EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MARK SCHNEIDER

February 4, 2009
Washington, D.C.

Interviewer
Janet Heininger

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TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH MARK SCHNEIDER

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Heininger: This is a follow-up interview with Mark Schneider on February 4, 2009. Let's talk about what we were talking about before, that as the Vietnam War was winding down, it was clear that this was a time in which America needed to rethink its defense policy, its spending, its orientation toward the world. What role did [Edward] Kennedy play in that process?

Schneider: He played a pivotal role, because he helped lead on a couple of different issues. Kennedy was one of the original sponsors of a comprehensive test ban treaty resolution, together with [Edmund] Muskie and [Hubert] Humphrey and [Jacob] Javits. They pushed that each year, and while it was aimed at the nuclear issue, through trying to get support for a comprehensive test ban treaty, it really was looking at the whole range of issues involved with nuclear nonproliferation. I don't know if you talked to others about the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty] vote and the work that Kennedy did there, but this was the next step. It led Kennedy into taking a leadership position on all the issues that ranged around nuclear nonproliferation, deterrent issues, et cetera.

Heininger: What was his interest in this? What did it stem from?

Schneider: It goes back to President [John F.] Kennedy, to the first test ban.

Heininger: Did he feel like he was carrying on Jack's legacy?

Schneider: Without any question. He gave a speech at American University on the test ban. It's interesting, to some degree. As you know, the Senate is a competitive place and everyone is looking for the spotlight. Kennedy was not a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at that time not a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, so the degree to which he had any institutional support for taking a leadership role was very small, and it related directly to his relationship with President Kennedy, and who he had become. In that context, the idea of him being in the lead, and the lead name . . . .

It was the Kennedy-Muskie resolution—and then we made it the Kennedy-Muskie-Humphrey-Javits—on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. That went through and we got that passed each year. It went through once separately, and once it went through as an amendment to a defense authorization bill.

Heininger: What happened to it each time?

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Schneider: It was killed in conference.

Heininger: It never even made it to the White House?

Schneider: No, that one never did.

Heininger: But at least it got through the Senate?

Schneider: Yes. Then we had the separate amendments. Each year, all the liberal Senators wound up proposing amendments to reduce the defense budget, through amendments largely focused on—this was in the aftermath of all the "end the Vietnam War" amendments—specific weapons systems, questioning, in some cases proposing reductions. Different Senators staked out their particular interests.

Heininger: Was it done by weapons systems because (A) that's an easy way to parcel it out, or (B) because there were weapons systems that were considered less than essential, or both of the above?

Schneider: Three things. One was that it was easier to parcel it out, to have a clear focus. Second, because you didn't get into the issue of reducing the defensive capacity of the United States because you weren't cutting troops, you weren't doing an across-the-board budget cut, you were saying this particular weapons system doesn't work, it doesn't function, it's not necessary. In a sense, it's counterproductive to the best use of our resources for a strong defense.

Heininger: All right.

Schneider: This goes back to the nuclear—He initially went after the ABM, the comprehensive test ban, then he went after the—

Heininger: Didn't he go after the Minuteman?

Schneider: Yes, the Minuteman III and the remaining bases for the ABM that were still out there in North Dakota. His amendments actually succeeded in both cases, on the Minuteman III and on the remaining ABM bases, to remove them. That led, then, into thinking about the issue of the U.S. defense structure and U.S. national security, and that the defense structure should relate to the way we deal with the threats to our security: As we look forward in the post-Vietnam era, what are those threats and how does the United States position itself best to deal with them?

Heininger: It started, then, more from the individual weapons systems, and then evolved into a broader philosophical discussion?

Schneider: No. The inarticulate major premise—I'm not a political science professor—was that in the aftermath of Vietnam we needed to rethink the way we were structured, and that the defense establishment expected a budget that was way out of kilter. The way to get it back was to go after those individual weapons systems. The public could understand that they didn't work.

Heininger: Were there any reduction proposals coming from the administration?

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Schneider: No.

Heininger: They just wanted to keep it—

Schneider: Flat or increase.

Heininger: Flat or increase at the same time we had ended a major war?

Schneider: That's right, exactly.

Heininger: Which didn't sit well with Congress.

Schneider: No.

Heininger: Including Republicans?

Schneider: Some. Some raised questions. So we had this back and forth on different weapons systems.

[BREAK]

Heininger: This is resuming the interview with Mark Schneider.

Schneider: With [John] Stennis's staff, with Jim Woolsey, we got an agreement—a letter, of course—between Kennedy and Stennis, that said that for the first two, and maybe three, days, but at least two days, there would be no amendments offered. There would be discussion of these broader strategic issues, and we would organize a speaker from our side on the subject and then Stennis would, from the other side.

Heininger: This was to be the "great debate"?

Schneider: Yes, exactly. It went through most of the strategic issues that were facing the U.S. at the time. At the end of those two days, we organized the traditional presentation of amendments on weapons systems and on some other aspects related to defense policy.

