



EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD M. KENNEDY

Interview 19

May 30, 2007
Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

Interviewer
James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is a May 30th interview at Hyannis Port, with Senator Kennedy, and our broad subject today is the Vietnam conflict, refugees, and the collateral problems of the draft; prisoners of war and so forth. Why don't we start out by my asking you how you got initially involved in the Vietnam question, and what your general view about the administration's policy with respect to Vietnam was.

Kennedy: I think, Jim, in understanding my transition in Vietnam, from a hawk to a dove—and I've thought a good deal about it—I think I have to really go back to my life's experience, from the time I was in college and absorbing and learning primarily from my older brother Jack [Kennedy], about foreign policy. He believed very strongly that at the end of the Second World War, the great challenge in foreign policy was going to be the test between democracy and communism, and he saw the role of these emerging colonies as playing a very important place, and that the most dramatic obviously was India. India was at the crossroads, and I think history points out his interest in India, and his great support for Indian democracy.

But he was also very conscious of what was happening in other countries; in Africa, in Asia, and in South America as well, as these nations were emerging. I can remember him urging me, after I got out of college one summertime, to take a trip down to North Africa, which I did with Fred Holborn, at that time, just the two of us, and wrote articles for the INS [International News Service]—it was one of the news agencies then. The place that we spent the most time was in Algeria, but we had been to Morocco, and they had had independence then from France. Mohammed the Fifth was placed on the throne, and I remember going to the ceremony up in the mountains, where he took on the authority with all the Berber tribes up there. There were all the tents up in the mountains, and I remember sleeping on the rugs under a big tent. The king and his party—and he had a harem with these young almost children that were part of his harem—went off to another tent, but everybody else, probably three or four hundred of us, slept in one tent. Underneath, the horses were making noise, drinking the water.

All night long people were wandering around, and then the next day they had this wonderful ceremony of Berber riders crossing the plains and finally coming and giving their salutation to Mohammed the Fifth, and then we went to Algeria and traveled around with the French Army. They were putting down this insurrection, the FLN [National Liberation Front], and we were there just at the time at the Battle of Algiers and were given the assurance that the French powers had conquered and finally eliminated this insurgency. It didn't appear that way to me at the time,

but that was enormously moving because there was a good deal of violence that was taking place through the country, and then going to Tunisia, where they had [Habib] Bourguiba, who had also recently acquired— This is some of my first exposure of insurgency and the power of these kinds of activities.

Then my brother, after the 1960 campaign, urged that I go to Africa to find out what was happening there, and I spent five and a half weeks there with Senators. Frank Church and Gale McGee were two. There were perhaps one or two others on that trip. We went to Rhodesia and Belgian Congo and Kinshasa, and then through the countries in West Africa: Togo, Ghana, French Guinea, and we met the various leaders there. Sékou Touré emerged as an incredible nationalist leader in Guinea, and we met Jules Nyerere, who had been imprisoned by the British, who was the nationalist leader in Tanzania. So you saw these forces that were coming out and being enormously successful in knocking down these colonial powers. I also saw them selling bags of independence in Belgian Congo. They said, “You want independence?” And the crowd would say yes. “You can have it here,” people selling bags of independence. This was such a startling kind of—

Young: Bags of independence. What do you mean?

Kennedy: There were just lines of bags that probably had cement or dirt in them. Politically, they’re saying, we want independence. Many of them, they were getting independence from Belgium—the Belgian Congo—everybody wanted independence, so you had local leaders selling independence. “You can have independence too, for twenty-five cents over here,” and people buying it. I remember in the Belgian Congo, when the Belgians left, they destroyed all the land records, all the marriage records, all the legal records of everything there. They had 12 college graduates in all of Belgian Congo, this massive nation and this startling contrast between the colonial powers, and that was a very powerful factor, a force, that I saw.

West Africa was just after the Presidential campaign but nonetheless, it was enormously interesting. My brother was very interested in it. The one talk that we did have a hand in was his speech on the independence in Algeria, which he made at that time in the Foreign Relations Committee, just before the 1958 election. It was considered to be a bold declaration. This was an international problem and he got credit for taking on the Francos, the French government, and the Francos in Massachusetts, of which there was a significant population, because he was saying that France has to alter and change its policy from a military policy. People understood it and the subsequent activities justified his position, where the generals took over in Nigeria. They had a coup and then finally [Charles] de Gaulle came back in and settled it.

Now we jump forward to 1966, when I went back to Algiers, and they loved the Kennedys there. The people who were part of the FLN, who were the terrorists, were escorting us around, looking out for us, talking about the struggle and the fight that they had had for their country. That’s now ’66, but it was all a factor and a force in my mind.

I remember very clearly my brother Jack going to Southeast Asia, ’56, ’57, just before the fall of Dien Bien Phu, where the French were defeated and Vietnam became a major part of it, then became independent and free. I remember my brother talking about a wonderful person, a foreign service officer he met over there named Ed [Edmund] Gullion, who later came back and

was the head of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and how Ed Gullion had spelled out exactly what was going to happen to the French. The French would come to occupy the country after the Second World War, and they were again the colonial powers and they couldn't last over there. They had General [Jean] de Lattre, who was the big general, and my brother was impressed with him, but that this wasn't going to last. And then we had Dien Bien Phu, and he was impressed by this, what was happening in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia.

Now we go probably to 1962, skipping a good deal on this; 1962, my election. I run in the primaries against Eddie McCormack, but I also run against a fellow named H. Stuart Hughes, who was a professor at Harvard, and at that time, he was running on an anti-war platform. He said that we should not be in Vietnam.

Young: That was against the American military advisors even, because we weren't escalating combat troops in '62.

Kennedy: I think there were perhaps 100 people who had been killed that whole year. It was a very slow, slow process at that time. Stuart Hughes had gotten 70,000 certified signatures, which is impressive if you're a candidate, to be able to get people to get out and get certified. I remember being most impressed that there were enough people in Massachusetts that would sign up for H. Stuart Hughes to go on, that they could get 70,000 certified signatures. During that campaign we had the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was in October of that year, and the world was on the edge of a cliff and stepped back. I remember conversations during that week that I had with my brother, and I remember when he indicated to me that he thought that it was going to be OK.

