, I recall very well explaining to him a very important decision that President Kennedy had taken with regard to the functions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Kennedy had been very unhappy over the support given him by the Joint Chiefs at the time

of the Bay of Pigs.

One of the things which came out of that investigation was the feeling on the part of some of the Chiefs that anything that was not a strictly a military matter, they had no responsibility for. Hence they had no responsibility to warn the President if, for example, the Bay of Pigs--which was being conducted by CIA--looked like a dangerous and uncertain operation. That wasn't their business; and hence they took a rather detached attitude toward it. This was very apparent to the President, once he had a chance to see really what had happened in the preparation of the Bay of Pigs operation and its execution. He paid a remarkable visit in March--I'd have to get the time--to the Joint Chiefs in person and talked to them about his concept of their responsibility, and later confirmed it in writing.

Now, it was important because he emphasized that he as President couldn't consider just military aspects alone or political aspects alone of a given problem. He had a single problem and it consisted of many facets of many components. His decision had to take into account all factors. He looked to the Joint Chiefs not as military specialists, but as men of experience who had been about the world and had seen many aspects of foreign policy problems. He wanted the Chiefs to advise him in those terms as broad generalists in the field of foreign policy, not narrow military specialists.

To me that was a very important statement and gave a new and broader orientation to the task of the Chiefs than had any President before. It was so important that I wanted President Johnson to know that that was on the books. He listened very attentively. He neither approved nor

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disapproved, but with the knowledge that it was on the books he tacitly approved it because he never changed it. I'm sure if he were asked today, he would say, "Yes, that is indeed the kind of support I want from the Joint Chiefs."

P: When you first met with the President and reviewed the contents of the black book, did you feel that he had a basis on the information or were there areas he indicated he had not been informed?

T: He had never seen the black book before. It was unknown to him.

P: How well was he up to date on the--?

T: I would say, he was not up to date at all on these particular things because actually--. I wouldn't say they had been reserved for the President. All this information is for the President, and he, of course could have briefed the Vice President had he wanted. I got no impression he had ever done that. This was a new subject, or really a list of subjects as far as the President was concerned.

P: Could you just briefly give me your assessment of what the most critical situations were at this period?

T: Fortunately, these problems that I was concerned about, namely what the President does in case of an alert of nuclear attack never arose. So that this was just theoretical knowledge, but it could have been the most essential knowledge in the world under certain circumstances. I would say that he got to know all these things, but in the beginning we were throwing a lot of rather technical information at him in a hurry. I thought the first time was not enough and hence I asked for the second appointment.

P: Did you feel particularly close to President Kennedy?

T: Yes, I would say I did.

P: Did you develop this type of relationship with President Johnson?

T: Not to the same degree, although I had known him longer than I had known President Kennedy. It resulted somewhat from the different kind of work. I got to know President Kennedy best when I was in the Executive Office Building. I would often see him several times a day on many different subjects. In other words, it was as military representative that I really became close to President Kennedy. That closeness tended to diminish somewhat as I moved across the river into the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The physical distance from the President has a great effect. That's why the man who's outside his door is one of the strongest men in Washington. So I felt I had lost to some extent my very close feeling for President Kennedy just because I was farther away over there. With President Johnson --I was never on duty in the White House with him. So I would say I've got to know President Johnson better as a consultant than I ever did in official life.

P: You had just really a fairly brief period in there in which you concluded your position as the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Did anything occur or happen during that period--. I think it was about six or eight months in there before you took over your Ambassadorship?

T: Well, nothing that really stands out in terms of our relations to President Johnson. We always had a tremendous amount of business going on, of course, between the White House and the Pentagon--to include the Joint Chiefs. But nothing that I would say is conspicuous in recollection.

P: I was thinking of the Gulf of Tonkin, but that happened later.

T: That was later. I was in Saigon when that occurred.

P: When did you first discuss with Mr. Johnson becoming Ambassador to Viet Nam?

T: Well, there was a sort of prolonged discussion of how to fill the vacancy that Cabot Lodge was creating in Saigon. Many, many suggestions for replacements were made. I was asked to suggest possible replacements; McNamara was; Dean Rusk, and so on and so forth. A great many people were looked at for the job. For one reason or another either the President didn't want them, or they were in positions like Bob McNamara--who himself volunteered for the job--as did Dean Rusk. Obviously they couldn't be sent to Saigon.