Heininger: What was the outcome? Was there interest in talking about these things?

Schneider: Oh, there was tremendous interest, and we received a substantial amount of attention for it. It was interesting in the sense that it was not just a speaker and another speaker. You had a lot of the Senate there listening. It was somewhat unusual, because it wasn't a vote. [*laughing*]

Heininger: Yes, that is unusual. Was there any consensus on which way to go?

Schneider: First, there was consensus that we—The Soviet Union was the dominant security threat. There was a sense that there were opportunities with respect to China, still, and that very

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little had been done beyond starting the initial relationship. We did one session that focused on the developing world. A lot of it was looking at the alliances and what needed to be done to strengthen and to change the alliance relationships. Have you gotten into Kennedy as a member of the North Atlantic Assembly?

Heininger: We've just scratched the surface.

Schneider: That gave him a window into the defense world and national security. He actually was co-chair of the defense committee of the North Atlantic Assembly at one point, with a European, and I went with him. As co-chair of one of the committees, he got to bring staff along.

Heininger: One of those was in Berlin.

Schneider: Berlin and one was in Brussels, and we raised issues. It put him in contact with the defense leadership in Europe.

Heininger: This was also a way of broadening his thinking about issues?

Schneider: Without any question. He was relating to Europeans in a different way than he normally would. These were all parliamentarians, but they were also parliamentarians from usually the governments of those countries. He was talking to members of Parliament who were or would become Ministers. He had sessions there on the side with those who were involved in trying to do something about Northern Ireland.

Heininger: This is when he met with John Hume?

Schneider: Right, exactly. You're getting it all aren't you? All right, that's exactly right.

Heininger: Was there any recognition during this time that we were moving into an era of another round of decolonization, particularly in Africa, particularly with the Portuguese, and that this was going to alter the dynamics in Africa?

Schneider: I can't remember a lot of focus on that. There was some, but not a lot.

Heininger: We were still completely NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and Soviet oriented.

Schneider: Throughout that period, he was one of the five Senators on Latin America. Carey [Parker] had him do things on Asia, on China particularly.

Heininger: From a security dimension or from general relations?

Schneider: General relations mostly.

Heininger: Because this wasn't a period in which the Chinese were viewed as a major security threat?

Schneider: Right. Kennedy's focus was much broader.

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Heininger: This was also the time when—and I don't know whether you were handling this or Bob Hunter, who had come in at this point—issues like arms sales to the Saudis, the problems with the Persian Gulf region, arose.

Schneider: Bob was handling that more. During that time, things were carved up a little, so I wound up doing a little more specifically on Israel and relations with the Jewish community here, but even on that, Bob took it broader, into a Middle East focus. That was the time, still, when the Senator had a continuing focus on Chile, on El Salvador.

Did I tell you about him calling up [Henry] Kissinger because Kissinger denied a visa to [José Napoleón] Duarte? Duarte was in exile in Venezuela, and the military regime in El Salvador didn't want Duarte to come here and have any kind of attention. They kicked him out in '71. He won the Presidential election in '71. The military came in on election night, voided the election, and beat him up. The result was that he lost part of his finger and was put on a plane to Venezuela.

Heininger: If at this point he was being exposed to and was concerned about El Salvador, did this set in motion him being a leader when we got to the Contra aid issues in the mid-'80s?

Schneider: To some degree. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in El Salvador, which was why there was a clear involvement from the beginning, but I told you as well it was because of Duarte himself and his linkage back to the Kennedy era. As a result of El Salvador, he began looking more at Central America. During the mid-'70s he became engaged in issues relating to [Anastasio] Somoza. The Catholic Church was bringing information to us, to me, about torture and killings in Nicaragua.

Heininger: This was liberation theology.

Schneider: This wasn't even that. This was just concern about human rights. Liberation theology, the dogma side of it, was not—It was just simply in terms of the political side of human rights violations in the country, so Kennedy also put in amendments to halt military aid to Somoza at the time.

Heininger: Passed or failed?

Schneider: We passed some in the Senate on grant aid.

Heininger: Did it get through the administration?

Schneider: I don't think so. The administration opposed it, of course.

Heininger: But this really was not on the radar screen of many people.

Schneider: No, no. Four or five people on the Hill were involved. If you remember, that was when human rights issues were coming to the fore, so Kennedy was part of that, in conditioning U.S. military aid to dictators. The first thing that was successful was going after torture and police aid, with [James] Abourezk and [Frank] Church, on Greece and on Brazil.

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Heininger: Which were easier issues to get people to rally around?

Schneider: Right, right. We were part of, again, a small group that on the House side included Tom Harkin and Don Fraser, who had been the mayor of Minneapolis and was the chairman. It was his language that started, on the House side, the conditioning of foreign military assistance: no funds should be provided to a government that engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights. That legislation started in the House and we sponsored it in the Senate. That then became law, and the Harkin amendment expanded it to cover U.S. votes in the international financial institutions. There was an attempt to expand it to cover the Ex-Im Bank [Export-Import Bank of the United States] and OPIC [Overseas Private Investment Corporation]. That wasn't successful. That rolled into the [Jimmy] Carter campaign and the Carter administration.