Just to add a note here. I had my final major debate with George Lodge in Worcester, Massachusetts, at this big auditorium. There were two or three thousand people there, the issue was American foreign policy, and it was the night that President Kennedy announced the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis. I think the summary of my statement was, "I'm with him, supporting him." This was, of course, a dramatic moment. It was the major forces of the world now. The Cold War had been obviously reflected, even during the course of my campaign, with Checkpoint Charlie and the airlift down in Berlin where, "Are they going to stop the cars at Checkpoint Charlie? Are they going to try and run through the checkpoint?" You know, what's going to be the counter action? I mean, it was a very dangerous time, and that was the overarching issue, that was the great force—East versus West, Cold War, with all its implications, and the dangers of the expansionism of Communism, and everything being done to try and contain it. President Kennedy, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, within five or six months, making that wonderful speech at American University, challenging the Soviet Union to an arms control agreement. You know that was one of the great, great moments and great talks that—initiatives on his part. But anyway, this Cold War mentality was there. And you had the Bay of Pigs in those early years. I mean communism was on the march.

Young: And expanding into a postcolonial world.

Kennedy: They were on the move.

Young: Yes. That's very true, in Vietnam.

Kennedy: And they were on the move in Vietnam. So my experience in the Senate now, I was appointed to both the Labor Committee and the Judiciary Committee. My brother was rather interested. He said, "I don't want you to make any requests, because if you make a request and you don't go, it will reflect on me, so you take what you get." I said, "That's all right with me." I think they called him and said, "Do you think he'll be satisfied with the Labor Committee? You were on it all the time that you were in the House and Senate?" He said, "Fine, he'll love that, and the Judiciary Committee, he's a lawyer," which I was on. After a short time on that committee, there's a lot that's happening now. Obviously '63 has happened; I lost my brother. In '64 I traveled to Vietnam, and there are a lot of other things. Civil rights bills are coming out in '64, a civil rights bill, the '65 Voting Rights. We're going to come to those in time. The Immigration Act, 1965, my first major legislation.

So at that time, we had been working on issues on discrimination, but we had also been working on issues of immigration, some on refugees, and I was appointed as the Chairman of the Immigration and Refugee Committee of the Judiciary Committee. That committee had been interested in immigration law, but it also had been interested in refugees, primarily refugees from communism. It had been active at the time of '56, the Hungarian uprising, making recommendations primarily, and it looked out for immigrants who were leaving Eastern Europe, and was focused at other times on that. So it had been involved in refugees. I was interested in immigration and I was interested in the plight of refugees. We went to Vietnam in 1965.

Young: October.

Kennedy: The end of October of 1965. That was just after we had had a battle on the Frank Morrissey issue. I went there, and looking back over the notes of the time, the first meetings that we had—it was an incredibly long trip—27, 30 hours—but we started off with briefings on refugees. What became so immediately apparent to me is this incredible gulf between what was happening over there from governmental action and the military action, and what was happening to the people, primarily refugees but basically people generally, what was happening to the civilian population. You could call them refugees.

Generally, you think of refugees as being people who are moving out of their country, but it's broader than that. It's displaced people. There are two million people in Iraq today that have been uprooted. You can call them displaced people, they'd rather be called displaced than refugees, and they're entitled to it, but whatever you call that, I call them refugees. Even though they were inside the country, they were being constantly moved and constantly displaced, their life and their safety.

Young: Some of them fleeing North Vietnam?

Kennedy: Fleeing out of communities, some fleeing from the North—but it was the movement of people as a result of the creation of these free fire zones, and this incredible bombing that had not taken place yet, but these free fire zones were taking place, and free fire meant that American artillery could shoot into the jungle, as long as they cleared it with local officials. What happened was most of those local officials would be sitting and drinking tea someplace or in a bar, and write the thing off and boom, boom, boom, and we were firing this artillery in these jungles and into the countryside and destroying villages.

Young: To get the VC [Viet Cong].

Kennedy: To get the VC and to interrupt their places. The whole history of that period and what happened to Vietnamese civilians has just been—

Young: Do you have any particular—you mentioned a moment ago about the briefings. This is on the '64 trip there.

Kennedy: Yes.

Young: You went over there primarily to take a look on the ground, to see what was happening in general, or was it more focused on the refugees?

Kennedy: I went over there to take a look at basically what was happening on the ground. We were there, I think, three and a half, four days the first trip. and ten days the second trip. We were there and we were briefed by the military, [William] Westmoreland, and we were briefed by military leaders, and we were briefed by other people, because I was interested in what was happening with the refugees, the Judiciary Committee.

Young: And by the diplomats as well?

Kennedy: By diplomats and by those who were involved in these humanitarian undertakings.

Young: Did you feel they were in touch with the situation?

Kennedy: Well, no. The very powerful impression that I had was that the military officials felt that the war had been going well, and it was getting better for the South, and that there was an enormous amount of corruption, which the military acknowledged, but that special forces were training a number of the Vietnamese troops, and that they thought that they were doing better and better and getting better organized, the South Vietnamese getting better organized, better cooperation between the Vietnamese and Americans. They thought that it was moving in the right direction militarily. On the other hand, you saw the examples of extraordinary waste and corruption and indifference. The most important thing was the indifference towards the civilian populations. At that time they were using napalm over there. You were seeing children who were being burned and you found out that people were being terribly wounded, and there were insufficient doctors, insufficient nurses, and insufficient conditions for all of these people living in desperate, desperate cases. That was startling to me.

Young: Do you remember any talks with South Vietnamese government people, Ministers, and your impressions of them or what their take on the situation was? Did they feel everything was going fine too?

Kennedy: Well, they thought everything was getting better. They thought that so much of the problem and disruption in terms of the country started as a result of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese, and not as a result of actions by the Americans or American free fire zones or American napalm or anything like that.

Young: What were they doing about the refugees?

Kennedy: I can't remember now. I mean they were saying that they were going to help them and get housing and water and get them resettled and get local leaders, I mean the general kinds. My impressions are—I wrote this out in 1966, and that probably is the best recollection that I had at the time. I can't improve on that. I outlined, in *Look Magazine*, what those particulars were at that time, and I think that really represents my best judgment. I think in terms of the war itself, I was impressed by the fact that the generals, Westmoreland and the commanders, appeared that they were moving, they felt, in a positive direction. What they felt most importantly was the overall danger of the potential success of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong in Vietnam, that if this happened, this was going to be just a continuation of the expansion of the communist countries. The Chinese influence, even though historically they've had tension, would be expanded and they thought it was an extremely dangerous situation.

Young: Called it the domino theory. If we lose here, everything terrible will happen. So your impression on the first trip was—

Kennedy: But let me finish this.

Young: Sure.

