

Dean G. Acheson Oral History Interview – JFK #1, 4/27/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Acheson, Secretary of State under President Harry S. Truman, talks about foreign policy matters during the John F. Kennedy administration and his advice and activities during that time. He also reads the text of several letters he wrote to JFK.

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DEAN ACHESON

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Oral History Interview

With

DEAN G(ooderham) ACHESON

By Lucius D. Battle

April 27, 1964

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For the John F. Kennedy Library

This is an interview with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson for the Kennedy Library--this is Lucius D. Battle speaking; I was assistant to Mr. Acheson during the time that he was Secretary of State.

BATTLE: Mr. Acheson, I thought we might begin today by reviewing the origins of your relationship with the late President Kennedy--when did you first meet him?

ACHESON: This is hard for me to remember. I can't recall any relations with Kennedy when he was in the House of Representatives, but I do know that we met in the 50's when he was in the Senate. I can't think of much of anything before say 1957, '58--somewhere along in there--although I think our relations went back a little bit longer than that.

The first thing that stands out in my mind--this is somewhat towards the beginning of our relationship--had to do with the book I wrote which was called *Power and Diplomacy*. I picked out as an example of how not to do something from a speech that Mr. Kennedy made in the Senate, in '57. This was a speech about France and Algeria, and he said that the Senate should pass a resolution which he had drafted and which he read in his speech which said that France should immediately get to work with the Algerian rebels and work out an arrangement for independence. And if they had not done this by the following September when the United Nations was to meet, the United States would introduce a resolution in the UN in favor of Algeria. I said this seemed to

me the wrong way to treat our oldest ally and our most sensitive ally--a country which was still smarting under the defeats of World War II and a sense of inferiority for what had happened. I remember using the phrase "this patient snapping of our fingers"... [Congressional Record, July 2, 1957, p. 10788].

BATTLE: I recall this now.

ACHESON: ...seemed to be the wrong thing to do. Well, this book was published in '58, and I thought no more about that until one of the big blizzards we had about February or March of '58. I was coming down on the Congressional from New York--the Congressional that didn't start. There was a great

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crowd in the station, and the station-master sent somebody out, knowing that I was in the station. They found me and brought me into his office, and there was Jackie Kennedy who had been held up also. We had been friends, I was a friend of her mother's, and we sat down to have a cup of coffee, waiting for the train to start. She began to attack me about this statement I made on Jack Kennedy's speech. I pointed out to her that we were likely to be spending some hours together--we had looked at our tickets and found that I had the chair next to hers on the train--and I said that we could either spend this time fighting or we could be pleasant. And she said, "All right, let's be pleasant." It was a good thing we did, because we arrived in Washington at 7:00 o'clock the next morning, after having sat up all night with desultory conversation and some troubled sleep. So I got the impression that the Kennedy family was not pleased with my....

BATTLE: Not pleased, but quite sensitive to what you thought, obviously.

ACHESON: Sensitive to what I thought and had said. At that time I went up to the Hill quite often to speak to a group of liberal Senators who--Senator Lehman [Herbert Henry Lehman] was one of them. They used to have dinner, and after dinner somebody would speak to them and chat back and forth. And I went up there quite a few times and saw a good deal of Jack Kennedy.

BATTLE: He attended these regularly, did he?

ACHESON: Yes, he used to come to these things and quite often he would drive me home. He lived in Georgetown and I did, and he dropped me off at the house. So we became acquaintances--I would not say in any way that we were friends, we were acquaintances--and he was always extremely deferential to me which made me feel even older than I otherwise would have felt. This was the general situation until the time leading up to the campaign. I was not at all active in Democratic politics. What I spent most of my effort at this time doing was trying to persuade President Truman [Harry S. Truman] and Sam Rayburn [Samuel T. Rayburn] and Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson, II] and Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] to get together and agree as to who the candidate should be, so we could go into this election

with some steam up. This was extremely difficult because we couldn't get the important people to center their minds on this thing. So it drifted along until Mr. Truman got to the point where he was going to have a public press conference over the television and radio about the candidate, and Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford] told me this was not going to be good all--he was going to be very extreme in his opposition to Kennedy. So I called Mr. Truman on the telephone and we had a long conversation in which I pointed out that this was not going to do any good at all. He would not defeat the nomination and that, if he thought that, he was exaggerating his own power. But he could hurt the situation, as there were a lot of people who had a great respect for Mr. Truman's judgment,

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and it would be a mistake to say something which later on he would regret. We discussed this back and forth, and I finally got him to promise that he would not say certain things which he had in mind to say. He kept his word on this and did not do that. I urged him not to say anything at all and he promised me that he would take that under consideration, which was his usual phrase.

BATTLE: He did what he wanted...

ACHESON: And of course, as you know, he did. Then things went along and the nomination, was made. I looked through my files the other day and I find two letters which I wrote that have some interest here. One was on the 17th of July, 1960--this was apparently right after the election. I wrote to the late President saying:

"Dear Jack:

My best wishes for success in all that lies ahead, the election and beyond, go to you. Also my congratulations on the way you have conducted yourself all through the proceedings leading up to your nomination and after it. Your bearing and actions were as admirable as they were successful. Here in Maryland you will have no problem. The ticket will be enthusiastically supported by our great Democratic registered majority. You will find no lack of advisers on foreign policy. But you will need all your good judgment to disregard most of their advice. The only advice I offer is to get all the rest you can while you can. With the best of luck,

Sincerely,

Dean."

BATTLE: What is the date of this letter--the second letter?

ACHESON: The second letter? September 15, 1960. This is the letter:

“Dear Jack:

“May I make a suggestion? I enclose a clipping from the *Washington Post* to the effect that Lodge (if Nixon wins) will become the first ‘Prime Minister’ under the proposals made by Rockefeller to Scoop Jackson’s Subcommittee and carried into the Republican platform. I also enclose a piece written for the American Academy, to take place at Arden House in October, taking this silly idea apart. Dorothy Fosdick and Bob Tufts of Scoop’s Committee are thoroughly knowledgeable about all of this. My suggestion is twofold.

“First, that you do not get hooked into this idea and nominate Lyndon as your Prime Minister.

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“Second, that you might want to go further and make it plain that you know enough about American history to know how idiotic this Prime Minister business is. You intend to be an American President--not a general in the White House run by a staff--not a Roi Faineant, run by a Major Domo, not a constitutional monarch opening Congress by parroting the words of a prime minister. The President cannot ‘lighten his burden’; he must carry it. But he can put more time and energy into his work if he has more energy and if he saves his time and his energy by not wasting both on frivolities.

“You will notice, too, that Mr. Lodge is going to be a funny sort of Prime Minister. He will be supposed to direct everything except military affairs. The Secretary of State and the Chiefs of Staff will go on having direct access to the President and will occupy his mind with military affairs.

“But the rest of the government, including the Secretary of State who will conduct the ‘day to day conduct of diplomacy’--God save the mark, that is our relations with the outside world until the shooting begins--this, if you please, Mr. Nixon, if he were to be President, he would turn over to the direction of the Vice President.

“You can imagine what sort of a man would be Secretary of State under that setup. One thing is sure. It wouldn’t be Mr. Nelson Rockefeller. He would be too busy somewhere else. Mr. Rockefeller’s interest in the office of ‘Prime Minister’ is restricted to occupying it himself.

“Mr. Nixon’s political instinct is sound in trying as a matter of electoral camouflage to present Mr. Lodge to the voters as the responsible acting President. Anyone in his right mind would rather have Mr. Lodge than Mr.

Nixon. Also, anyone in his right mind knows that Mr. Nixon doesn't mean a word of it. If he did, he wouldn't be half as smart or half as tricky as I think he is.

“Interposing bodies between the President, who must ‘direct’, and the responsible Cabinet officers who must execute policy does nothing for either. It only confuses and hampers both.

Sincerely yours,

Dean Acheson.”

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BATTLE: That is a wonderful letter, with a strange applicability to some things that have happened since then, I think. One point that I think you overlooked to mention, sir, was President Kennedy aware of the fact that you had intervened with President Truman to at least cut down any vehemence in his criticism?

ACHESON: I don't know. From my own knowledge I don't know at all. Clark Clifford knew all about it, and Clark at this time was supporting Stu Symington [W. Stuart Symington], so I don't know whether he saw Kennedy at this point in the Convention--probably afterwards I imagine he would have mentioned it to him.

BATTLE: What interests me particularly is the fact that you had no particular part in the campaign and had no relationship of any sort with him in your own years as Secretary of State and before that--and yet the fact that he turned to you instinctively and quite early in his own assumption of power. This, I think, is a rather interesting fact.

ACHESON: Well, I don't know really why this was so. Later on, it seemed to me, that he did have a good deal of respect for my judgment. Two or three times during the campaign he telephoned me and asked me my judgment about several things. I remember one of these was the talk about Cuba that he got into. I think this was started in one of the debates--or in one of the speeches he said something, Nixon said something, and then he said something, and he asked me what I thought he should do. I said I thought he should stop talking about Cuba. I didn't think this was getting anywhere; that to try and solve important questions of foreign or domestic policy in political debates seemed to me unfortunate. He was likely to get himself hooked into positions which would be difficult afterwards and if I were in his place I wouldn't do that. I thought a political campaign ought to be conducted on broader bases than this, that, or the other minutia of foreign policy and that he ought to give the country his attitude of approach to large questions of government, not to small, specific policies.