Heininger: It set the stage for Carter to come in and make human rights a centerpiece.

Schneider: Without question.

Heininger: But it also enhanced Kennedy's role, because he'd had a longstanding interest in human rights when other people didn't, and exposed him to Central America, where most people weren't.

Schneider: That's right. That continued up through Nicaragua, the fall of Somoza. Then there were Charlie Wilson and John Murphy. They used to call Murphy "Jack," just like President Kennedy. He roomed with Somoza at West Point, and was a very close friend of Charlie Wilson's, who I think went to Annapolis.

Somoza's autobiography goes after Kennedy and goes after me. In this autobiography—and this was in the early '80s—they were talking. Someone must have taped some stuff and this was a conversation between Charlie Wilson and Murphy about Kennedy and me. Somoza was complaining, saying that we—because by then I was in the Carter administration, with human rights—were the ones responsible for the U.S. cutting off military aid to Somoza. Charlie Wilson was saying, "No, no. They don't have that much power." It was interesting.

He followed the Nicaragua thing through; it was probably in '73 or '74 when we first started to put in amendments about torture in Nicaragua. What flowed from that was a concern about Central America in general. He had been following El Salvador, so his interest broadened as the war started.

Heininger: When was the incident with the nuns?

Schneider: When the nuns were killed?

Heininger: Yes. Was that substantially later?

Schneider: That was in March 1980. During the campaign, they wanted him to go to the funeral for Archbishop [Oscar] Romero, which also was in 1980, in March, so he asked me to go, along with Sarge [Robert Sargent Shriver]. We were planning on going—Bob White was the Ambassador at the time, and I knew Bob from the Carter administration, so we were in touch

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with him. We let him know that we were coming down there, but that the Catholic Church was going to handle all of our arrangements, because we didn't want to, because of the campaign, be involved with the U.S. government directly.

I don't remember whether I decided or Sarge asked me to call him from the airport—We were at National [Airport]—before we got on the flight. I got him on the phone. There were no cell phones; this was a payphone. I said, "We're getting ready to come down; how are things?" As we were on the phone, the FMLN [Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front] shot up the embassy and Bob had to go under his desk. He said, "They're machine-gunning into the embassy!" You could hear it on the phone.

Heininger: Now that's a wakeup call!

Schneider: I said, "Well, what do you think?" He said, "The only way you can come is if I send an armored car for you, to pick you up at the airport, and you'll have to stay at the residence." I told Sarge and he said, "We're not going with him in an armored car to the residence. We're going with the Catholic Church and we'll be fine." I told him and he said, "You will not be fine. There are going to be people killed." It was mainly me convincing Sarge that we really didn't have to make this trip, so we didn't go, but it was that close and there were people killed the next day at the funeral.

Obviously, the relationship with the Catholic Church was very important throughout this period involving Central America, involving Chile. The Senator spoke at a memorial service here for Cardinal [Raúl] Silva of Chile, because when we went to Chile—When I had gone originally, in '74, I went to the archbishop, and he died maybe 12 years later. When we went to Chile, he had already retired, but we went to see him in Chile, along with the then archbishop. Silva came to Washington in let's say in the mid-'70s, and he wanted to see Kennedy, but he didn't want the Chilean government to see him going into the Senate. I lived on Capitol Hill then, so we arranged that Silva came to my house, and Kennedy came over from the office and met with him. The relationship with the church has always been there, and there has been a lot of direct relations with the church and Latin America, for obvious reasons.

Heininger: The mid- to late '70s was a time when Kennedy—having been involved earlier in the Vietnam issues and involved in cutting off funds for Vietnam—began to recognize that there needed to be a new strategy, a new defense strategy. One of the approaches to trying to think through that problem was this great debate, as well as parceling out, attacking different weapons systems.

Schneider: Right.

Heininger: At the same time, he had a longstanding commitment to human rights.

Schneider: In terms of U.S. foreign policy, he wanted to see a higher priority given to human rights and felt that the U.S. shouldn't be seen as standing with dictators.

Heininger: And you were exposing him to more in Central America than he had been exposed to before, which set the stage for his involvement in Contra aid stuff in the '80s.

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Schneider: Exactly.

Heininger: And for his longstanding interest in Latin America, particularly the issues that arose out of Chile.

Schneider: Once again, it goes back to democracy and human rights. He stayed with those issues throughout. In fact—I don't know if you want to transition to the concern over Cuba.

Heininger: Yes, I do, because that's another piece of it.