Kennedy: Part of the trip was going down to Singapore, and I went down to Singapore and I saw Lee Kuan Yew, who was the new leader for Singapore. He did an incredible job in cleaning Singapore up. He was a very strong supporter of the United States and believed very deeply in the domino theory. He said if I wanted to, I could come down to his prisons, because he had communists down in his prisons—because they had had some uprisings a year before and some violence—and he said he captured their leadership. But their time was up and he told them that they could get out of jail. They all said they didn't want to get out of jail, that they wanted to stay in jail because they were sure that the United States was going to get run over in South Vietnam, and then they were coming into Singapore, and when they came in to liberate Singapore, they wanted to be found in jail, and not out. He said, "That is the determination that they have" — they being the communists— "and that determination is what we see here and what they see in South Vietnam, so this is going to be a very tough regime.

I remember wondering at that time, not just about—I believed the military aspects, the people that were telling us. I was troubled by this extraordinary contrast with how badly they were treating people and about the level of corruption. But I was also struck, probably more, by the conversation with Lee Kuan Yew about the determination of the Viet Cong and the communists as compared to the determination of the South Vietnamese, who appeared to be taking it all, and the real issue, whether they would be willing to fight for their own country. That was something that I remember President Kennedy talked about before his death, that this is basically a problem for Vietnam, and the Vietnamese are going to have to win it themselves. This was something that was present in my mind. I came back to it again and again and again, and as we saw, this was not going to work out, but that was certainly a leading concern that we had at that time.

So I expressed my concerns—well, now we come back to the United States. We had my colleagues continue to the Middle East and then back. Then one night, we got invited over by Bernard Fall, who was the French writer who had written about the fall of France as a colonial power in Asia, and was an expert on Vietnam. I ran into my friends the next day or two after, and

they said they wanted to talk to me. They had been over and they had been enormously impressed by what Bernie Fall had been—Bernie Fall had been considered to be a leftie, some thought he was a communist sympathizer or whatever. The message that they had was very clear, and I had a conversation, but not the detailed conversation that they all had, but I had enough of it to verify it. What Bernard Fall did is take the places that we had gone in Vietnam and then said, “Now, who did you get briefed by?” “Well, we got briefed by the State Department and the land reclamation people and the economic development people, and they said there’s more rice being produced here than ever.”

He then would show that in the Delta they produced 300,000 tons of rice before the war and it’s importing rice now. So they said, “Oh? That doesn’t really square with what we were told on this.” And then Fall said, “What was the price of rice?” And they had it in their notes what the price of rice was, and he said, “Well, that’s interesting because here—” and they’d take a book from the Department of Agriculture that would be in one of their bulletins, and it would have the price of rice in one place, and the price of another place 20 miles down the road. Fall would say, “Well, what did they tell you about security?” They’d say, “Security is very good.” “Well, then, why is there a 200% increase in the cost of rice from this point to this point? Don’t you think that it means that it isn’t secure?” And Fall just, just using American documents, based on what these people had told us about these particular—all of which we would write down, about what the rice was in these places and all of the land settlement in these areas—raised the serious issues and questions about honesty, truthfulness, candidness in the war.

We all know that the first casualty of war is truth, and this was the time where at least for me, it fit into the internal anxiety that I had, the feeling that I had, going back to these other life experiences, where I began to see similar kinds of uprisings that were coming from other places. It began to seem different—rather than the neat aspects of Cold War, East/West that we started with, and I think that was the beginning of my transition, which took place almost immediately afterwards. It started being expressed in different ways over a longer period of time.

Young: Your friends and others, and Bernard Fall. This questioning began—you began to absorb this, the degree of misrepresentation maybe there was in Vietnam. This was after your first trip, those questions began to arise. That was after your ’65 trip, but later you took a much longer trip and you didn’t get all—you didn’t accept all this briefing in ’68. [Adam] Clymer says in his book that this is what you felt was really the—the ’68 trip confirmed your real reservations and turned you toward being against the war. When you were talking just now, were you referring to when you came back to the United States?

Kennedy: Yes.

Young: After ’64?

Kennedy: Yes, in ’65, when I came back. October of ’65.

Young: So that was—you were already learning. Serious reservations.

Kennedy: Serious issues and questions on this. By ’68, I had a pretty keen awareness and understanding. I had made some talks, some speeches there, but there were a lot of other things that were going on there in the Congress as well. We were dealing with the draft issues, about

who was going to serve, starting on what is really fair here in the United States? We had a million people eligible. Are we going to take 100,000? What about these deferments, who ought to get them?

We didn't have any kind of success, but I was interested in trying to make sure that we were going to have a fairer system for those who were going to go over there. I did that through our Manpower Subcommittee and even though this was in the Armed Services Committee, we could do it under the rubric of where we were in terms of manpower and I proposed, in '67, what they called the random selection system, the lottery. I had some amendments on the—I guess it was called the Selective Service Act, the Draft Act, to try and eliminate some of the deferments unsuccessfully. And then I made talks and speeches, and started to work on getting a random selection system. It was strongly opposed by the Armed Services Committee and General [Lewis B.] Hershey and others in the institution, but we were working on that. After that, we had been working on getting medical teams over there to work on the refugees and work on building hospitals, with legislation back here in the Congress. Then we began meeting with a number of our colleagues, who were experiencing similar increasing concerns about the war and the direction.

By the time we went to Vietnam in '68, we went over at Christmas time and it inconvenienced a number of people who gave up Christmas and went over ten days early, the setup team. I spent, as I said, ten days there during that period of time, and had very talented, good people who were very experienced, who set up the schedule. It was just a very powerful—

Young: This was a trip with a very decided, it seems to me, and large purpose. Dave Burke was involved in the planning of that and was with you part of the time over there, or maybe all the time, an advance team. So it strikes me that you had a very specific set of objectives.

Kennedy: We had Barrett Prettyman—I mean this is a first rate lawyer in Washington and very distinguished, and I think a fellow named John Nolan went there, also a very successful lawyer, very accomplished, and had worked with President Kennedy. So we had a very good group. Just coming back on this transition period from '66, after the '65 trip, I published that Refugee Subcommittee report, which outlined that. And then I was on *Meet the Press* around that time and indicated that the fundamental concept, the commitment to Vietnam, should be preserved. I stated that. But I went over to Geneva that year to discuss prisoners of war with the Red Cross, and from that time on, took an interest in the prisoners of war, what we could do to gain their release. Eventually we found out about them, and then we were able to. We were the first ones. I guess the Foreign Relations Committee was notified similarly, much later, I think in the early '70s, about that, but that's another story.