BATTLE: I recall being with you on both election night and inaugural day--that very

cold period--we talked a great deal at that time. During the period between the election and the inaugural you had any number of conversations, apparently, with Mr. Kennedy, and he called upon you for advice quite early and, according to the press, you were regarded then as a major source of strength and ideas to him. Can you comment on the period between the election and the inauguration when I think you were consulted on appointments and perhaps other matters?

ACHESON: Yes, I think quantitatively that has been somewhat exaggerated. I only remember one long talk that we had--there may have been others, but I don't think so. Mr. Kennedy came to see me on November 28th, when he was working on his Cabinet. He telephoned and asked if he could come over

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to my house in Georgetown. I, of course, offered to call on him but he said no, he thought it was proper that he should call on me. Shortly before he arrived, a good many photographers arrived and began hooking up electrical equipment around the place, so I thought certainly our meeting was not going to lack publicity. He walked over himself and came in and sat down in the living room. I offered him the usual nourishment but he said that he'd rather have some tea, which was the first of the famous teas that I had with him. We were entirely alone--this photographic business did not intrude. He said he wanted to talk with me about three positions in his Cabinet--the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Treasury. He started off on the Secretary of State and told me that he did not intend to appoint either Adlai Stevenson or Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] so that he knew all that he needed to know about that.

BATTLE: This disappointed you in neither instance, I'm sure.

ACHESON: Well, he thought there was no use wasting fire power on this. So I asked him who he did have in mind. This was sort of touchy--he said that one of his troubles now was that he had spent so much time in the last few years on knowing people who could help him become President that he found he knew very few people who could help him be President.

BATTLE: Interesting comment.

ACHESON: That was his own comment and I thought it was both true and touching. So I asked him what he had in mind and he said he didn't have anything very clear in mind. The person that he knew best in this field was Bill Fulbright [James William Fulbright], and that he had thought of Bill because he was on his committee and he thought he ran the committee pretty well and seemed to know a good deal about foreign affairs, and what did I think about that. I said I wouldn't think very favorably of Senator Fulbright. In the first place, Senator Fulbright was pretty important where he was. If you took him out of being chairman of the Senate Committee, the next in line might not be nearly as good as having him there--and the question was how were you going to use material for the best effect. I also thought that as a person in

active charge, Fulbright was not as solid and serious a man as you needed for this position. I've always thought that he had some of the qualities of the dilettante. He likes to criticize; he likes to call for brave, bold new ideas. I always--it's rather tiresome for people to say that other people ought to think of things. You either think of them or you don't, and if you don't you better shut up. So I rather discouraged this. Then he asked me to give him any ideas that I had. So I said it depends on how you want to approach this. You can approach it as doing something in an interim way and

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see how it develops or you can try for a person that you'd like to have during your whole office. I said if I were doing the former I think that I would be interested in asking Dave Bruce [David K.E. Bruce] to take this on for a little while and having Paul Nitze [Paul H. Nitze] act as Under Secretary and see how Paul developed. Paul has great qualities, he's wholly unknown, it would be impossible to appoint him as Secretary of State now, but after a year or so he might develop into a very useful man. I thought David Bruce would hate being Secretary of State. He certainly hated being Under Secretary when I got him in there--he hates going up on the Hill, he hates making speeches and all that sort of thing. But I thought he would do it and do it rather well for a short time. Then there was always mentioned in this connection Jack McCloy [John J. McCloy]. He interrupted at that point and said well, it seemed to him to be too bad for a Democratic President to take the attitude that there was no one in his own party who was good enough to be Secretary of State. I thought this was a valid point. Then I think the person I centered on, and I think I came next to him, was Dean Rusk [David Dean Rusk]. He didn't know Dean Rusk--he knew his name and knew who he was but he had never met him, he didn't know him, so he asked me to talk about him. I said that he had impressed me very much by coming to me almost at the outset of my time of duty in the department and offering to be demoted from Deputy Under Secretary to take on the very difficult job of Assistant Secretary in charge of the Far East. I had accepted this with alacrity. I thought he had done an extremely good job.

BATTLE: That was a remarkable incident, I remember it.

ACHESON: I thought he had been strong and loyal and good in every way. I would recommend him without any reservation, and pointed out that there was always the chance one took that somebody who had been good as a second or third in command would not be as good when the whole responsibility was put on him, but the only way to find that out was to try him. I think we may have mentioned one or two other people--or he may have, I didn't.

BATTLE: Was Bob Lovett considered at all in this?

ACHESON: He was considered, but not in this connection. Perhaps I mentioned Bob, but I wouldn't have urged Bob.

BATTLE: He was subject to the same difficulty I suppose, that would attend

McCloy, a Republican?

ACHESON: Yes, at this point he did mention his name and said that he was going to ask Clark Clifford to go up to New York to see Bob and ask him to be Secretary of the Treasury. I said I thought this was really a complete waste of everybody's time. Lovett wouldn't do it. He dislike this sort of thing. In fact he was hardly a banker, he spent a lot of time on Union Pacific Railway matters and a lot of fooling around with trains and this sort of thing--more than on Brown Brothers Harriman banking

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business--and I should think that the Treasury would have no appeal. I said, "Anyway, if you want to ask him, why don't you ask him yourself. If you give him warning by sending Clark up, this old rascal will have affidavits from every doctor in New York saying that he's going to drop dead," which is exactly what happened. He did send Clark up. Bob came down wrapped up like a terrific invalid, with all sorts of things around his neck, overshoes on and letters from doctors saying it would be unfair to the United States, unfair to the administration, to do this. And I said, "If you really want to put Lovett to work, a thing he might do for a very short time--his health is extremely bad--would be to act as Secretary of Defense long enough to reorganize the Pentagon. By the time he offended everybody in Washington, you would have to let him go home." But JFK said no, he had other ideas about Defense.

We then talked about the Treasury. He was quite strongly attracted to Gene Black [Eugene Black]. I urged him not to do that. I thought that could be a very considerable mistake. I had known Gene's father very well--I knew Gene very well, he was a strong-minded, stubborn, conservative banker and I thought that any Democratic President would have to do many things that a conservative banker would hate to do. And that, once you got Gene in there, he would have the support of the entire banking community and it would be impossible to get him out. He would turn out to be the George Humphrey [George M. Humphrey] of the administration. He would run it by running fiscal and monetary policies. This, I thought, was a mistake. JFK then asked me who I thought would be good, and I said that I thought Doug Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon]--who had been in the State Department and ought to have had a good idea of foreign policy, etc.--would be useful and that I thought that he had enough of Wall Street still on him to be acceptable, although I didn't think anyone on Wall Street would think that he was really a great financier--and I thought that he was pliable enough to be a useful person. I warned the President that the Treasury was really a very strong institution, and even a fellow who seemed to be all right when he went in could, from my own knowledge and experience, get into trouble. He seemed to be impressed with this. He then asked me what I would think if he appointed his brother Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] as Deputy Secretary of Defense. I said this seemed to me to be a great mistake and that, if he was going to put his brother anywhere, he should put him at the head of a department. It would be wholly impossible for any cabinet officer to have the President's brother as his second in command--with the known closeness of the two brothers to one another this would not be fair to anybody--and, therefore, if he were to be brought in at all, he ought to be given

complete responsibility for a department of government, or be brought into the White House and be close to the President himself. He said he thought that was a pretty sensible idea and he said another thing which seemed to me to be touching and picked up the earlier one that I mentioned. He said again that he did not know and would not know most of the people who would be around him in high cabinet positions and he just felt that he had to have someone

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whom he knew very well and trusted completely with whom he could just sort of put his feet up and talk things over. This seemed to me to be fair. He then said, what would I think about his making Bobby Attorney General. I thought this was not a good--I thought there were other cabinet positions that would be better for him. I thought it was not a good idea because it was an exposed position. I mentioned the civil rights business which was going to come up. Bobby and the President would be one person, they wouldn't be two people, and whatever Bobby did the President would bear directly. They would just be regarded in the public mind as the same person and that it was important in a difficult job like that to have a little buffer in between. The Attorney General should be able to take the blame for things without having it go directly on to the President. Well, this was about the substance of that conversation.

At the end of it he asked me if I would accept an appointment as our representative at NATO. I thanked him very much for it and said no, that I would not--that he needn't worry about me, there was nothing that I wanted. I would be glad to help him in any way that I could with advice, but, as Mr. Churchill said, I've had enough of responsibility--I was not seeking any more. He asked me to think it over and I said I didn't need to think it over, my mind was very clear on this and I just wouldn't do it at all. I think this was the sum and substance of that conversation.

BATTLE: You called, I think, on him later at his own house in Georgetown, did you not? I thought there were other conversations...

ACHESON: No.