Schneider: When we got involved in Cuba as a policy issue, part of it was also the concern about political prisoners in Cuba. While we thought the way to bring about change in Cuba was not to maintain the embargo but to engage, we also politically had to be concerned about the reality of human rights violations in Cuba. When we went to Cuba the first time, we went with essentially a mandate to raise that issue. Bob Hunter and I went and were able to visit what I would call the halfway house of political prisoners coming out. This was not the high-security prison where they were held most of the time, but after they completed their sentences or were ill, they went into this place, so we met them there. We got out about 40 prisoners.

Heininger: You went in December of '74.

Schneider: That sounds too early. This says, "Meeting with Fidel Castro, 3:05 p.m. to 6:35 p.m., Thursday, January 2nd." It doesn't say the year.

Heininger: We had it as '74.

Schneider: I thought it was '75.

Heininger: It could have been that you went after Christmas and it spilled over into January.

Schneider: That could be. That could be.

We did the speech at the University of Montana in '71. Then we did the *Saturday Review*, probably in that same year. We kept at it. We did the *New York Times Magazine* in '73 and then did a roundtable on just Cuban relations with Senator [Harold Everett] Hughes in April of '72. He stayed with it. Then the trip to Cuba came up. The reason I think it was '74-'75 is because we went six months after [Claiborne] Pell and Javits went. In negotiating going down there, we said we were going to bring a list of names of political prisoners and we wanted to know that there would be some kind of response.

Heininger: Kennedy often did this when he made foreign trips.

Schneider: Right.

Heininger: He brought up political prisoners that he wanted released.

Schneider: Exactly.

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Heininger: And was this designed merely as fact finding, or were you trying to set the stage for Kennedy to come and visit Cuba?

Schneider: It really wasn't clear at the time. That was a possibility, but we were mainly—Kennedy would have liked to have gone. We definitely wanted to try to use it as a way not only to fact find, in the sense of what the conditions were, but more to find out what space there was to try to negotiate some political opening in Cuba.

This is the outline that I wrote to myself, which is in Spanish and lists things like thanks; what we've seen on our visit; the note—We had a gift but I don't remember what it was; President Kennedy; and a personal message from the Senator expressing interest in seeing relations improve and bringing benefit to both countries from new relations. The trip was part of that effort. The outline continues with the government's reaction to the possibility of a trip by Kennedy; the objective being humanitarian; the role the Senator could play; information on the Cuban government's attitude with regard to a series of humanitarian issues: reunification of families, visits of families, political prisoners. At that time there was also an issue about access for the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] to jails.

Heininger: Those ultimately did happen after this.

Schneider: Yes. It also included access to medical assistance for prisoners, sometimes very specialized; the idea that Kennedy could play a role in the Congress, in legislation, public opinion, in talking to Henry Kissinger if there was a possibility, some opening; information on the economic blockade, the kinds of conditions that would be necessary to permit that to be removed. Remember, he was already on record as saying, politically, this was what should be done.

[BREAK]

Heininger: This is a resumption of the interview with Mark Schneider on February 4. So you did meet with Castro?

Schneider: Right, for about three and a half hours.

Heininger: What was his reaction? Did he see Kennedy as speaking for the government or recognize that he was—

Schneider: He definitely saw him as his own person. We talked about Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union, sugar, Guantanamo, and then there were elements of the current economic program in Cuba that we wanted to talk about. We wanted to know what kinds of significant actions in the humanitarian area, as a result of the trip, were possibilities, why they were desirable, how they could take place, and what they would do. We said that Kennedy's going would not be possible until the blockade was lifted.

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Heininger: Oh, really?

Schneider: What I have here is that he said, "Kennedy's emissary stated, 'Not until the blockade is lifted. Someone other than Kennedy could perhaps discuss the modality of negotiations.'"

Heininger: Kennedy recognized that he wasn't going to go until after the embargo was lifted?

Schneider: No. This is what Fidel said. That was my outline. This is pretty much going through that outline: Fidel expressed appreciation for the visit, and then reviewed the discussion of the possibility of Senator Kennedy arriving, which already had been discussed through other emissaries, in New York with me and Frank Mankiewicz. He said that he would be welcome, that it would be of great interest to the Senator to increase his image in Latin America, the international community, particularly for his progressive policies in the past, best seen in his attitude toward Chile and Brazil and Latin America in general.

I raised the matter concerning Kennedy's role as the chairman of the Refugee Subcommittee, that humanitarian issues raised the possibility of some development regarding family visits and situations, humanitarian needs, sickness, death, et cetera. Fidel said it was taking place, that his government was facilitating that kind of travel, but said that it would be absurd to consider this as a matter of forced negotiations in any way. There was no reason to, because it was not the government's policy to oppose such family visits where clear humanitarian issues existed.

I said that this was not known in the U.S., which also had active restrictions, and that perhaps it was an issue that was being used by groups opposing relations with Cuba, to hold up an example of lack of compassion on Cuba's part. I said that if they were willing to do more in this area, Kennedy would be able to do more himself in terms of trying to improve relations with Cuba. Castro did not express much appearance of willingness to move in this area, although he did say that something symbolic in the form of a statement on the subject could be possible. Then he talked about family reunification.