I was asked, would I be willing to go if the President wanted me. I said the last thing I wanted to do was to go to Saigon. "I've finally reached the top of the military profession. I'm enjoying what I'm doing. Furthermore, I have some family problems, I couldn't be out of the country for a very long period of time."

But regardless of that--McNamara was rather a go-between. A President never likes to ask anybody for something and get a negative answer, for obvious reasons. Bob McNamara finally said to me, "Well, I think it's narrowing down to you; now, what about it?"

I said, "Well, I'll just repeat, it's the last thing I want to do personally, but if the President really wants me to go over there, I will. But I'll have to limit it to one year because of family problems I have here in the United States." After that word went back to the President, he asked to see me, and then formally tendered the position, and I accepted. I didn't tell him it was the last thing I wanted to do, but I did say, "I'm sorry. I really can't stay out of the country for more than a year at this time."

P: Would you say that anyone was particularly influential in your recommendation?

T: Recommending me?

P: Yes.

T: No. Of course, I was on very close terms with Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara, they're good friends of mine, and the President. I don't know that anyone was particularly--I was obviously in the group to be considered. The way I describe it--the press asked me about Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara--also Bobby Kennedy who had been mentioned. What did I have that they didn't have! I said, "I have the invaluable quality of dispensability."

P: Did you see any reasoning behind this? Of course, you were a very capable and logical candidate.

T: There were many factors you could see. First, the place was going to pot very fast. Diem had been overthrown, and the place politically was in a turmoil. It stayed in a turmoil all the time I was there. The place never got better until I left as I often say. So the President wanted to send somebody that was known around the country. In other words, he didn't want to get a good professional named Joe Smith who had never been heard of. To strengthen the team and also to meet the obvious criticism, "Look here, why are you sending a general over to this highly complex diplomatic post?" he then got [U. Alexis] Alex Johnson to agree to go as my deputy, which was a very gallant thing for Alex to do. He was the senior, professional diplomat in the government--and to take a number two job after being ambassador to two or three different places and being a very valuable man around town! But he's a lifelong friend of mine, and it was a great source of strength to take him with me. But it permitted the President to state that he had a good

team there, military experience and diplomatic experience, to deal with a situation which included both military and political factors.

P: Was there at this early time the anticipation of the forthcoming build-up that, of course, did occur in '65?

T: No. Of course, we didn't know we were going to have that build-up. The principal issue that I had in my year in Vietnam was how to get some political stability in the situation. I had five different governments to deal with in a year. Coup followed coup, and to stabilize the turbulence was the greatest problem. With that, there was the growing demoralization of the South Vietnamese at their own impotence, their own ineffectiveness.

My conclusions, which were based upon observations going back to 1961, were that sooner or later we would have to use our air power against the homeland of the enemy north of the seventeenth parallel. I hadn't been Ambassador more than a few months before I started recommendations to resume consideration of this course of action, which had been considered and rejected in the past. It was only after three terrorist attacks on American installations--one, the Bien Hoa Air Base just before the election; one, on the Brink Hotel in the middle of Saigon on Christmas Eve; and then finally the attack on Pleiku Air Base in February which fortunately took place when McGeorge Bundy was visiting Saigon.

After each one, I recommended air reprisals against targets in North Vietnam and was turned down the first two times. But along with Mac Bundy, with his reenforcing voice, we got agreement to retaliate for the attack on Pleiku; which really initiated the start of the air campaign which gradually expanded therefrom.

Concurrently, one of the arguments I had with the President was on the subject of our dependents. He was terribly worried about the American dependents. Even at the time I went over, he gave me a long talk--"I think we ought to get them out just as fast as we can." I asked him to please let me get on the job and study this problem directly.

I hadn't been there very long before I developed a very strong feeling that there were many objections to taking the dependents out. It looked like scuttling and running to some extent. It would create added doubts in the minds of the South Vietnamese as to whether or not we were going to stay with them. There was great fear, great suspicion at that time that because of their inability to govern themselves, we were just going to throw up the sponge and leave them at some point. If they saw all the American dependents go home, that would certainly increase their concern and probably increase their political instability, which was bad enough under the most favorable of circumstances. So that I held out against the President. He came back at me--I first had filed a negative recommendation, and he came back, arguing the case back and forth. Finally it got to the point that I was urging, "Let's start bombing North of the seventeenth parallel in reprisal for these terrorist attacks." And he was saying, "You get the dependents out, then we'll talk about the air campaign." So eventually I put my protesting wife and all other dependents on air planes and sent them back to the United States.