BATTLE: You did not--I thought I remembered seeing you photographed going in or coming out of the interior.

ACHESON: No.

BATTLE: Well, there were no other lengthy conversations then on the matter of appointments?

ACHESON: Yes, there was one other but this was over the telephone. He had asked me about Bruce--after I had talked about Bruce as a possible Secretary of State. He said, well, if he didn't do that, what would he do. I said, obviously the right thing to do with Dave Bruce was to make him Ambassador to the Court of St. James's. I thought he would be very good at this and his wife would be very

good. Kennedy said to me that I was wrong about that, that he had heard that Bruce wanted to go to Rome. Evangeline's sister was in Rome and they wanted to do this. I told him that this amazed me; that he had better be awfully sure he was right because Evangeline's sister was on her way out of Rome, not in to Rome.

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BATTLE: And on her way to London, probably.

ACHESON: Yes, she and her husband were separating. This appointment I was sure would be wrong. Well, not long after that he asked David to come and see him and asked David to be Ambassador to Rome. Dave was very upset about this and said he would like to think about it. I remember going over to David's house after this interview and he said, what in the world is this all about. Then I told him my conversation with Jack Kennedy, and he said, "Where in the world did he get this. This is the last place either Vangie or I would want to go." So I said, now let me see if I can't do something about it. So then I did telephone Jack Kennedy and said, I had talked to Bruce, that Kennedy's information, wherever he got it, was wrong. Bruce did not want to go to Rome, and that if he really wanted to use this man he should send him to London. This is what he did. After Lovett [Robert A. Lovett] came down I had another talk with Lovett, but not with the President. He asked Lovett about who should be Secretary of State. Bob said, well there wasn't any problem about that, that Dean Acheson ought to be Secretary of State. Kennedy said he couldn't do that, that it would upset a lot of people in his own party.

BATTLE: Well it would have been brilliantly received over here in the State Department with enthusiasm in all quarters. Well, did you have any conversations with the President on the appointment of Secretary of Defense?

ACHESON: No.

BATTLE: None.

ACHESON: No, no, I didn't.

BATTLE: Well, we then go from the period between the election and the inauguration and into the beginning of the administration. I recall that when I returned to Washington in February of 1961 that you were already deeply involved and concerned with a study of NATO. Would you care to talk about that particular study that you made and particularly how you became involved in it? Was this at the request of the President, also?

ACHESON: Yes, this was at his request, conveyed to me first of all by Dean Rusk. Dean asked me to come over here [Department of State] even before the

inauguration and again pressed me to go to NATO in Paris. I declined again. Then he said that the President wanted a review of the whole NATO situation to see what ought to be done--what policy was right, and what, indeed, the policy was after massive retaliation and all the other things that Dulles had been doing--what were we really supposed to be doing in NATO. I said I'd be glad to take that on. I wanted to be careful about not being pointed to anything. I wanted to continue to be free to stay in my law firm and I didn't want all these statutes operating on me,

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so I didn't want to hold any office of trust and confidence, and I didn't want any pay, and I didn't want any office, I just wanted to give him any thought that I had about NATO. So I started to work very shortly after the inauguration on it. I remember I was going down to Antigua to stay with the MacLeishes [Archibald MacLeish] and that went up in smoke. I must have spent the whole spring working on NATO--sometimes over in this building, sometimes over in my own office. I would come over here if I had to look at documents that couldn't be taken out of the building. The purpose was to review our original intentions in 1949 and '50 up through the Lisbon Conference in troop goals, force goals, etc., then see what had happened as a result of the development of nuclear power by the Russians and the further development of the thermonuclear weapon by us and the rumblings of discontent which were already starting in Europe about the concentration of nuclear power in our hands, etc. This I did--and had some excellent help, very good people over here and from the Pentagon working with me; I talked with Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and his advisers, Paul Nitze, Bill Bundy [William P. Bundy] and various other people. We finally worked out a paper on which we had, I think, two or three discussions in the Security Council, which was finally adopted as government policy, but I never was quite sure how much of it was adopted.

This is one of the difficulties of working on these assignments. I was never sure whether Jack Kennedy was completely sold on the conclusions. I have some letters from him here--here's the letter I was looking for, this is about when it ended, April 24, 1961. This is signed John F. Kennedy. It says:

“Dear Mr. Acheson:

“I have now approved the policy directive which you prepared concerning US policy toward the Atlantic nations. I want to thank you for your work on this directive and on the underlying report.

“These are excellent papers. They will provide a basis for our policy toward the Atlantic nations. I am directing that specific actions be taken to ensure that their conclusions are urgently carried out.

“Your preparation of this report has contributed greatly to the effectiveness of the United States foreign policy. Its results will, I am confident, be evident in a stronger and more cohesive Atlantic Community. You have added one more to the long list of distinguished

services rendered your country.

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“May I add a personal note and tell you how much I have enjoyed our several discussions of this paper.

“I am looking forward to the further work you have agreed to undertake on the Berlin problem.

Sincerely, ”

BATTLE: It is interesting to note, I think that according to a record I have here, he approved the policy directive on April 21 and disseminated it on April 24--the same date of your letter--and it is indicated as a paper prepared by Mr. Dean Acheson, assisted by a working group, etc. So apparently the paper was disseminated throughout Government for implementation. I was under the impression there were a number of National Security Council meetings or whatever we called them at that particular time, at which time the paper was considered and perhaps modified in some respects, but essentially I thought the paper was accepted. Am I correct in this view?

ACHESON: Yes, I think this is so. It was accepted just as you said. The paper was prepared; it was clear as a bell. We met three or four times about it, we did change this, that and the other paragraph to make them clear, etc. And finally he signed it and sent it around, and said, this is policy. But what I was suggesting is that I was never quite sure how completely his mind was sold on this.

BATTLE: But you participated in all the changes that were made to the final?

ACHESON: Oh, yes.

BATTLE: That was the point I was making--that this was not changed elsewhere without your...

ACHESON: The thing that continually seemed to bother the President about this was the continuation of so large a body of American troops in Europe without any plan that they should come home on a specific date; whether it was a year, two years, five years, six years. How far did we look in the future? What did we see at the end of the tunnel? Et cetera. What I was trying to make clear here was that this is a situation in which what we had to do was to see our long-range policy, then we had to take what intermediate steps we could take. These had to be modified by what you could do. What was possible. Sometimes these did not make as much sense as one would like to make, because you couldn't do all the things you wanted to do. What you did at any time must be consistent with your long-range view, and not against it. Therefore, if you began saying we're going to take troops home or our

hope is to bring them home, you always got into the European mind an unsettling element. Surely we do hope to bring them home, but the point was to get the Europeans in such a state of confidence and growing capabilities that this time would come. It would never come if you keep saying, "If you don't do exactly what we want, we'll go home." This was the wrong way to act. I don't think he ever was quite with me on this. There's always a state of mind in the United States which looks at foreign policy as though we were rewarding good boys and being severe with bad boys. That doesn't make any sense. You can't conduct affairs like that. It isn't a matter of rewards and punishments. It's a question of trying to influence people to do what in a collective way is the desirable thing to do. Once you understand that the result of the whole civil war in Europe from 1914 to 1945, is that you have a divided world and that it will continue to be divided with two great power centers in it, one must conduct policy on that basis. This is what I was trying to get across. Well, after this paper was finished--and what I was doing in it really, was to underline very deeply the conception of strong Allied conventional power in Europe, looking more and more at usable power as applied to foreign affairs in Europe. Underneath the whole thing there must be the assurance that anybody who uses nuclear power is going to be so badly hurt that it isn't wise to do it. This does not dispose of the relevancy of power in foreign affairs. Now this does not mean that you have to use it to make it relevant. But it means that if you give up either nuclear or conventional power altogether, then the Russians will engage in policies which we can't meet. And this is disastrous. Now that's the conception that was in my paper.

When we got through with it, I was going to argue the jurisdictional part of the case in the World Court, and at that time the President and the Secretary of State asked me if I would see General de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle] and Chancellor Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer] and tell them what we were doing--tell them that the President was not trying to face them with a decision which we had arrived at, but that in order to talk to them at all we had to make up our own minds what it was we thought would be sensible policy and explain it to them. And so this I did at his request--and I'll come back to that, if you wish, later on. There's one thing that ought to be mentioned here. We went to Europe in March of '61 I think--sometime in there. A day or so before I went I was over talking with the President about this NATO paper--a lovely, first warm spring day, and he said, "I want to talk with you about something else. Come on out here in the garden and sit in the sun." So we sat on a bench, and he said, "Do you know anything about this Cuba proposal." I said I didn't even know there was one. He outlined to me what the proposal was. I was very much alarmed about the thing, and said I hoped he wasn't serious about it. He said, "I don't know if I'm serious or not, but this is the proposal and I've been thinking about it and it is serious in that sense. I've not made up my mind but I'm giving it very serious thought." I remember saying that I did not think it was necessary to call in Price Waterhouse to discover that 1,500 Cubans weren't as good as

25,000 Cubans. It seemed to me that this was a disastrous idea. We talked about it for a little bit and then I went off. I really dismissed it from my mind because it seemed like such a wild idea. While I was in Europe the Bay of Pigs came off and this really shattered the Europeans. It was such a completely unthoughtout, irresponsible thing to do. They had tremendously high expectations of the new administration, and when this thing happened they just fell miles down with a crash. This had an unfortunate effect on my personal relations with the President. As you may remember, when I came back I made a speech to the Foreign Service.