Heininger: Meaning he, Castro, would be willing to make a public statement?

Schneider: Right. In terms of expanding family reunification opportunities for Cubans who wanted to emigrate to the United States—

Heininger: To emigrate or to visit?

Schneider: Emigrate.

Heininger: You raised both the visiting and the emigration issues?

Schneider: Right.

Heininger: And he said there was already a policy that they could visit?

Schneider: No. Only on very specific, narrow—This is about family reunification of Cubans going to the United States and staying.

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Heininger: And staying, okay.

Schneider: And then, in the question of going *to* Cuba, they would have no problems with that. I don't believe this, but he said he had no problems with allowing Cubans to come back to visit. He said while there was concern of counter-revolution, only a very small minority of those who had left had no political ideals and were now professional terrorists. Only ten percent, perhaps, of the Cubans who had left were still strongly opposed to the revolution. That's a little bit understated. But he also said that the issue of tourism, massive immigration to Cuba, would also have to be examined.

Heininger: Did you pick up any sense about what ultimately happened with the boat people?

Schneider: No. He talked about the fact that, in the United States, the arrival of 100,000 would not affect the country at all, but in Cuba, he said, 5,000 immigrants would. Then we had a long discussion about Latin America. It was desirable for Kennedy to come. Obviously, it was also important. If that led to lifting the embargo, obviously Cuba could benefit. Commercially, it would be much more important to Cuba, and in moral terms, the U.S. would benefit more.

Heininger: What were your impressions of Castro?

Schneider: He's very smart. He knew more about domestic politics in the United States than most political people in the United States do. He clearly followed it and knew the parties, knew the candidates, knew who their constituencies were, why they were taking the positions that they did. He was really well informed. He also said the United States was being isolated as Cuba developed relations with other countries in Latin America. As always, he said the point of the United States is that the United States—and this can be applied right now—needs to acquire better Latin American relations, and that the renewal of relations with Cuba could well be the road by which this could be accomplished, justified.

Heininger: At the same time, we were supporting a bunch of military dictatorships.

Schneider: Right, without any question. He said the way that the way this should be done would be for the U.S. to take unilateral action, removing the blockade/embargo. Then, without any quid pro quo—that is, without any stated, negotiated, formal quid pro quo—there would be a Cuban response that would be unilateral action in terms of humanitarian concerns. He said, for example, that the U.S. had not appreciated the gesture Cuba had made with respect to the hijacking agreement, and that this was a substantial benefit for the U.S.—which would affect opinion. The hijackings of U.S. planes were of little importance to Cuba, but, he said, when they did it, there was no counterpart or gesture on the part of the United States. He cited the [Sol Myron] Linowitz report, which was all about relations with Latin America, including Cuba, regarding removal of the embargo as just elementary justice.

With respect to the Kennedy visit, he emphasized great respect for Senator Kennedy. They were following his policies and political activities, reflecting their view of him being a major progressive force in the United States, so a trip by Kennedy would raise the image of Latin America. The trip would be part of the process of setting the stage for renewal of relations. They would like to do whatever was possible to help him develop the role of working toward that in the United States. He would be treated with the highest possible respect, would have the

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attention of the highest leaders of the country, and a speech at a university or another auditorium would not be inconvenient, particularly if he were to talk about Chile.

Heininger: Castro wanted him to come.

Schneider: Yes. He saw no reason why some gesture might not be possible in the area of humanitarian concerns, at the appropriate time. The trip obviously should take place at the optimum time. We talked about the kinds of exchange of technical experts that would take place as the process of opening relations occurred and about release of political prisoners.

When I mentioned this originally, during one of the early comments, Fidel simply skipped it entirely. Later, when I brought it back up in relation to the development of their constitution, greater institutional protection for human rights, which was generally becoming a greater issue in the region, and the diminishing numbers of political prisoners for years, he answered more fully. He said political prisoners came about at the beginning of the revolution because, given the profound social change that had occurred, the arrests had occurred in a counter-revolution. He said that it was rehabilitation; that no other country had such a program, with political and other prisoners engaged in work, for which they received the same salary as any other worker; and that the vast majority of them had been liberated, following rehabilitation. He said probably only 20 percent remained, 80 percent were now free.

In the room was the Foreign Minister, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez. He gave 2,600 as the original number, and admitted to dealing with their executions, but he added that it was under due procedure—There never was torture—adamant that torture would never be accepted. If there were some excesses at the beginning, it was not accepted, and that people had been punished. He said some had suffered torture and that was not permitted to occur.

Heininger: He was talking about at the very beginning, when Castro first came in?

Schneider: Yes.

Heininger: Okay, not now.