Then in June of that year, I suggested the lottery on the television program *Issues and Answers*. So were working on the humanitarian, working on the prisoners of war, working over there and then working on the issues of who was going to fight in that war back here. Eventually we were successful on the lottery in the early '70s, when they had the acceptance, President Nixon did, of the recommendation of the Burke Marshall Commission. They recommended a random selection system, and I always thought that the random selection system, which said that everyone was going to be eligible to serve, and the Tet Offensive were the two elements that brought the war to a close.

Young: Well, on the draft reform, you were trying to get a fairer system for service at precisely the time that the casualty rate was soaring. It strikes me that what this would involve would be the willingness of people who found a way to escape the war, to bring them into it, from their point of view. So was that part of the resistance to reforming the draft system to make it fairer?

Kennedy: I thought it was more a bureaucratic system. It's almost what we've got today. It won't make much difference because those troops are going to be fighting, and a year from now or a year and a half, and the war will be over by then. So you have that sort of attitude today. Institutionally and bureaucratically it's working just fine, and people have enough problems and they weren't going to shift to change this. You know it's interesting because in the First World War they had the lottery, and it worked OK in that war.

It always seemed to me that at the time of the conflict, the volunteer army is fine if you're going to have these sporadic incidents when you were going to need the use of force in an otherwise peaceful situation, but if you have the kind of involvement of the country involved in a conflict, I think that that burden ought to be shared.

Let's just go back a little bit about other things that were going on during that time. There was an enormously interesting—in June of '66 at the White House, Lyndon Johnson called the forty members down at about 4:30 in the afternoon. He had [Robert] McNamara, I think maybe [Dean] Rusk. He had—

Young: [McGeorge] Bundy maybe?

Kennedy: I think the head of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] at that time. There were probably 40 to 50 House and Senate members, and he said he wanted to hear from each of us on it. We all thought, how is he going to hear? I mean, it's 4:30 in the afternoon, we all have to get someplace by 6:00. How is this going to happen? He just sat there, and he drank Coca-Cola with those people, and he got an answer out of all of them. At the beginning, everybody was saying how it's important that we fight communism and that we were going to be successful and we're going to stay with them. He was a little bit put off in the very beginning, but he warmed up, because he heard a lot of nice things about it.

I indicated, in looking over the notes on it, that I was going to be one who dissented somewhat from this, and thought that we ought to be looking at greater diplomatic initiatives, and that we ought to consider bombing pause—more diplomatic initiatives and less bombing. Then he kept going around the room, and there was a question about whether we ought to put up a wall, and they indicated he was looking at that or thinking about that. One of the members of the Senate, this was so authentic of Lyndon Johnson, President Johnson, said, "Well, why aren't we changing the leadership and getting somebody good in there? Someone who's going to be—"

Young: The Vietnamese—

Kennedy: "—the South Vietnamese leader who's going to be good and clean and effective in terms of the administration and be our ally." President Johnson said that in Polk, Texas or wherever, there had been a bad mayor down there and people said, "Lyndon, why don't you get a good Mayor?" So he said OK, he'd help get a good mayor. So he got this young person who didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't chase women, and they elected him as mayor of Polk, Texas.

Six months later, people in his district at that time came up to him and said, “Lyndon, we need a new Mayor.” Lyndon said, “Why?” And they said, “Well, because the new mayor is drinking, gambling and chasing women,” and Lyndon said, “If I can’t keep a good mayor in Polk, Texas, how the hell do you think I’m going to keep a Prime Minister in Saigon, Vietnam?” And that sort of ended the conversation at that point.

This poor Congressman or Senator sat back at that part. Johnson did it with such verve and storytelling ability, it was—that part is interesting. At 7:00 he said, “Well, the ones who have talked can leave, but the others I want to keep.” And I went back to my house and at quarter of 11:00 that night, my friend John Tunney had just left. He stayed there not only—he stayed with them until the last one spoke. So Lyndon Johnson was in there from 4:30 to 10:30, listening to members of Congress. I mean, who does that?

Young: Was he hearing—

Kennedy: He was hearing what he wanted as—

Young: Except from you.

Kennedy: Well, very few others. My notes that we have, that Senator [George] McGovern was down there. He obviously was giving him a different talk. The idea was to hear from some of those who had differing views, although he picked a pretty balanced crowd. But I had the feeling that he might have been hearing it but he wasn’t listening to it. That was some time in the spring/summer of ’66 and then later in ’66, I testified, I went down and testified on the lottery.

Young: You said he was nervous at the beginning, LBJ was—he didn’t know what he would be hearing. I think most of the people he had assembled were people who actually had been over there.

Kennedy: Yes. I think he asked all the people that were over there.

Young: And there had been a lot of people going over there, and they were basically telling—a lot of them were telling him what he wanted to hear.

Kennedy: That’s true.

Young: Was that because they—why?

Kennedy: Well, I think again, it’s the atmosphere of the times. All that you could probably understand, that there is still a very strong Cold War mentality at that time.

Young: Also deference to the President, Commander in Chief.

Kennedy: Certainly that was part of it. I’d say by ’67, there were—you had a few other people. I think Frank Church and McGovern, [Stuart] Symington, I think in the caucus, it was probably ’67, he’d been very strong for the support of it. He began to change and that made a big difference in the Democratic Caucus, because Symington had been Secretary of the Air Force,

and was from the heartland of the country. It was a relatively small group. You had probably a couple in the Republicans; [Mark] Hatfield, but very few until about '67 and then '68 obviously.

Young: At the time of that meeting, did you feel that the Senate or maybe the Congress in general was not as—was behind the curve in terms of the movement of public opinion.

Kennedy: I think so. I mean, clearly it was, and my sense is that the people were ahead. It doesn't come quickly to mind with the examples that you have in terms of the rocky situation, the current situation in Iraq. There are obvious examples of what's happening, and not just the polls. You can say that much more clearly. There was also a recognition somewhere in here now, '65, that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, that the attack on the Americans had been hyped, and that was enormous. I mean, we began to get this series of different activities.

I was against the Iraqi War from the beginning, but you give people a series of steps—even people who eventually become against the Iraqi War—where they didn't have enough troops and they dismantled the Iraqi Army and they shouldn't have, and they didn't have the armor and they should have. So you have enough examples now to where people grow in their disillusionment. In Vietnam you had a much larger, I mean, it was in the context of the global, East/West kind of conflict. But suddenly, people began to feel that they're being lied to over there, and when that begins to happen, it has enormous implications.