BATTLE: I recall it very well, I sat next to you.

ACHESON: And in it I was ill-advised enough to attempt to be humorous about something which I shouldn't have been humorous about. The European view, I said, was that they were watching a gifted young amateur practice with a boomerang, when they saw, to their horror, that he had knocked himself out. Well, the President didn't like this at all.

BATTLE: I recall that he sent for the text of the speech. We got it together over here--it had been taped--and it went over to him at that particular time. And I heard also that he was rather irritated by this.

ACHESON: He was very irritated.

BATTLE: But your relations with him during this period--in addition to the NATO paper--were there conversations with him between the two of you other than in the NSC or the contacts considering the NATO paper, on other subjects or this one?

ACHESON: I don't think so--I don't remember any. I know one time when W. S. Lewis was staying with us, who is sort of an uncle-in-law of Jackie Kennedy, we went over and had tea with them, a pleasant time at the White House. But I think most of my relations with him were business relations on these subjects. We got into Berlin policy, and we also got into policy toward Portugal.

The latter happened purely by accident. I was riding over with Dean Rusk to the White House for a meeting of the NSC on the NATO paper. And he brought Woody Wallner [Woodruff Wallner] along who had a draft telegram instructing our people to vote against Portugal or for the resolution for an investigation into the Angola matter. I argued against sending this telegram in the car when we were going over. Then Dean Rusk and Woody and the President went off in the corner of the Cabinet Room and talked about this. He signed the telegram and went out with it. Later on in the meeting something came up about treatment of our allies--and I said that an illustration of what I thought was the wrong way to conduct an alliance was contained in the telegram which he had just signed. One cannot expect an alliance to hold together strongly when the leader of the alliance is taking actions which member of the alliance think are directly think are directly hostile to their interests.

Now this doesn't mean we have no freedom of action at all. But it does mean that we're much too light-hearted about kicking our friends around. This telegram is an example of it. The President said, "Go ahead, I didn't know that you had this view--talk about it." So I said, it's silly to talk about it--you sent the telegram and we're going to take this step. But the point is, what does this telegram achieve? If this happens, we are supporting an investigation into Portuguese affairs in Angola. What do you expect to get out of this? Is this investigation going to improve these conditions? The answer is quite clearly it isn't, and we don't expect it to. What we are doing is, under the pressure of the United Nations part of the Department and of the African affairs part of the Department, acting for the purpose of appeasing the Afro-Asian group. This is all we accomplish. We accomplish nothing in Angola--we don't expect to accomplish anything in Angola. We will alienate the Portuguese. Now, this is not the way to run an alliance. It's just the wrong thing to do. Well, we had quite a discussion, and it came up two or three times after this. I said we could write all the papers on NATO in the world, but if we went ahead doing this sort of thing then we wouldn't have any NATO.

Now we skip way ahead. Toward the end of that year--September or October of '61--the President asked me to come over to the White House and he had Mac there. We were in the upstairs sitting room.

BATTLE: This was Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy]?

ACHESON: Mac Bundy--and he then asked me if I would take on the negotiations with Portugal for extension of the Azores lease. I said, I'll do anything that is sensible that you ask me to do. Let's talk about this. If you would really have a policy in regard to Portugal which is somewhere anything like what I urged in the NSC meeting earlier in the year, negotiations become unnecessary. Portugal is a devoted and loyal ally--she would like nothing better than to extend this lease. On the other hand, if your going ahead and fight what they're doing in Angola, you won't get the extension anyway. Nobody can get it. I can't--nobody can. So why don't we have a policy toward Portugal rather than a negotiation of something in the abstract. We talked about this for quite a long time, and then he said he thought that it was quite silly to ask me to do something which I thought government policy was rendering impossible. And I didn't hear any more about it. That was the end of our Portuguese talks.

BATTLE: That was the only involvement you had in that particular matter?

ACHESON: Yes, I have a letter or so here--I don't know that they have any great bearing.

BATTLE: The impression at the time over here was that you were having discussions with the President on the subject. This was obviously not quite right.

ACHESON: No, I think I only talked with him about three or four times--one in the spring, one in the fall--perhaps twice.

BATTLE: You started to mention something else about your trip to Europe. You said you would come back to this in a moment.

ACHESON: Yes, this is my interview with these two men--one with de Gaulle and one with Adenauer. The one with Adenauer on April 9, 1961, I think was quite important--the one with de Gaulle on April 20th was interesting but nothing came of that. On April 21st, I had a session with the NATO Council. The meeting with de Gaulle took about an hour, in which I explained to him our thoughts about NATO--what we thought the relevancy of NATO and any military power of NATO was to questions of foreign policy in Europe--and the importance of trying to get together with our allies on fundamental foreign policy conceptions, particularly about Central Europe, and then about what constituted pressure and what didn't constitute pressure on the Russians. He listened to all of this very courteously, as he did later on about Cuba. It was quite clear that he didn't agree with this at all. He told me what he was doing about his own force de frappe. He was going ahead with that. I said, well I was not an ambassador--I was not sent over to negotiate in any way at all. The President wanted General de Gaulle to be aware of what he, Mr. Kennedy, was doing in order to try and get his mind ready to talk with his allies. I said, "He isn't expecting to come over here later on with his mind completely made up. But if he comes over with a blank mind he isn't going to be any help to anybody. So he wants to be able to talk with you in a constructive way. The views I am giving you are my own. The President is now considering them and he has asked me to tell you about them." I thought that we at least put de Gaulle into a position where he could not say that nobody let him know anything until he was faced with it. I talked to the Council of NATO pretty much the same way.

Adenauer had wanted to see me very badly. It was arranged that a military plane would pick me up, fly me down to Bonn where the old gentleman would meet me and take me out to his own house on Sunday. This he did. A glorious spring day in the Rhine Valley--all the fruit trees out--everybody out on Sunday. I was scared to death. We just went about as fast as it was possible to go in an automobile with a jeep ahead of us with a soldier sitting up in the back with two paddles. He would put a paddle out, like this, which meant that we were going to go right up on the sidewalk, or, with the other hand which meant we would go on the wrong side of the road--the old man was just having a wonderful time.

BATTLE: Not bothered at all?

ACHESON: Not at all--imperturbable. We got down to his house--stopped in a little lane. There were a few people standing around who clapped when we got out of the car--and there was this house, about 100 feet up the side

of a hill with steps going zigzag up the hill. He said, "My friend, you are not as young as you were the first time we met and I must urge you not to take these steps too fast." I said, "Thank you very much, Chancellor, if I find myself wearying, may I take your arm?"

BATTLE: He said, "Are you teasing me?"

ACHESON: I said, "I wouldn't dare--I wouldn't think of doing it." Well, we spent all of Sunday together--broke in the middle of the day for a delicious lunch and walk around a little bit in the rose garden and came back again. I went over everything that I had been working on with Mr. Kennedy, and also talked with him a great deal about American intentions--my view of what they were--toward Russia and Berlin. He was worried to death--just completely worried. The Chancellor was not getting on well with this Administration. We seemed in some curious way to have a hostility toward the Germans. Also, suggestions were constantly coming out of London and elsewhere that we would make some kind of a deal with the Russians about Germany or Berlin or disarmament or a non-nuclear zone or one thing or another. He would only get the tail end of these suggestions and they bothered him. He was very suspicious anyway--I think he'd felt rather happy with me and with Dulles. After that he became unhappy.

Part II of the Interview

BATTLE: Mr. Secretary, you had one letter that you wanted to read into the record that bears on the Portuguese base matter. Would you like to put that in at this point--I know that it is out of order, but I will see that it is corrected when this recording is typed.

ACHESON: Yes, I want to read at this point a letter I wrote to the President on March 19, 1961, shortly after the conversation in the Cabinet Room that I referred to relating to the telegram on the UN vote on the investigation into Angola. On March 19, I wrote him:

"Dear Mr. President:

"The enclosed *New York Times* report of a statement by the US Mission to the United Nations may be an accurate description of the brief conversation before our meeting on Wednesday last between you and Dean Rusk regarding the telegram which he had previously shown to me. I do not know, because I was not a participant in it, but I doubt it. I also hope that it is inaccurate, and since the statement has already produced mischief I add a further word to what I said on Wednesday.

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"The point of impact of the vote last week--and more importantly the statement, with its ominous note of warning for the future--was not

primarily upon the Portuguese or Angola crisis. The last paragraph of the enclosed dispatch, recent editorials in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as the African reaction, give the vote and statement a far wider significance. Perhaps its most important impact is on a negotiation which everyone has hailed as very probably 'the last best hope' for sanity in Africa, and certainly as one of utmost delicacy.