Schneider: I asked again, on the basis of Kennedy playing a role in combating groups opposing renewed relations, whether things could be done to publicize and communicate the true situation, such as allowing the ICRC and Amnesty International into the prisons, and mentioned the Senator's actions in the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], Chile, and Brazil as evidence that this was no new concern. He said he never thought of combating negative publicity as a major concern, and that some people would always use it as a way of slandering the regime. He said they would look at the possibility again. I also mentioned that using an ad hoc group of Latin Americans would be respected outside of the country, letting them see political prisoners as well. I also mentioned that the ICRC did those things in private reports.

Heininger: He didn't tell you yes while you were there, but it happened after?

Schneider: It happened. In the same way, he didn't tell us yes, but we got, each year, a fairly substantial number of political prisoners released.

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Heininger: Even without asking in subsequent years?

Schneider: No, no, we asked. The first time, I remember that there was a Cuban poet, [Armando] Valladares, rather well known, and we had arranged for his release—He flew up and we received him at Logan [International Airport].

I got into the issue of the export of revolution by Cuba. I raised it as a point that concerned many in the United States, particularly as it was used as a basis for justifying a continued isolation policy. He said there was no longer a problem. He said [*reading from notes*], "The policy of hostility was adopted in response to hostility from the U.S. and other countries. Mexico refused to join the boycott and it expected to be treated with total respect by Cuba. Countries which were or are the subject of export of revolution, in 1974—" there is support for the Sandinistas—"There is no norm of respect shown toward Cuba, therefore it did not justify any in return. The right of Cuba to find its own destiny is not respected. The U.S. used other governments. That does not mean that we don't feel sympathy toward other revolutionaries, but there is a difference between sympathy and conduct. Cuba maintained an attitude of mutual respect for all nations with a similarly adopted attitude." Well, that's not exactly true.

Heininger: You really didn't get a diatribe from him.

Schneider: No, no, no.

Heininger: This was a serious discussion of issues.

Schneider: Oh yes, there was no diatribe, none. It was a discussion.

Heininger: Was that what you expected?

Schneider: I didn't know what to expect, I truly didn't. The stories of journalists who had been there at times when he just lectured—

Heininger: Right.

Schneider: And they sat there for hours.

Heininger: It sounds as though he saw this as important.

Schneider: I don't think there's any question about that. Not just because he gave us the time, but because—

Heininger: He was seriously engaged.

Schneider: Yes, exactly.

Heininger: How did the Cuban-American community respond to all this?

Schneider: The Cuban-American community was not thrilled at all. Remember, they didn't particularly like the original statements that Kennedy made, the speeches, et cetera. I'm not sure

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when, but there was a point at which there were threats and there were many vitriolic messages coming up from Miami.

Heininger: Any of security concern to Kennedy?

Schneider: Oh, yes. There were threats that came that were—You know, the Secret Service always went through everything, and that's why, in 1980, when the campaign was going on, decisions about going to Miami were somewhat difficult. [*laughing*]

Heininger: Didn't the Bay of Pigs Association want its flag back from the JFK [John F. Kennedy] Library?

Schneider: That was one, but [Jorge] Mas Canosa in general was pretty rabid about Senator Kennedy. See, there were a couple of Cubans who had been with the Bay of Pigs, with the Americans, who had then been close to Bobby Kennedy. The positive Kennedy connection was still stronger than the negative view about policy. They at least were the ones who said, "Hey, wait a minute, this isn't working. Yes we want a free Cuba, but this policy is just not working." People who used the anti-Castro rhetoric and support for an embargo and didn't want to have anything to do with him were no longer seeking to bring about change in Cuba. They were just using it to maintain their own political leverage, or power in their own communities, which I think is pretty accurate.

Heininger: Skipping ahead for a minute, given what you just said, to the Presidential campaign in '80 and the decision to provide him with Secret Service protection—

Schneider: Early on.

Heininger: Early. Were the threats they were most concerned about generalized, or were there some in the Cuban-American community?

Schneider: It was more generalized.

Heininger: Just a long history of threats there?

Schneider: Exactly.

Heininger: Okay. I didn't know whether there was something specific there.

Schneider: No.

Heininger: So you all came back and reported to Kennedy. He didn't make a trip.

Schneider: Right.

Heininger: Did he let the issue die or did it simply get overtaken by other developments?

Schneider: I think it was overtaken by other developments. He didn't move away from the position, but he didn't stress it any longer. As the '80 campaign developed, to the degree that it was discussed, the focus was on the humanitarian aspect and the political prisoners, and that if

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that were done, then there should be some kind of continuing discussion that would ultimately result in renewed relations.

Heininger: And if things were going to happen then, where there might have potentially been an opening, here we are 30 years later, still in the same situation.

Schneider: It's 29 years later.

Heininger: Still the same situation.

Schneider: The only good news there is that I was at the State Department yesterday and the day before, for different meetings, and as I got there, there was a young lady standing there with a sign that said, "Cuba Meeting." So maybe they're thinking about it.