Young: I think the press and the reporters in Vietnam, you had some pretty good reporters over there, and they were filing reports and the media, the television, became very prominent here. You'd see the body bags. It was the body bag count every day, and that was a new element in the coverage of war, to have this massive media coverage, which was mostly negative, at home, of the war. I just remember watching it. Did you have any particular impressions of the quality of the press reporting over there? Did you meet [David] Halberstam or any of those guys?

Kennedy: I think your point is absolutely true. I mean, there was a constant drumbeat from the press about the lack of progress in the war, in every aspect of it, and I think that that was a big contributor. That was a big contributor. I think, moving back from—we can get into the particulars on it, but I think moving back to the lessons—I think it's important to get the lessons.

I think one of the big lessons or the spin offs of this is, what is the role of the larger power? I mean, shouldn't we have recognized a lesson that the use of military power in these is—having built this massive military capability, superpower, what is its value in this post the collapse of the Soviet Union? What is its value? How does it fit in militarily? How does it fit in strategically? How does it protect America, versus America's security interests? This should set off big shockwaves as to what is security, what should be our national effort in order to be able to deal with our interests, the interests of our allies in the world. It clearly made no impression upon those who got us into Iraq, clearly made no impression on them. I mean, they had complete confidence and trust that the military machine was going to be successful against this third world country in the Middle East.

And then I think you've got this extraordinary sense of the diversion of a lot of resources into that war, which could have been used to put the domestic agenda back on the track again. They tried to get refocused on where we're going as a country in dealing with domestic issues. Our

people, investing in our people, investing so that people are going to have the opportunity in the future to have useful and happy and fruitful and satisfying lives. That was all diverted, and I think also an enormous casualty was the truthfulness of the Federal Government. I mean, there was the understanding, awareness, belief that was there in the early '60s that we could deal with our challenges, deal with our problems, come to grips with these issues. We saw enormous progress in that area.

The generation that had fought in the war came back and said we fought in the war, now we can fight the challenges here at home. What are the biggest ones? Racism, and we had progress in the '64 act, the '65 act. What about our elderly? We passed that in '64 and '65, the Medicare. We passed education. So we were doing all of those things and this war just brought all of those kinds of things to a halt. The collapse of trust in terms of the Federal Government and the emergence, I think, of Ronald Reagan that just took this kind of aspect of lack of trust in government and used it cleverly, politically, to both enhance his own regime politically and also to further undercut that opportunity for government to be a force, to try and assemble the different kinds of elements in the country and in the society in dealing with a domestic agenda. Just carry that on into the future, and we have not recovered. We have not recovered from that.

I mean obviously number one is the loss of those precious lives, the 55,000, and the waste, particularly from 1968 on, where everyone politically said, "We are going to end this war," and they continued it for political reasons. Now we are continuing this war in Iraq for political reasons, to carry this thing through until the end of George Bush's career, and that loss of lives is just horrific. So we're not learning any of these lessons, these lessons that were so apparent, and were again reinforced, I think to some degree—we probably won't get into it today but the whole Contra situation, where we said, "They're coming up here and if we don't win the Contra War, they're going to come up and fight in Harlingen, Texas." Harlingen, Texas is going to be—remember Harlingen, Texas. They're going to run through South Texas, going to come all the way on up and threaten our people and all the rest of this. The Americans bought all into this, and you look at what's happening down there, struggling, when finally the Congress ended the war. Finally Congress ended the war, but it took five years.

Young: Well, yes, you're hearing recently, Harlingen, Texas. It's "If we don't win in Iraq they'll be coming over here," or "We can't bring people over here because they might do this." Wasn't there another lesson here, and that is—because you made a big point of this in your public statements and also in your proposals. How do you save a country you're destroying? How do you bring a stable government? How do you build a nation? We're talking about nation building way back then, when it was what you needed to do and demonstrate with the refugees, with the displaced people. You need to give them something to live for. You need to give them some practice in democracy. You need to take care of their health so that they are prepared to govern themselves at some point and get rid of the government. All those issues seems to me to be—they are parallels that I'm thinking of today. We can't win the hearts and minds, we call it today. Don't you think that's another lesson of the war?

Kennedy: I think so. One of the oldest is the fact that you can't superimpose these values from the top down. It has to be something that comes from the bottom up. I mean, that's the American experience as compared to trying to impose these issues from the top down, which is most

dramatic, the Iraq experience, but I think it was true in terms of Southeast Asia as well. I don't know how many times we have to learn history.

Well, maybe we'll take a break for a minute or so, to see where we're going to go.

Young: OK.

[BREAK]

Young: OK, it's recording now.

Kennedy: I think it's certainly so that at the start of the war, I had a basic presumption in favor of decisions that my brother made, and I think that certainly was reinforced after—I mean, I had enormous confidence in him, a great belief in him, and I was exposed to enough of the general kinds of discussions that take place, and they'd take place frequently down here on Cape Cod on the weekend. I mean, he always wanted to get away from the heavy lifting, but he was always willing to talk about anything that any of us were interested in. We had both brothers and sisters here who were interested in hearing him out on issues. So I came to it as someone who was aware of the Cold War implications. I'd seen those Cold War implications from Checkpoint Charlie, and I think I mentioned Berlin, which was very much alive in the fall of '62, and then we had the Cuban Missile Crisis. So this was very much alive, and the idea of the domino theory was something that appeared to make a good deal of sense, particularly having seen what happened in Eastern Europe.

There was a strong presumption that my brother had it right in Vietnam. Although I was aware that towards the midsummer of '63 he had some qualms, and he had made statements about the Vietnamese fighting the Vietnamese. He had also asked Maxwell Taylor to go over and do a confidential review for him. I mean this was obviously based upon his judgment that he needed a new direction and a different direction, that he inherently had some very serious concerns about it. I've never really speculated about what would have been or could have been, but I have the clearest feeling and sense that there wouldn't have been this dramatic escalation of the conflict. I just don't believe that's the direction he was headed in. I don't know how that would have worked out otherwise, but I really feel very confident that he was beginning to understand that this was a conflict that wasn't ultimately going to be resolved militarily.

Young: Did your brother Robert [Kennedy] share that view?

Kennedy: I think so. Perhaps not quite as much initially. I think Bobby came at it from—I don't think Bobby went to Vietnam. I don't remember him going there.

Young: There was a consideration that he might go, and I think it was judged that he was not the right person to go.