"Even if General de Gaulle and the FLN Algerian leaders did not each have explosive elements with which to deal, their difficulties would be enormous--the Sahara, the colons, bases, property interests, the civil service, etc. The General knows that the hour of independence has struck. He must be permitted to accept the inevitable without a humiliation, which might well be impossible for him or which might destroy the regime and throw France into chaos. The stakes are enormous. What is needed now is that the FLN shall be responsible and, if possible, even generous in victory. It does not need inciting. It needs sobering.

"Indeed, throughout Africa the great necessity is not to push more peoples faster toward an independence which they are no more able to handle than are the Congolese. Independence for all these people is no longer an issue of any reality. The great and crucial problem is to prepare them with far more than deliberate speed to deal with their inevitable future.

"Every statesman, soldier and lawyer knows that the road to disaster lies in fighting on ground of someone else's choosing. One of the greatest traps in the UN is to allow small countries to maneuver responsible powers into voting on every conceivable issue. We are great enough not to do this. We can refuse to vote on alleged issues which do not advance solutions and our very greatness responsibility requires us to look at every situation in the light of the whole. This is the 'principle' involved in determining how we should or whether we should vote, and what we should say at the UN. It is not some formulation on human liberty, about which we can nonetheless continue to take a favorable view.

"Most respectfully yours,

Dean Acheson."

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BATTLE: That's very frank, a very interesting letter to him. Shall we turn now to the summer of 1961--a rather key period as far as Berlin and Germany were concerned, and look at your involvement in the policy formulation of that particular period?

ACHESON: Yes, I'll get right on with that. I think at the end of the last tape I had started to tell you about my day with Adenauer and had not quite finished that. The important thing about this day was that after going over with him the formulation of plans that was going forward in Washington and an explanation of our actions toward the Russians, he began to understand that this was not a conspiracy behind his back which would result in selling out German interests. And I remember as we ended our conversation, we stood up to go out and play that Italian bowling game of Bocce, which he liked so much. He said to me, "You have lifted a stone from my heart."

BATTLE: That's a wonderful phrase.

ACHESON: And I reported that to Bill Tyler who started off his cable to Washington reporting my interview with those words. The old man was about to come to Washington and meet the President for the first time--and I think that this interview with him had a very great effect in relaxing him--taking away his suspicious attitude--making him more willing to open up and have frank talks with the President, which he did--because when he came back from those talks, I got a very warm letter from him telling me how much he had benefited from our day together. We went out after the talk to his Bocce court where we started to play. After a little while I began to catch up on the Chancellor and threatened to go ahead of him. At this point, he, I claimed, changed the rules and began taking carom shots off the sideboards as well as bowling straight balls. I protested against this, and he stopped saying, "You are now in Germany--in Germany I make the rules."

BATTLE: The two of you had a very good relationship, I thought.

ACHESON: Well, we were fond of one another. Passing on then, as you suggested, to the summer of '61--the President and the Secretary of State asked me to go to work on the Berlin matter and prepare a paper for the Security Council. I think if you put your mind back over that period you will recall that first in '58 and again in '60 Khrushchev had brought about a crisis on Berlin. And during '61 he had said that this situation had to be resolved along the lines that he had put forward by the end of '61, or steps would be taken to bring that about. I was very apprehensive that he means to do just exactly what he said, and that we were approaching a serious crisis. The President also felt that way and the Secretary--and in order to get something before the Government to work on they asked me to prepare a paper. This I did--and without trying to get into all the details of it--well, I don't think it's even worthwhile trying to read two pages which states what I thought Khrushchev was up to and what I thought we had to do. Perhaps I could read the five objectives which I thought he had in mind. They were, first of all, to stabilize the regime in East Germany and prepared the way for the eventual recognition of

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the East German regime. Secondly, to legalize the Eastern frontiers of Germany. Third, to neutralize Berlin as a first step and prepare for its eventual takeover by the German

Democratic Republic. Fourth, to weaken if not break up the NATO Alliance; and fifth, to discredit the United States or at least seriously damage its prestige.

After discussing these objectives and the capability which he had carrying them out, I thought that our more instant purposes should be, first of all, to de-Sovietize East Germany--second, to stabilize the countries of Eastern Europe by helping them regain a substantial national identity--and third, to limit armaments so that the possibility of successful offensive action either way in Europe would be greatly reduced. The action part of the paper was directed to the fact that we must content ourselves for the time being with maintaining the status quo in Berlin. We could not expect Khrushchev to accept less--we ourselves should not accept less. The paper then went into how this should be done. This is of some interest because in part the line followed in this paper was followed by the United States in the summer of '61.

Looking the field over, it seemed to me that, in order to deter Khrushchev from what he was proposing to do, we must look at the various methods within our power. One of these was to threaten to take nuclear action. This I thought was not a real capability because it would not be believed. It would be so unwise on our part that it would be perfectly obvious to the Russians we didn't mean it. A second step which was advocated at the time by some military people was a limited use of nuclear means--that is, to drop one bomb somewhere. I said this I thought was most unwise. If you drop one bomb, that wasn't a threat to drop that bomb--that was a drop--and once it happened, it either indicated that you were going on to drop more, or you invited the other side to drop one back. This seemed to me to be irresponsible and not a wise step adapted to the problem of Berlin.

However, there was a physical means of deterrence which I urged in this paper. And that was making clear to the Russians our determination by so substantially increasing our forces in Germany that they would know that we had irretrievably committed ourselves to the defense of Berlin. We would have made too vast a commitment to back down in any way--and if there was any backing down, they would have to do it. This had risks, but it seemed to me that it was the only way of showing that we meant business without doing something very foolish. This I thought would be carried out by an increase in the forces, not in Berlin, but in Germany of two or three more divisions; an increase in the reserve of the United States by three, or four, or five, or six more, and an ability to transport some more at short notice. This was, of course, subject to a great deal of discussion in the National Security Council. On the whole I think that the Army took a rather favorable view of it. As I recall it, the Air Force did not--and the navy did not play an important part. On the whole, it seemed to me that McNamara shared my view in part. The President, I could not tell--he did not commit himself to this.

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At the time, Paul Nitze was going forward usefully talking with the group of ambassadors, the French, British and ourselves, with some consultation with the Germans. But all he could do with that group was get us up to the point where trouble started, and then everybody said, well, we'll have to consider that when it occurs, which meant that they wouldn't consider it at all. This, I thought, was an unhopeful aspect of the

matter. The paper was finished and, again, I had a warm letter from the President thanking me for this.

I went off the early part of August to Martha's Vineyard where my two daughters were. I was there on the famous 13th of August when the Wall Episode occurred. The Government put into effect some of the measures recommended in the Berlin paper. You will recall the Defense Department sent over the equivalent of another division. This took the form of bringing the divisions there up to full strength--there were, I think, five divisions--full divisions--in Germany, each one at 80% of strength. They were going up to 100% of strength, which was equivalent to one further division. Also, material was flown over--some National Guard and Reserve Units were called into Federal service and a general posture of preparedness for conventional action was taken in the country. This, I think, had a really profound effect on the Russians, far more than blustery talk would have had about using nuclear weapons which would not impress them. When we actually making life uncomfortable for a quarter of a million of American citizens, they were quite aware the Government wouldn't have done this just for fun.

When I got back I was asked by Mac Bundy, at the President's request, whether I thought it was a good idea to go forward with some of General Clay's suggestions of more vigorous action in the City of Berlin. I said I thought, really, the time for that had passed. If we acted vigorously on August 13 we might have been able to accomplish something--I didn't know, I wasn't asked and I wasn't doing a Monday morning quarterback job on it. But since we had thought it wise not to take steps then, it seemed to me that it would be even more unwise after we had more or less accepted the Wall to begin to take steps which looked as though we were trying to undo what we'd already done. This was the limit of my participation in any Berlin matters during the rest of the summer. We then move forward--my next contact with the White House was in connection with the Portuguese matter that I've already spoken about. I think that takes me through '61.

BATTLE: I might ask one or two questions about your relationships with the President during that period--There was, I gather, while never acceptance on his part of your views, there was and continued to be an amiable, pleasant kind of relationship, or was there ever any incident in which you took exception to one another's point of view?

ACHESON: No, no, I don't think that we ever had any disagreement--well, we had a disagreement about policy, but this was always conducted on my part with the utmost respect to the President, and I thought accepted by him as

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vigorous and frank criticism. But I never said anything about this in public. I didn't write letters to the newspapers and didn't make speeches.

BATTLE: I know you didn't--but I'm only getting at your personal relationships in this period, sir. You mentioned the slight strain that had come about as a

result of a speech you made to the Foreign Service Association. But I gather this was pretty well behind you and there was no difficulty during this period.

ACHESON: Yes, yes.

BATTLE: Well, shall we turn on to the next one, sir--we've done the Portuguese base discussion, which covered over part of this period. The Cuban crisis, I presume, was the next involvement that you had with the Administration--this was October of '62.