P: I remember hearing at about that time myself, personally, that it would have been very difficult had an attack been made on the city to safely

evacuate all our dependents.

T: Yes, if the city were under attack. Well, that is quite true. It was always a possibility that almost anything could happen in the city. Why they didn't have more terrorist attacks in Saigon in that period than they did, I don't know, because the place was wide open to terrorist attacks. The President was very much worried about it. But it was the fact that we evacuated and then immediately started the bombing campaign that nullified the danger of demoralization of the South Vietnamese from the evacuation, because one offset the other.

P: When you think about your tenure there, that one year, what is your feeling about the relationship of the President with his mission in the country?

T: Well, it was very close, extremely close. He asked me when I went over there to send every week a message to him directly, not to the State Department. It is a practice that has been going on with all the subsequent Ambassadors to Vietnam. I welcomed that. There's nothing like having the feeling you can talk to the President any time you want to. And I used it as a device to give him personal insights--in addition to the cables which of course are the formal formalized reactions of the mission. It's a great thing to be able to get your own coloration into the reporting.

P: What is your reaction to the charge that the handling has been too much in Washington as opposed to there on the scene?

T: I don't agree. This is a criticism made with regard to military operations. There was no interference with the military operations in South Viet Nam when I was there, other than those which are obviously necessary. You

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couldn't let the military commander go running across international boundaries into Cambodia and Laos and various places--not that the military commander wanted to--but necessarily there have to be guidelines within which to conduct military operations. President Johnson and his government provided, I thought, very reasonable guidelines for the ground war.

Where Washington control became very exacting, and properly so, was in the attack of these targets in North Viet Nam. Because here was the use of a military weapons for a political and psychological purpose. We were attacking those targets for three reasons. One, to give the feeling in South Viet Nam that for the first time they were being allowed to strike the homeland of the enemy, the enemy that had been making their lives miserable for twelve to fourteen. Second, to restrict and make more difficult the infiltration of men and supplies from North Viet Nam to South Viet Nam. The third reason was both psychological and political. It was to remind Ho Chi Minh and his council that were sitting up in Hanoi running a war at no expense that they were going to start to pay a price, and an increasing price as long as they continued.

Now, that being the case, the President then had to take into account the dangers of the expansion of the war. When we started bombing, we didn't know how China would react; how Russia would react. I think most of us didn't fear this, but you couldn't eliminate the possibility of an extension of the war resulting from the bombing.

So great prudence at the outset, I think, was entirely justifiable. That meant control back here. The President is Commander-in-Chief, and he has the responsibility. If he wants to do it himself, that's his right. I didn't feel that President Johnson ever exceeded what normal

prudence would dictate in controlling this very potent weapon, but also a weapon that entailed certain hazards.

P: As Ambassador, what differences did you find in that capacity from your previous military career?

T: Not very much, as a matter of fact. First, there was a very heavy military component in the task there, increasingly so as time went on. Also, it was a question of organizing a team of people representing various governmental activities to work as a unit, work as a harmonious group. That problem exists in the military profession. Also, it required an intimate knowledge of government here in Washington. I insisted on returning home every other month so that I could be here personally and talk to the President and talk to McNamara and talk to Rusk and the people around town. Something which my successor didn't do, and I would think he would regret it because there's nothing like getting right back to Washington to get the feel of the home front and also to bring a sense of reality of what's taking place overseas to the decision-makers.

P: General Taylor, from the events that happened I'm wondering if there are particular things like Bien Hoa and Pleiku that you just recall the events as they occurred while you were there. I'm wondering how you ever got any sleep on that job.

T: It was a seven-day a week job; always has been; and still is. But it was intensely interesting just because there were so many things going on, and so many things going on very badly. I think most people would say that period was the trough of our policy. It was the black year. The fifth government I dealt with was the Ky government, from which has sprung the constitutional government today. Things

got better after I departed. But it was a very strenuous year because of the uncertainty of whether you could hold the Vietnamese government together and get the Vietnamese people behind this war to a greater extent. So my problems were not military. The war itself I never worried about, but rather the political aspects of the problem.

P: It was during this period, wasn't it, that there was a growing Buddhist uprising. So you were also dealing with that?