Kennedy: I'm not sure. In any event, he read deeply about the war and he talked to many, many people about it, and was very concerned about it. Let me just talk for a minute on my own approach to it. I'd probably say I entered this tangentially, rather than should we be there or shouldn't we be there, should we withdraw or should we cut off the bombing. I got into all of that but by nature and disposition, and responsibility in the Senate, I started off with the people issues, the humanitarian issues, and the issues of justice that surrounded the war. It was the draft, issues on the draft, eventually the issues of amnesty.

The first hearings and probably the only hearings that we had on the issue of amnesty, I worked with Senator [John] Stennis to get a consideration of conscientious objectors so that they would get a fair hearing at the time that they had been selected. So we had the prisoners of war issue, and then finally we had the statements that we ought to stop the bombing, negotiate, get away from search and destroy, declare and hold, and then to stop the funding, the whole range of progressive postures and positions, which were later.

I think Bobby was more upfront on the issue. He had serious reservations about this. I think one of the very interesting historical meetings was the series of meetings that my brother Bobby had with McNamara on Saturday mornings. I don't think that they were ever written up in McNamara's book. I read McNamara's book and I would have picked those up, but I don't think he ever really wrote about them. Bobby talked about it very cautiously, but there was no question in my mind that he had a dramatic impact in finally shifting McNamara around, and McNamara did get shifted around on it.

I went out to the house a number of times. We'd go out to play football and have lunch out there. He was always late because he had been over to see McNamara, and it was always done quietly. I think probably it was one of the things that Johnson found out about, that this was happening. Bobby felt stronger and stronger about the mistake of the war in '67, '68, as he was thinking about whether to run or not run. This was obviously a big factor in his judgment and decision, whether he should or shouldn't. His great concern was that the war issue—he was concerned about the war issue and about poverty in America—and his great concern was if he ran, that the war or even the war issue would be subsumed to the fact that it was Kennedy against Johnson and a very personal battle, and that the issue would not be there, and it would get distorted or misrepresented, and not be clear for the American people to make a judgment decision about whether he was right or wrong about it. He had that feeling and that sense.

I never discussed with Bobby the fact that we had to lay low on Vietnam because Jack had allegedly gotten us into it. I think the fact is, if you read the history, it was [Dwight] Eisenhower who got us into the war. I mean, he was the first one to put the U.S. military advisors in there. It was another one of these things that my brother inherited. It's probably not something greatly different from what it was at the Bay of Pigs, which was an operation that was much further along and for which my brother never forgave himself for being sort of a willing figure on that, when all the forces and stars were lined up to move ahead. He did and he regretted it. I think the solution on the Cuban Missile Crisis, to a great extent, was almost a result of what happened at the Bay of Pigs. I mean, his decision to rely on his own instinct and his own judgment and his own understanding about people's reactions and how they were going to act and react, and his measurement of time—a whole combination of different kind of elements. He had good judgment, and that we saw at the Cuban Missile Crisis, and it's very difficult for me to believe

that with the kind of maturity he had by then he would have continued this. But we had been very wary—I had and Bobby certainly was—about predicting what he would have done, other than having heard enough before that to have been very wary about the kind of buildup that we had there.

Getting back to the other statement, I never told Bobby that, “We’ve got to hold back, because Jack was the one who got us into this.” That never really—both of us would have felt very strongly that he would have wanted us to do what we thought was right. I mean, I certainly felt that we could be subjected to criticism—you know, “Your brother got us in and what are you yakking about?”—but that would be a political problem for us to have to deal with personally. But it never really—I never felt all that amount. Maybe I did subconsciously in terms of my early interventions on the war, coming to it collaterally from the people’s point of view and from these other points of view on it, and beginning to face it in ’66 and right after that more frontally, and then obviously frontally during the ’68 campaign, and then being one of the prime movers in cutting off the support.

Young: I think what you said is just important for the historical record. It was not the case that you got involved in the way you did through the refugees and the humanitarian concerns because you had to restrain yourself on the issues of the war itself because of your brother’s involvement. You came at it, it seems to me, in a different way, and for wholly authentic reasons that were uniquely yours, I think.

Kennedy: Yes.

Young: I just wanted to make that clear. There was no one turning point, was there, for you? Or was there?

Kennedy: Not really. I mean, it was a continuing and ongoing awareness and disillusionment. I mean by the ’68 campaign and Nixon saying, “I have a plan to end it,” and then nothing. I was at a meeting with President Nixon at a meeting shortly after that, and he was talking about withdrawal of troops, and how he was going to do all of this, none of which was for real. Then you had such complete distortion and misrepresentation, and such extraordinary—

Young: Did you feel that was deliberate deception for reasons of state, or because—

Kennedy: I never thought he had a plan. He said he had a plan, and I thought that was phony, and I think most everybody else did. You don’t have a secret plan. “I’m going to have a secret plan.” Eisenhower said, “I’ll go to Korea,” but you did have a sense that he was going to do something that was going to get us out. But with Nixon it just didn’t have a ring. A secret plan—people understood you weren’t going to announce it because whatever you announced, you were going to tee off people, and better to have the political secret plan. I have no sense or any recollection whatsoever that he ever did, or knew anybody who believed that he did have a plan, but it was very powerful politically. He didn’t neutralize the issue. I mean he diminished it, the difference is not insignificant. I don’t know how you’d calibrate it. So everyone became much more emboldened about this. I mean, the losses were so overwhelming. It was so clear to see what was going to happen, and the Congress finally moved.

I think one point that we hadn't talked about, which we've chatted about privately, is the fact that in the great American history, there was reluctance to second guess American Presidents when they involve us in wartime, and certainly that had been true in the recent times. World War II. The Korean War, there was some concern but never really criticism. At that time there was the flap about [Douglas] MacArthur and the potential danger of invading China. There wasn't a *lot* of flap, and this was the first time. Lincoln. You could go back to his opposition to the Mexican American War. We don't have many instances where you had, once we were in a war—I mean, you have differences in the War of 1812, yes—but once we were in a war, you didn't have many instances where Congress was prepared to stop it and halt it.

This was the first really notorious example of that, and so there was the obvious hesitancy and reluctance in terms of moving ahead in that direction. I think the Congress finally moved, but it took them a long, long time to move. There's no question that people were ahead of the Congress in doing it, but it did take a long time. On the other hand, it takes a good deal to get Congress to take that kind of an issue on.