ACHESON: Yes--the early part of '62 I was in the Far East and then in The Hague and was just out of Washington pretty nearly six months, so I didn't have much to do with anybody in the Government. In the autumn of that year in October, I was asked by the Secretary of State to come to his office. I should think that was probably on a Tuesday or Wednesday of the famous week. I think the troubles began on the 16th, and I should think that the 17th might have been the day that I came over. He then showed me the photographs of the missiles in Cuba which had been taken up to that time--I think they had just been developed the day before. He said that these were nuclear weapons (we had discovered at that time only the shorter range of the two types of missiles) and asked me what I thought should be done.

I thought about it as much as one could in that time, and said it seemed to me we had to consider at the outset whether to deal with the weapons before they became operative, or whether we would take the risk that they would become operative while we were taking other steps to get them out of Cuba. I was very much afraid that if we delayed dealing with them we would get into a situation where we could never deal with them. In the first place, the danger of the situation would become very much accentuated if these weapons got into a firing state. We already had photographs of the surface-to-air missile stations which appeared to be operative--at least no one was sure they weren't--and if they became operative and the weather continued to clear it might be very difficult to do anything until these weapons were pointing at our hearts and ready to shoot. The other course was to go in on a low-level bombing expedition and take these out. The next day I was asked to come back and we had more photographs--and this continued each day until, I think, Thursday or Friday, when a full, quite frightening picture was developed. This showed a very a very considerable number of weapons--the range would cover almost the entire United States. I think

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the only part of it which they would not cover would be the city of Seattle and I believe the President was thinking of going to make a speech in Seattle. We advised canceling that speech.

Well, various meetings were held during this period which have been publicized in more or less erroneous ways by various writers. And, of course, a whole range of views were taken. The basic matter of policy--the great question to be decided here was which of the views which struck me from the very beginning as the issue one would take. The question was which was more dangerous, to go in and knock these things out, in

which case most of the people who would be killed would probably be Russians (they were not near centers of population) or to, as I said a moment ago, let them become operative and face a clamor of world opinion by which everybody might be paralyzed by talk while the Russian purpose was accomplished. Their purpose, it seemed to me to be, in the first place was to increase greatly in fact, they would have had much more bearing. It seemed to me that theoretically this might be true, but, in fact, short-range missiles located 90 miles from our coast were a much surer bet than long-range ones located about 5,000 miles from our coast. At any rate, their political effect would be terrific, both in Latin America and among our allies abroad. Therefore, something should be done quite quickly to counteract the terrible effect of these missiles if they were permitted to stay there.

In the discussion which followed, two things began to happen--one was that the different views became closer together, and the other was that some people intervened to make the situations much more difficult by making rather foolish proposals. It has always been my impression that when you get soldiers talking about policy they want to go further and further in a military way so that all possibilities of doubt are removed, until their proposals are apt to be at least as dangerous as the original danger. They cannot satisfy themselves by doing something but not everything--and therefore, as this discussion went on, more and more began to be introduced into the picture. For instance, it was pointed out that it would be a wise military step to take out the airfields in Cuba before mounting expeditions. Surely this is what any good planner would do, but it would be a stupid thing to do because the airfields were all right near Havana and other cities--you would have cause terrific casualties of Cubans which would be a very, very bad idea. Then other military people said, "Well, if you're going to do all that, why don't we put six divisions in and take over the Island." This could be done quite easily--the obvious danger was, once you got in, how were you ever going to get out. So these were the problems.

In the course of these discussions, as I said, also the two sides began to get closer together. First of all, those who did not want to take immediate military action tended not to take any action. They soon left

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that view and began to make suggestions closer to the policy which was finally adopted. In the course of this, the President asked me to come and see him alone--and I went to his office in the White House and he and I discussed this thing for about an hour. I gave him my view and told him all the dangers about it--and pointed out the dangers in any other view--and said that I was very glad that I was not in his position. He touched me very much toward the end of our talk. After I had said that he really bore a terrible burden, he got up and walked over to the French door looking out on the Rose Garden--and stood there looking out for an appreciable length of time. Then he turned around and said to me, "I guess I better earn my salary this week." I said, "I'm afraid you have to." On, I should say it was, Saturday it was decided to divide the group that were talking. Those who thought some military action against the missiles was important should go into one place and devise what action should be recommended. Those who had other proposals would devise specific recommended action. The various proposals would then be put up

to the President in fairly concrete form and he would decide. I went in with the people who were thinking of immediate air action.

After being in the room a little while, I decided that I didn't there at all. It was one thing to ask me to come over and give my opinion, but it was another thing for one not an officer of the United States engaged in planning of this importance and seriousness. So I asked to be excused, and said I would do anything that I could within a proper field, but this was not a proper thing to ask me to do. Security and other considerations were involved, and I just didn't like it. Not that I was disagreeing with anybody, but I just thought that it was not the right thing to do from the Government point of view. So I went out to the country. That evening, Saturday night, the Secretary of State telephoned me and said that the President had decided not to take the action which I had rather favored, but to do something rather less than this--which he did not want to talk about over the telephone. The President was anxious for me to go to Europe and see General de Gaulle. I had given a memorandum from which I spoke, I guess that was it--and one of the points in it was, since we could not really consult our allies in advance, we ought to warn them as much in advance as possible, and this ought to be done in an impressive way--I thought here was an occasion where the Vice President could be very usefully employed. At any rate, it would not do to have a charge d'affaires--at this time there was no Ambassador to Paris--walk into de Gaulle's office and tell him something like this. I little thought that the result was going to be that I would elect myself to this mission. But at any rate, Dean Rusk said to me that the President would like you to go the first thing in the morning. If I would come to the Department very early, they would instruct me and send me off. The important thing to know that night was whether I would go. I said that I remembered Justice Holmes saying to me that we all

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belonged to a club which the least exclusive in the world and the most expensive, and that was the United States of America. I said, "I guess if I belong to that club I better do what I'm asked to do." So I said, "Sure, I'll go." He said, "Well, you don't mind that your advice isn't being followed." And I said, "Of course not, I'm not the President, and I'll do whatever I can do."

So I came in in the morning quite early, and asked Barbara Evans, my secretary, to meet me at the State Department, and arrived with no bag, only the clothes I had on, no money and no passport. While I was being briefed, Barbara got the passport and had it fixed up. Some member of the Department passed a hat around the room and collected \$50 from various people to finance me, if I needed to be financed right away. When we got through, I went to the P Street house and packed a bag to last two or three days, and Barbara Evans met me with money and passport. Bill Bundy then picked me up, and in no time at all I was over the Atlantic.

The most serious things have entertaining sides. When we got in the air, we discovered that there were in all about six of us on this tremendous Air Force plane going across the ocean. Red Dowling [Walter E. Dowling], our Ambassador to Germany, who had been home on leave was there; Sherman Kent of the CIA was going with me to see de Gaulle with some photographs to show him; we had two other CIA men and three armed guards--the two others were to go to London and Bonn with photographs and the

armed guards were to protect everybody. Their first duty seemed to be to prevent the Air Force, which had taken the photographs, from seeing them. I thought this was security of a very fancy type. There was a VIP room in the plane--but there had been apparently a hole, a fracture in the skin of the plane which produced a little high shrill scream that passed through the pressure way, in or out. This is just about what a dog could hear, but it was like a squeak of chalk on a blackboard. You just couldn't stand it. We went out and sat in the larger part of the plane with the armed guards standing around the table on which the four of us were looking at the photographs. Every time an Air Force officer went through the plane the guards covered the photographs, so he couldn't see them.

We touched down in a SAC base somewhere in the middle of England--and there we were met by David Bruce. He said he had two interesting things he wanted to show me and they were both in his raincoat pocket. One obviously was hiding a bottle which he promptly produced, and we had some nourishment at the base. "The other one," he said, "put your hand in my pocket and see what's there." I put my hand in and it was a revolver. I said, "Why?", and he said, "I don't know. I was told by the Department of State to carry this when I went to meet you." I said, "There was nothing said about shooting me, was there?" He said, "No, would you think it's a good idea?" We told him what was going on as he had to see Macmillan the next day and dropped off a CIA man and a guard and a set of the photographs. We then went on to Evreux, and there I was met by people at 2:30 in the morning French time, driving in to the charge d'affaire's, Cecil Lyon, house, and went to bed for a few sleepless hours.

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The next day the problem was, how we should approach de Gaulle. It seemed to me that the thing to do was to talk to his chef d'cabinet and tell him that I had come into town incognito in the middle of the night on a very important secret mission from the President of the United States to President de Gaulle--and I was at his disposal and would see him at any time that was convenient for him to see me. I thought this was a matter of such complete secrecy that it would be wise for no one even to know I was in town and, with that, we were in his hands. He said he thought this was a good way to deal with it--and wanted me to come to the Elysees at 5 o'clock to see him. He would send his own staff cars for us so that no notice would be paid of their going in and out of the Elysee. These would not be big--things that the ordinary staff people use bustling about, whereas the Ambassador's Cadillac would have attracted a good deal of attention. The middle of that day they brought in the American part of the SHAPE Command, and I was told to brief them about what was going on. And at 5 o'clock we then got in these cars and went to the Elysee, and, as the General had foreseen, no one paid the slightest attention to our driving in. We went not up to the front big steps in the courtyard of the Elysee but underground, and got off and out and followed some winding passages. As we went along the whole thing seemed to me to have an element of a Dumas novel, and I said to Sherman Kent, who was behind me, "Porthos is your rapier loose in its scabbard? I think some of the Cardinal's men may be lurking here." He said he was ready.