T: Well, really, the Buddhist problem--very much misinterpreted at the time here in Washington--had its most serious consequences in the year of '63 when it resulted in the overthrow of the Diem government and his assassination. But that same group of radical bonzes (Thich Tri Quang, etc.) were still running around the country, were a tremendous problem because having tasted political success in overthrowing Diem, they wanted to continue to be a political force without any responsibility, but pulling the rug from under the recurrent governments. They were pretty successful a couple of times. But by the time of the end of 1965, we rather closed in on them, and also, on some of the generals who had been collaborating with these Buddhists. We got some of the trouble-makers like Khanh out of the country--who are still out of the country, I'm glad to say.

By the end of that year, the South Vietnamese themselves were so discouraged by their bad political performance that they were getting to the point where they were willing to put national interests ahead of their minority factionalism, which had been the great curse of the previous period.

P: You said that you felt that this was misunderstood in Washington. Were they placing too much emphasis on this?

T: In '63 misreporting, twisted reporting, had created an impression that the Diem government--Diem being a Catholic and his brother and his immediate family very devout Catholics--was guilty of religious oppression of Buddhists. Well, it never was.

It was really a small wing of the Buddhists allied to some of the generals who were anti-Diem in a--really a conspiracy, which created a series of events including the burning of bonzes, which unhappily is not an uncommon thing in the history of Vietnam but to us in America it looked like a horrible thing. I can still remember the picture of the burning bonze on the front page of one of our weekly magazines. It shocked our entire country and created the impression that something must be seriously wrong in the relations between the great religions in Vietnam for this to take place.

Well, there wasn't anything seriously wrong. The religion versus religion issue did not exist. But it was rather the political groups, which included certain segments of Buddhists and certain segments of the Catholics who were vying for political advantage. It was a political game of alliances and of groupings based upon religion.

P: Did you have any feeling that there was any Communist undermining or motivation in these Buddhist uprisings?

T: We always suspected it but never proved it. Some of the Buddhists leaders were certainly following a course of action in parallel with what the Viet Cong, or Hanoi, would certainly have liked them to follow. But whether that was just empathy or whether it was actual conspiracy, no one ever knew. We never were able to prove a direct link between Thich Tri Quang and his people and the Viet Cong.

P: General Taylor, did you cover the assassination of Diem in the other tape with the Kennedy Oral History?

T: Yes.

P: Could I just ask you one for one statement on that just to be sure that it's in there?

T: All right, and then I'm going to have to break off. It's three o'clock.

P: There are many, many stories and charges that there was of course, U.S. involvement in that assassination. What is your view of that?

T: There was a schism here in Washington between the senior advisers of the President on the whole question of Diem. We were not together in Washington. There were two groups. One group said, "You can't win with Diem." That was their slogan: "You can't win with Diem! He's a tyrant, a dictator. He has a bad brother and a bad sister-in-law" and that was true; "They have come between him and his people. He can't communicate with his people. His leadership is deteriorating. We must get rid of him."

The other group, which I belonged to said, "Well, most of those things you say are true, but if you get rid of him, then who?" Well, nobody had an answer to that. They hadn't the foggiest idea of how to answer that. So Group B would say that it was a great folly to do anything that would encourage an overthrow of Diem unless we had a better solution, or at least even a solution, which was not the case.

That split existed all through '63 with differing interpretations of what these events meant that we were seeing in Viet Nam. But, meanwhile, President Kennedy did not take a personal position. He was still unconvinced by either side. But he also favored doing what Ambassador

Lodge recommended, that various sanctions be imposed upon Diem-- holding back aid, various things to remind him he'd better see the Ambassador and listen to his advice--something that Diem was not doing at the time, or was resisting at the time.

Well, you can't do the things like that without it being public knowledge. Just the very fact that the United States government was showing disenchantment with Diem, disapproval of him publicly, was great encouragement to the people who had been plotting against him for years; so in that sense our actions encourage the plotters. Simply by seeing that we disapproved of Diem's actions we certainly encouraged the elements that eventually overthrew him and assassinated him. Beyond that I know nothing. I know nothing of any direct American intervention, and I don't even know who killed Diem. I don't know who knows, as a matter of fact. He and his brother were found shot in that personnel carrier.

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Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed

Maxwell D. Taylor

Date

Oct 22 1971

Accepted

Harold J. Middleton, for
Archivist of the United States

Date

July 19, 1974