Young: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was 1964, although that took a decade, almost a decade for the War Powers of Resolution, 1974. That's quite a long timeframe and a lot has to go on for that to happen, but in the end, there *was* a War Powers of Resolution. Congress *did* move fairly decisively, didn't it?

Kennedy: It did, and I think that's certainly a reflection of the fact that the American people, and certainly the Congress, understand that there's a shared responsibility in going to war and conducting a war. The old adage that you can't conduct a war or a successful one if the American people aren't behind you is still true. The fact that this thing is a shared responsibility is something that most members of the Congress and the Senate understand—not all members—and increasingly so as that war went on and this current war in Iraq is going on. The founding fathers, in their own good judgment, divided the authority and the power, as they did in other areas, judicial appointments and so many other areas. For the war making—the power to declare war is in the Congress—the Commander-in-Chief in the Executive Branch and the resources in the Congress, treaty making powers in the Congress.

So this was very much a shared responsibility, but it certainly wasn't believed to be so by the Presidents—it wasn't by President Johnson and it certainly wasn't by Nixon. As a result of that, the War Powers Act, which tried to restate what basically our founding fathers had felt, that in times of emergency, a President had the greatest flexibility, particularly if Congress had not acted, and if they thought there was a real imminent threat to the United States' security, had to act. Their ability to continue a conflict and their responsibility to the American people, and Congress' responsibility to end a conflict, and the War Powers Act was an attempt to try and further define what those responsibilities would be, so that the American people would understand and Congress would be encouraged to involve itself.

Young: Do you feel that anything positive came out of it in terms of lessons about refugees, or did you feel that you accomplished something for the refugees or in our thinking about refugees or in our thinking about how you handle the humanitarian problems of war?

Kennedy: What happened with the refugees in Vietnam was that when the Viet Cong became stronger and stronger, the people who had been doing the contracting with the Americans, and the people who had been part of the whole American greater bureaucracy, gradually retreated. Most of them went out to Vung Tau, a very lovely resort area, and the wealthier people went there. When the final collapse was coming, they were the ones who left, and they were the ones who got here, into the United States, about 700,000 of them. The people who were the great allies to the United States, out in the field in all the paddies and all these local communities, couldn't get out. They were imprisoned and worked in labor camps for a number of years. There was some recrimination, but not much.

If you read back, the right wing all says there was this big bloodbath. They were all predicting it, but there never was. But people nonetheless had to go into these work camps. They came on out and by that time, Americans had gotten tired of taking refugees, and they were the real ones that we had responsibility for. It took a lot. We got in a number of them, but we should have had fewer numbers in the very beginning and more that were set aside for these people at the very end. We're repeating that problem today in Iraq by not taking people who have been translators, have worked for the United States Military or the western press or non-profit organizations that are all targeted by the insurgents, as well as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. We haven't taken them and we're not willing to do that. That was the spin off in terms of— One thing that did happen is that President Carter, in '76, welcomed people back to the United States who had gone to Canada, let them come on back to the United States.

Young: Was the amnesty something that the feeling was so strong about it, Congress really couldn't have done. I know you tried.

Kennedy: Congress never could have done that. The feelings were so, so, so incredibly strong. We had these hearings, and they were enormously interesting in the sense we had parents who had lost a son in Vietnam, and they would say that they thought another boy who might have been in that boy's class or something, and had gone to Canada, should be able to come back because their son died for American values, and those values included a conscience.

Then you'd have someone else, parents whose son was killed over there, and they'd say, "We ought to catch that guy in Canada and just string him up, because he's a yellow coward for not serving. My son died and he should have served." You just had every possible emotion on all sides of these issues, unbelievable. The interesting thing, it went from being ten to one— We had these hearings for two or three days, and it was on all of the networks each night. The contrast, you usually had two on two. You'd have somebody whose son went to Canada, and the father would come down and say, "Don't let my son in, because I've seen too many friends die." So you had this incredible mix of people that you wouldn't have expected to have these views, and it went from ten to one down to three to one being opposed to it, but it didn't ever move beyond that in terms of the American public. Finally, Carter said that they could come back and there was never a ripple.

Young: I guess he just did it by Executive Order. I think that was the first thing he did when he got in the White House, and got it out of the way.

Kennedy: It's a very understandable emotional feeling, particularly the enormous loss of life and suffering on that, and the way these soldiers were treated when they came back, with great disdain and dishonor. You know the stories they all say, they would never go through the airport unless they changed into civilian clothes, because people used to demean them and everything. I mean, it was a very nasty, nasty time. And of course you had enormous convulsions here in this country during that time too. In '67 we had the burnings of the cities, in Watts and Newark, and in '68 the loss of Dr. [Martin Luther] King, my brother. We went through this period where Americans became so detached from anything to do with their government or belief that anything decent could be done by their government. It took an incredible period of time to get that kind of feeling back, respect for our institutions and political leaders.

Young: The country is being torn apart by a war instead of rallied, which was usual in the past. You're of the generation, and your parents were, when your country calls, you serve. It's quite a measure of the loss of faith and the polarizing influences that went on, that so many people were avoiding service.

Kennedy: Do you want to push these buttons for a second and we'll see where we are for other areas.

Young: OK.

[BREAK]

Kennedy: One observation I left out earlier in the description of the trip to Vietnam in '68 was the whole issue of Vietnamization. This was a fellow named [Robert] Komer, whose idea that he sold Lyndon Johnson on was how were you going to basically liberate these various communities, these settlement areas. We went to some that had been effectively what they call "liberated" or now firmly in the hand of the South Vietnamese, and he had a checklist. He said that if they had a well so they could get fresh water, if they had a school, if they had a dispensary, those were three of the things. If they had a playground, if they had some security around the area. He had ten different categories and if all ten were there, he gave them the check that they were liberated or that they were firmly in the South Vietnamese corner.

If you went into his office, he had a map of the different provinces of South Vietnam, with little flags all over them that showed all these communities that now had been reestablished and that were back in the corner of the South Vietnamese. Just unbelievable naiveté in terms of what was happening, what was going on, what we were hearing from people who were there. We had seen so many instances where they had given blankets out when we were there and took them back when we weren't, and recent painting and things being all dressed up in different communities that we went to. Then if we went to others that were not expected, the kind of disrepair that they were in. But it was that kind of thinking that was so pervasive at that time.