Heininger: Maybe. This was a time when he was both broadly rethinking what we should be doing in the wake of Vietnam and this was a fertile time for being concerned about human rights, helped even further when you went on to the Carter administration and Carter had this as a hallmark.

Schneider: Right.

Heininger: What happened when you got to the Presidential campaign? That was a big issue. Let's start with what your role was.

Schneider: I was in the Carter administration from about late April of '77 until November of '79. I got a call around the end of October from his office. Paul Kirk told me that he wanted to see me, to see whether I would be interested in joining the campaign. I said I wanted to think about it. Between the time that that conversation occurred and the time that I went, I tore up my knee playing basketball and had an operation. I got there in a wheelchair, with a cast up to here [*gestures*], and that's how I had the conversation in which he asked me if I wanted to be issues director for the campaign. I said yes and went back to the State Department. Concerning my role and relationship in the State Department and my satisfaction in being there, I had enjoyed it and I think I would have stayed. Politically, I was more comfortable with Ted Kennedy than with Jimmy Carter, so I sent in my letter of resignation and joined the campaign.

Heininger: At this point, when they were asking you to become issues director, who was in the constellation of people around him, and what were they supposed to be doing?

Schneider: There was Paul Kirk, the political person; Carey—

Heininger: As Carey.

Schneider: As Carey. At the house, we had Dave Burke and discussions at a first meeting. I can't remember who all was there, but in his office, it was Paul and Carey and the Senator.

Heininger: No Larry [Horowitz] at this point?

Schneider: Not there.

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Heininger: And no Peter Edelman at this point?

Schneider: No. And no Bob Shrum at that initial point.

Heininger: You really were one of the very first people asked to come back.

Schneider: Yes. And then when I came back—

Heininger: This was October?

Schneider: This was October. When I came back and it was clear that I wasn't going on the plane, that's when—They might have reached out to Bob in any case, but they clearly did then. They needed another speechwriter on the plane, and that's when Bob came in. Again, I'd say shortly afterward it was agreed that—maybe they had already talked to Peter, I don't know—Peter and I became co-issues directors for the campaign, working out of the headquarters on 22nd Street. After my six weeks of the cast, then being off, I would spell either Shrum or Carey for a week on the plane.

Toward the end, the last wave of primaries—before it was clear that it wasn't going to happen—involved Texas and California, so I went out and did organization, particularly with the Hispanic communities, with the farm workers. I had those contacts. We did everything. We wrote speeches. We wrote fact books. It was a campaign. We'd start early in the morning—well, not so early in the morning. You start at 9:00 and you go until 3:00 in the morning.

Heininger: Right, yes. [*laughing*] The morning ends late.

Schneider: Yes. I have always said that there were two things: Obviously he was hurt by the television interview, because he hadn't fully decided to be public about running, so when he was asked the question of why he wanted to become President, he hemmed and hawed, and that hurt. But what killed the campaign—Remember, the reason he ran for the primary against a sitting Democratic President, which is not exactly a smart thing to do under any circumstances, was that everybody in the Democratic Party was beating on his door, telling him he had to run to save the party, not just the country but the party. Labor and all those guys were all over him.

Heininger: And for various reasons he hadn't run earlier—

Schneider: Right.

Heininger: When people were expecting him to.

Schneider: Yes. They came and finally he agreed. First, there was the interview that August with Roger Mudd. I started around the first of November, and the hostages were taken in Iran the end of November. We didn't see it, but that really ended the campaign, because you couldn't go out and run against the President of your country when you were "at war." You couldn't say the same things; you couldn't do the same things.

Heininger: You couldn't attack the same way, either.

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Schneider: That's right. We should have recognized that and rolled it up right then, because that's what ultimately . . . . What it did, though, was change his strategy, the way he appeared. He held himself back and was a bad candidate for that first two months.

Heininger: Which is not the way Ted Kennedy wins campaigns.

Schneider: Exactly. He was a great candidate afterward, and that led up to the convention and the platform, et cetera, but it was over.

Heininger: Did you sense at any point in him any ambivalence about becoming President?

Schneider: I always thought there was some ambivalence that related to what happened to his brothers. I didn't sense any ambivalence about wanting to have the power of the Presidency to do things.

Heininger: For the job, yes. But what about his kids?

Schneider: Those things: his kids, personal relationships, recognizing that that would increase, in general, the threat. It's not specific always. There was just a sense of insecurity that at times rose and at times fell.

Heininger: What about Joan [Bennett Kennedy]?

Schneider: If you say "What about Joan?" in terms of the Presidency, she obviously had an enormous amount of pressure just in handling being the wife of a Senator, a national public figure, et cetera. I'm sure that that was exacerbated, and she had lots of other personal problems.

Heininger: When you look at '84 and '88, where some things had been set in motion for him to run if he chose to run, and ultimately his decision not to run in '84, and the decision in '88, when he said, "I'm not running. I'm never going to run again; it's over"—

Schneider: I don't know the answers. I was not there. I was not involved in either of those two times.