Well, we were taken up in an indirect way to the waiting room by General de Gaulle's office and set up in the cabinet room. There a friend of mine who had been in the French Embassy here, whose name was Labell, told me he was going to be the

interpreter and that the General would see me with Cecil Lyon and didn't want to see anybody else. He didn't want Sherman. I pointed out about the photographs and he said, no, he didn't want to see anybody except Cecil and me. So we went in--I've rattled along in telling this story--is this useful...

BATTLE: Oh, it's fascinating, let's do this....

ACHESON: ...because it has its impressive side. We came in exactly as the clock behind the General's desk was striking five, which was a nice touch I thought. He rose from his desk and walked to the left-hand front corner of the desk where he waited. I went across the room and he held out his hand which I shook and then, in French, he said, "Your President has done me great honor by sending so distinguished an emissary." I thought this was a wonderful phrase because there is no possible reply you can make to it--all you can do is to bow. There's just nothing to say to that at all. With that he turned around and went back and sat at his desk--motioned me to a chair, folded his hands and looked at me--no talk about, I hope the President is well, did you have a nice flight--nothing of this sort of all. I'd asked to see him, I had a message, let's get on with it. So I handed him a letter

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from the President which he read and then I handed him the main part of the President's speech which had come over the wire to the Embassy and he looked through that. Both of these were in English which he seemed to have no trouble with it at all. In fact, he had no trouble with English at all until we got in the technical part of my mission. He waived translation aside and, since he spoke very little himself in the early part of this, I didn't have too much trouble either. But it was all translated for me by Labell.

After reading these papers he started right off with very business-like and sound comment--he questioned. He said, "In order to get our roles clear, do I understand that you have come from the President to inform me of some decision taken by your President--or have you come to consult me about a decision which he should take." And I said, "We must be very clear about this. I have come to inform you of a decision he has taken--but I want to call your attention that it is the kind of a decision which opens the way for a lot of advice from his allies, which he wishes to have." I said, "You see that instead of taking a sharp action, to be with, which would really have put us right into the middle of something, he has taken action which will not materialize unless and until Russian ships attempt to violate the blockade. If they do, then an issue will be raised. If they don't, then no issue is raised."

He said, "That's very true," and then he said, "that was a wise step." Then something happened which I thought was impressive. After we had gone over the situation a little bit, I said, "I have outside the photographs of these missiles. They are extraordinary photographs and very impressive, and I think you may want to look at them. He waived this suggestion aside with a wave of his hand, and said, "Not now--these will only be evidence--a great nation like yours would not act if there was any doubt about the evidence, and, therefore, I accept what you tell me as a fact without any proof of any sort needed. Later on it would be interesting to see these, and I will see them--but let's get the

significance of the situation before we look at the details of it.” This was so directly the opposite of Macmillan’s attitude as I learned later, who said, “We must publish these right away--we must get these in the paper--no one will believe this unless they see these.” General de Gaulle didn’t care whether anyone believed it or not--he did, this was enough for him.

Then he said to me, “Do you think the Russians will attempt to force this blockade?” And I said, “No, I do not.” He said, “Do you think that they would have reacted if your President had taken even sharper action?” And I said, “No, I do not think they would have done that.” And he said, “I don’t either. If they should react, where would you think they would react?” And I said, “There are two obvious places--one is, if we blockade Cuba they can blockade Berlin. This is a good reciprocal kind of attitude--or they might take some action in regard to Turkey or a place where it would be difficult for us to respond.” And he said, “But you don’t think they will do either?” And I said, No, I don’t.” He agreed with that. Now he said,

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“Suppose they don’t do anything--suppose they don’t try to break the blockade--suppose they don’t take the missiles out--what will your President do then?” When I left Washington nobody had told me the answer to that question. I don’t know whether a plan existed, but if it did, I didn’t know it. But I thought it would be most unwise to indicate to General de Gaulle that we were not absolutely clear as to what we were going to do in each stage of this--and I said, “We will immediately tighten this blockade and the next thing we would do is to stop tankers--and this will bring Cuba to a standstill.” He said, “That’s very good,” again. I said, “If we have to go further why, of course, we’ll go further.” He said, “I understand.”

We discussed this a little bit more, and then he said he would like to look at the photographs. I got Sherman Kent and a man he had who was an expert on these things with him--and we laid them out on the desk. They were great big photographs blown up, large size, and the General has bad eyesight, but even with his bad eyesight these were striking. We took a magnifying glass, and then we showed him and counted the weapons. We had other photographs of the same weapons in a May Day parade, and we showed him every detail of these missiles and every detail of the ones in the May Day parade. He was obviously deeply impressed, said, “From what height were these taken?”; I said, “65,000 feet.” He started to say, “We don’t have anything”--and then he caught himself and said, “Well, I’m not very familiar with photography but this seems remarkable to me.” And they were remarkable. He was delighted with them. You could see the soldier really taking over at this point, as he studied every one of them. The IL-28’s which were first photographed on the deck of a ship from mast height; then, the same crates with the same markings on them were seen on an airfield. One of these had been broken open and here was an IL-28 with one wing on--the other one hadn’t been put on yet--but the photograph of that and a photograph of an IL-28 were put side by side. They were 500-mile atomic jet bombers. This really finished any doubt he had about the seriousness of this matter. When we got through with this he said, “You may tell your President that France will support him in every way in this crisis.” He didn’t say I will--or the French Government will--or anything. He was France.

BATTLE: He makes no distinction.

ACHESON: No distinction at all--France will support him. He said, of course, "I shall write him about this, but you will doubtless be sending him a message and you may say that for me." I thanked him very much. We had some more talk, very brief, and then I looked up at the clock and it was exactly six. And I thought, well, you know, I think I'll make a hit by terminating this thing myself. He had received me--I had done everything I was asked to do--he's given me the message--why fool around wasting his time--so I arose and he was rather pleased that somebody would go out without being thrown out,

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and he walked to the door with me. As he got to the door he spoke the only words of English he spoke in the whole thing, and he said, "It would be a pleasure to me if these things were all done through you."

BATTLE: A great compliment, isn't it.

ACHESON: A great compliment--you know, this was Louis XIV saying a nice word to an ambassador from the Sultan of Turkey. And I went out.

BATTLE: Did you leave Paris without having your own presence there noticed?

ACHESON: No, my presence was noticed...

BATTLE: I would have thought so.

ACHESON: ...just about the time the President was to speak in Washington. This was, I believe seven o'clock here--that would have been 12 o'clock in Paris. About then the NATO Council was meeting, and I asked if I could come to the meeting--I didn't tell them why. So a little bit before 12 they finished their meeting and I went in and told them what was going on so that by the time they left the meeting the President's speech was on the wires and they thought that was safe enough. This I was instructed to do by the Department. When I came out, there were two newspapermen--one a *New York Times* reporter and somebody else standing outside. "For heavens sake, how did you get here and what are you up to?" "Oh," I said, "I had been here for a little while and I came over and just again telling my old friends in NATO some things that are going on." He said, "We're told to stand by--that something hot is coming out of Washington." I said, "You're not misinformed." Then I left--I didn't tell them anymore.

BATTLE: On your return, did you see the President?

ACHESON: Yes, I thought I was going right back, but I didn't. I got a telegram asking

me to go on and see the Chancellor. Red Dowling had talked to him the night before and he seemed to be pretty excited about this whole thing, and that maybe it would be a good idea for me to take another day or so and see him. So I did this--flew on and saw Strauss and some of the other members of the cabinet--and then saw the Chancellor--so then we went ahead and went over the whole thing again. This was very useful because he hadn't really given this much thought--and we discussed the possibilities and how it might develop, and I told him I thought it would end up by the Russians backing away--just how, I don't know. Then when I came back I did see the President and reported to him about all of this--I had a long talk with him, a long talk with Dean Rusk. I got home in time to take part in the discussions at the end as to whether we should or shouldn't accept this rather doubtful proposal of Khrushchev's.

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I have two letter of the President's--two letters to him. The first one, I wrote him on October 28, 1962, a handwritten letter and said:

Dear Mr. President

“With proper precautions for warding off the ill-luck which is said to attend upon and punish premature statement, may I congratulate you on your leadership, firmness and judgment over the past touchy week. We have not had these qualities at the helm in this country at all times. It is good to have them again.

“Only a few people know better than I how hard these are to make, and how broad the gap is between the advisers and the decider. It way be that we are out of the woods yet. I remember the fate of our high hopes as the Korean armistice was agreed to. But through the dangers of the flypaper of talk are clear, what has already happened amply shows the wisdom of the course you chose--and stuck to. I am happy that you enabled me to participate in the events of the last week.

“Most respectfully,

Dean Acheson”

The President replied in longhand:

The White House
Washington

October 29th

“Dear Mr. Acheson:

“My thanks for your generous letter and for your service in the past days.

“It is a comforting feeling to have a distinguished captain of other battles in other years available for present duty.

Sincerely,

/s/ John Kennedy”

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Then the President sent me one of those paperweight mementos that he had with his initials and mine in October with the 16th to the 28th brought out in deeper letters. I wrote him on the 30th of November and said:

“How kind and imaginative of you to have designed and to have made me a recipient of such a delightful memento of those stirring and critical days in October. I am deeply grateful for it, and grateful, too--as I wrote you earlier--for the opportunity you opened to me to take part in the campaign so wisely conceived and vigorously executed. In its execution you confounded de Tocqueville’s opinion that a democracy ‘cannot combine its measure with secrecy or await their consequence with patience.’

“Most respectfully yours,

Dean Acheson”

BATTLE: Fascinating story--well, were there any other conversations on Cuba at that point with the President?

ACHESON: No, I think that is it.

BATTLE: We move then to the other area in which you were involved in February of '63--that is the consultation of the balance of payments. I know less about this particular one than any of the others, and in fact, was not aware that you had been involved in this particular problem. Would you care to talk about the origins of it, sir, and your involvement in it?

ACHESON: Yes, yes, this was a considerable surprise to me that came out of a clear blue sky. Mac Bundy asked me to come over and see the President. So I went over, and he told me that he was unhappy about this whole balance of payments question. The Government seemed to be at loggerheads about it. Any discussion of this thing resolved itself into such curious terms and such complicated ideas that a layman was puzzled as to what it was all about. We had respect for people who had

diametrically opposite views, and the language that they used seemed very confusing to him. He was turning to me as somebody--he said he knew I had been in the Treasury. I said this was no recommendation. But he said what he really wanted me to do was to go into this as much of a layman as he would be--he was impressed by the fact that I could bring simplicity out of apparent complications and confusion--and see whether these people really were far apart; what was driving them far apart, if they were--and find out what was going on: try to bring them together and try to make a recommendation to him as to what to do. So I said that I would do it. It took about two weeks to do it.

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I came over to see George Ball [George W. Ball] who had been working on the problem and written a memorandum which the President had given me. George asked what help I wanted. I did not want a committee and didn't want an office--I didn't want a whole lot of people milling around and getting in the way. I asked George if he had in the Department a very bright man who knew all about this problem and would be helpful. He said he had, and a very good man he was, too, by name Mort Goldstein [Mortimer Goldstein].

BATTLE: I had a word with him the other day.

ACHESON: Then I inquired around some more and there was a young man whose name is Richard Cooper [Richard N. Cooper] who was in the Economic Adviser's office, who is now a professor at Yale. These two were told off to give me such help as I needed. They collected a lot of data and brought it over to me. I sat in my office at the Union Trust Building and studied these papers. When I got the thing pretty clearly in my mind and knew the State Department's views, I got Joe Fowler [Henry H. "Joe" Fowler] to ask Roosa [Robert V. Roosa] in the Treasury to talk with me, and give me the treasury's ideas. Then I went back--worked some more--and finally it seemed to me that the Departments weren't so far apart, that what was required here was to get a sensible proposal, get the President behind it, have him call everybody in and spend a couple of hours letting bureaucrats state their positions and then overrule them all and say, this is what we're going to do. They would be quite happy to be overruled and go and do it.

I worked out a proposal which is almost exactly the one that The Brookings Institution came to some months later. I had seen their preparatory work which were very voluminous. Their recommendations are not too dissimilar from mine, but mine were very specific and stated how to do various things and how much money we were likely to lose in the course of doing them. The main thought was that we had, over 15 years, adopted some economic policies which had been very successful, just unbelievably successful. The whole volume of world trade had expanded greatly since that time--you wouldn't have thought this could have happened. The result of all of this has shown first that the Bretton Woods arrangements have been outgrown; outdated; they were meant for a much smaller world, a much smaller world trade. They've got to be updated, modernized. This isn't too hard, quite easy to do. The second conclusion was we must not go back on the liberal financial trade policies which we have led the world to adopt in

order to take a cautious banking view about our balance of payments. The main thing that is outmoded in Bretton Woods is that those arrangements don't allow enough time for a great trading nation to adjust itself to a swing. I was certain that in five years time the problem will be so exactly the opposite of what it is now that we will find that the rest of the world is in trouble again. Therefore, we should not do anything precipitate. We should also not try to patch the problem over with band-aids. We should take new, constructive action which would deal with the great overhanging balances of dollars which the rest of the world is using as

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their monetary reserves at the present time. After I got this down, I had another talk with the Treasury and I got the impression that Roosa would go along with this perfectly well, and I talked with Doug Dillon about it, talked with people in State. Then I had another session with the President and I said, "You know, I think that if you study this, then call everybody together and say, let every man now speak if he wants to but later hold his peace--then decide what should be done. He thought that was a good idea and we had such a meeting. It just didn't turn out the way I thought it was going to. Doug Dillon...

BATTLE: You were present at the meeting?

ACHESON: I was present at the meeting—I presented the report. Then Doug Dillon started...

BATTLE: This is Tape 3 of the interview with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Mr. Acheson, would you like to continue on the action taken with respect to the balance of payments recommendations which you made?

ACHESON: Yes, I was saying that after the President had studied this paper there was a meeting held in the Cabinet Room, and after going over the document presented by me, various questions asked and clarifications made, the Secretary of the Treasury, Douglas Dillon, took the floor and, as I accused him afterwards of doing, he conducted a filibuster. This went on for an hour or more in which he pointed out all the problems and all the difficulties which came from taking action of any sort. He kept saying that the Treasury was having studies made and in one month or two months or three months they would have more data, and began to weaken the President's will to tackle this problem. I urged that no one would really ever know any more about this in six months than they knew then, and that the important thing was to raise this whole matter of the balance of payments from a treasury and central banker problem to an inter-governmental problem. If that were done, we could really begin to make some progress.

However, at the end of the afternoon, the President said that he thought his was a matter that required more thought and that he wanted the Treasury to finish these studies they were engaged in. This allowed the matter to drop off the edge of decision, so that, instead of overruling the bureaucrats and getting the Presidential action which would

have resulted in governmental action, this matter disappeared again into the swamps of inter-departmental rivalry. And, while some progress has been made, it's only the progress which the Treasury makes on its own talking with other treasuries. At a recent Bilderberg meeting in Williamsburg, I talked with the man who is the secretary or counsel or director of the group of ten nations, and he says that they have been rather sadly disappointed with the lack of leadership from the United States in dealing with this problem. I think it was a good effort, well conceived and well executed, but it had no result. This was almost the last time that I had any direct contact with the President of the United States.

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BATTLE: Well, that covers, Mr. Acheson, all of the main areas of your consultation. Thank you very much, indeed.

ACHESON: Thinking over what we have said this morning, it seems to me that it would be better to eliminate from the tape and, of course, from any transcript the report of my talk with Ambassador Adenauer where I referred to his suggestions about Castro, which perhaps he was making more facetiously than I indicated in my speech, and I think it would be unfortunate to leave that in there-- so if you will have that removed from both the tape and the typewritten document, I would appreciate it.

BATTLE: Thank you, Mr. Acheson.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]

**Dean G. Acheson Oral History Transcript
Name List**

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| Jackie | Kennedy Onnassis, Jacqueline Bouvier |
| Lehman | Lehman, Herbert Henry |
| Truman | Truman, Harry S. |
| Rayburn | Rayburn, Samuel T. |
| Stevenson | Stevenson, Adlai E., II |
| Johnson | Johnson, Lyndon B. |
| Clifford | Clifford, Clark M. |
| Symington | Symington, W. Stuart |
| Bowles | Bowles, Chester B. |
| Fulbright | Fulbright, James W. |
| Bruce | Bruce, David K.E. |
| Nitze | Nitze, Paul H. |
| McCloy | McCloy, John J. |
| Rusk | Rusk, David Dean |
| Clark | Clifford, Clark M. |
| Black | Black, Eugene |
| Humphrey | Humphrey, George M. |
| Dillon | Dillon, C. Douglas |
| Bobby | Kennedy, Robert F. |
| Lovett | Lovett, Robert A. |
| MacLeish | MacLeish, Archibald |
| McNamara | McNamara, Robert S. |
| Bill | Bundy, William P. |
| de Gaulle | de Gaulle, Charles |
| Adenauer | Adenauer, Konrad |
| Wallner | Wallner, Woodruff |
| Mac | Bundy, McGeorge |
| Evans | Evans, Barbara |
| Dowling | Dowling, Walter E. "Red" |
| Kent | Kent, Sherman |
| Labell | Labell |
| Ball | Ball, George |
| Goldstein | Goldstein, Mort |
| Cooper | Cooper, Richard |
| Fowler | Fowler, Joe |
| Roosa | Roosa, Robert V. |
| Castro | Castro, Fidel |