Heininger: No, but looking back in the '80 campaign—where apparently family reasons were so much at the forefront of the decisions in '84 and '88, did you pick up on a lot of that in the '80 campaign?

Schneider: In a sense, what happened was Steve Smith was still around.

Heininger: Yes, that's true; that made a difference.

Schneider: Paul, but Steve Smith particularly as well, was getting everybody calling to say, "You have to run," and they became supportive, and then protected him from the rest of the family. Once the family decides that they're going to do something, they're pretty united, so I don't think there was any—Once the decision was made, there was no question.

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Heininger: Apparently, once it got to taking the family's views into consideration, it became absolutely—

Schneider: Clear that it wasn't going to happen.

Heininger: Yes. By the time '84 and '88 rolled around, it became clear.

One other thing. You went into the Carter administration and went into the [William] Clinton administration. You've traveled with Kennedy even when you were no longer on staff with him. What's your relationship been with Kennedy in years when you have not been working for him? Did he help you get any of these jobs? Why did he ask you to come back and travel with him? That's a broad series of questions.

Schneider: First, he supported me when—I was not expecting to be offered a job by the Carter administration, and they called and asked me if I would have my name considered for the Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs. At that time it was Latin America, the ARA [Bureau of American Republic Affairs]. I was surprised. I was on vacation in Mexico when Tony Lake called me, and I said sure. When I came back, I told the Senator and he said he would support me. He probably sent a letter. I don't remember, but my guess is he probably did.

He's always supported me in the efforts with the Clinton administration. He wrote letters when—It started with the Assistant Secretary for Latin America. As things then moved, I wound up P-DAS [Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] with human rights and then the assistant administrator for Latin America at AID [U.S. Agency for International Development]. Then I assume—I don't know whether they called him. Hillary [Clinton] was the one who put my name forward, I'm pretty sure, to be Peace Corps director, as part of the Clinton administration, but I'm sure that they must have—They knew that he would be supportive, and he's supportive now to the degree that there's an issue.

During the time that I wasn't working there—Remember, I left in '81 and I didn't start in the Clinton administration until '93—I was with the Pan American Health Organization. There were times when I thought that there were things he could do with respect to foreign policy issues, so I would make suggestions. He identifies certain people with certain things, so he identifies me with Latin America. He would call sometimes if something came up, or if there was a "What's the name of that guy?" type of thing. Obviously, you respond.

Because I've been trying to get him to Latin America from the beginning, when the possibility occurred, we went to Latin America during the campaign. We went to Mexico and to Puerto Rico.

Because I was involved in the State Department and going after [Augusto] Pinochet after the [Orlando] Letelier assassination, the Chileans in exile would call me about something that the U.S. government was doing or not doing, and I'd be in touch. The same thing with Central Americans as related to U.S. foreign policy. Sometimes he would call me on some of those issues. As the effort was made to begin the process of pushing for the end to the Pinochet regime, there was an economic downturn in '84, '85, '86. He went in '86 and then they had the referendum, and '89 was the election.

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In ’80 I met with Chilean exiles in Bellagio, Italy. Most of the exiles were in Europe, so the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored a week’s discussion on how to end the Pinochet dictatorship.

Heininger: That’s a nice place to hold it, Bellagio.

Schneider: Beautiful. I have a photograph someplace of all of us standing there, let’s say that there were 35 people. All of the Presidents of Chile since the return to democracy were there; all of the Foreign Ministers were there; almost all of the Ministers were there; most of the people who had been on Dawson Island were there. I kept in touch with them, even though I was doing other things, so when they came to town, I would let the Senator’s office know. Somebody would see them or he would see them, depending on who they were.

Heininger: Didn’t Greg pretty much take over the Chile issues?

Schneider: Right. When they were planning the trip to Chile, I got the call saying that he would like me to come with him. I said yes and took vacation and went. In ’90, I was invited by [Patricio] Aylwin to the inauguration, myself. The Senator was invited by the State Department, by [J. Danforth] Quayle, to be part of the U.S. delegation. Because I had been invited, it wound up that he asked that I be able to join the delegation, so I was with him then. In Chile, we planned the speech that he gave when he was there.

Heininger: You still had to fall back into the staff role?

Schneider: Yes. That doesn’t change. [*laughing*]

Heininger: We have heard, from many people, “Once on staff, always on staff, no matter what payroll.”

Schneider: No matter what, that’s right.

Heininger: What has your relationship been with him through the years?

Schneider: It’s been close, but I’m still staff. There’s just no way to get around it. But he goes out of his way to do things for me, and where I can be helpful, I try to do things for him.

Heininger: What do you think his legacy will be?

Schneider: He will be seen clearly as one of the very few leaders of the Senate in U.S. history; I don’t think there is anybody who comes close in terms of legislative accomplishments. And he will be seen as the spokesperson for a part of liberal political philosophy in this country during this era.

Heininger: That’s a good note on which to end.

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