It seems to me that in looking at Vietnam and also at Iraq, I mean this is well worth giving serious thought to, the parallels, but what was very apparent to me is that the neocons, the ones

who were so eager to get us into Iraq, were individuals who believed that we really had won in Vietnam, or that we could have won if we'd stayed the course, if we hadn't let the politicians intervene, if we had listened to the military, we would have won. Even Henry Kissinger suggests that in his writings, his statements, his speeches and all the rest, that really basically we weren't driven out. It was the failure of will at the very end that they had things under control, that it was going their way—and that's a common view of the neocons, believing with that awesome military power, that things can be done the way they wanted to do it.

That's of course reflected in the Gulf I War, where the neocons said we should have gone to Baghdad, and you have [Paul] Wolfowitz and [Douglas] Fife and [Richard] Pearl and [Donald] Rumsfeld and several others who said that we should have gone to Baghdad, and had that critical letter on President [George H. W.] Bush. Then you had the response by President Bush and his National Security Advisor, [Brent] Scowcroft. So the fact remains, you have them coming into the war in Iraq believing again that they could accomplish this and deal with this very quickly and do it very easily.

It was this same kind of failure to learn the lessons of history—failure to learn the lessons of Vietnam, failure to learn the lessons of the Iran Contra—failure to understand history and then to repeat it by feeling that they could do it quick and easy in Iraq. That was a catastrophic misjudgment in the ability to use military power today, and that is the debate that we have not had in this country, about what is in our real national security. How do we develop a process in terms of our national security? We're doing somewhat better with regards to homeland security, but we really haven't gotten into what is really true in terms of our national security, what makes us strong. I mean clearly the elements that make us strong are going to be a United States that is strongly committed to its values and its ideals, as compared to torture in terms of Guantanamo, and is going to have a strong economy and is going to be committed to try to use its forces and influence to try and find those constructive forces that are in these various challenging areas of the world, and try to exercise positive influence.

Example, Northern Ireland. You take the grassroots leadership that was in Northern Ireland, of all the political parties, plus then the leadership from people outside who could have an influence on it, which was basically [Tony] Blair and [Bertie] Ahern, and it was [William] Clinton over the period of time and President Bush to some extent, and all working, for a ten-year period since the time of the ceasefire of Northern Ireland to a time where two weeks ago this Tuesday, they transferred power, gave power to [Ian] Paisley and [Martin] McGuinness. This was a monumental moment and it took a lot of time, but it had the grassroots support.

I remember in this instance, asking Blair, when I was in Northern Ireland, why he thought it would take this time, and he said this time, unlike other times, he could look at the audience that he was speaking to—and the audience he was speaking to at Stormont were the representatives of the most conservative Paisley-ites as well as those who supported Sinn Fein and others. He said he could look at all of them and see that this time they were committed to making the process work, they had come through the hot fires of domestic kinds of consideration and had been welded together by these outside forces in their own country and society, courageous political leaders, but those that were immediately outside, in terms of Ahern and Blair and by the United States and other interested groups.

That is the example of what worked in this recent time, and the idea that we can achieve and accomplish this ourselves, with the bomb and the bullet in Iraq, and bomb our way and shoot our way into a political resolution, where even the military officials have all indicated that there is only going to be the resolution when we get a political settlement, and that there's not a military solution. Even [David] Petraeus, the others now, [George] Casey, have agreed to that. But the absolute disintegration, I don't think you could stop that. The idea they could be abominable, or when there's enormous disruption, you're not dealing with the refugees, the people who are being threatened, who have worked with the United States military, worked with the press, worked with the non-governmental agencies, and who are targeted, you know, two million people who are displaced in the country. The numbers of the civilian casualties, the killings and the bombings and the war. The story the other night about the people who have lost limbs and must wait six years, allegedly, to get help.

Now, the United States knows how to mass-produce things. We're slow in mass-producing up-armored Humvees, that took long. We are incredibly slow in being able to help them produce the prostheses for people. We just don't get it. I think, myself, it's beyond the point where you could produce enough and take care of enough people over there that you'd ever be able to try and turn this around. We have gone from liberators to occupiers, and to being people that are perceived to be hindrances to the development of their kind of society. So I think it's failure to understand culture, failure to understand religion, failure to understand traditions, failure to have people who speak the language. It's an arrogance, that we can somehow impose what we think is correct and right on other people, and the American people haven't got that. That's not a quality.

They've got other qualities, believing that their system is correct and we obviously—all of us believe in the *Constitution* and the *Declaration of Independence*, but I always remember Justice [William O.] Douglas telling me years and years ago. He was on the Supreme Court of the United States. He said, "The best thing the United States could do is to export the First Amendment." Export the First Amendment, and if we could do something with food, because we spend billions and billions of dollars plowing ground and not growing food, to help hungry people or to teach them obviously, to be able to grow. He said, "If we could do all those things, we'd be a long way down in terms of being the most respected country in the world. But when we sacrifice our values, sacrifice our ideals, and demonstrate an arrogance, we get what we've got today, and that is a world in which the United States is hard put to find friends and supporters."

Young: Well, what about—do you see any parallels? As you mentioned earlier, your brother was already talking in the summer of '63, and he said publicly earlier than that, the Vietnamese people have to be able to do this for themselves. We're there to help, but they have to be able to do it themselves. Years later, Nixon talks about the Vietnamization, finally, of the conflict, after all the spilling of the blood and everything. Now, we have a government that in Iraq, that we're telling to take charge of the situation and do it for themselves so we can get out. Is there any moral in those three instances that you can see, any parallels?

Kennedy: What is it that these people are fighting for? I mean obviously there's some criminal element, there's thugs in there and political exploiters there. But how in the world is it that they have all these superb fighters now? We just heard of Lebanon last week. Battle hardened veterans from Iraq are coming on in there to stir up. Well, where do they get their training

camps? Why are they so zealous in terms of their beliefs and their fighting? What is it that—where did they get all of this training? We've got 300,000, we've been over there now almost five years. We've been training, they've got 300,000, and we still haven't got—we've only got a small, eight or ten thousand Iraqi soldiers who can fight independently over there. I mean, what is it about? What it is about is the corruption that is in there and the fact that these people don't feel that it's a system that's worth fighting for, because they have not bought into it.

This is the lesson. I mean, we hear, we learn from all about why people do fight for heart, why they are willing to sacrifice. There has to be something that's going to be—they're going to have to feel a part of it. That's not existing now in Iraq, and I don't see it as coming together. I mean, this goes back to the 1920s, and three different groups that had been divided up. I think there's a sense by some to have an Iraqi—and they've got 130 billion dollars worth, or a million or a billion barrels of oil over there, they're sitting on. So they've got enormous wealth in that country, an incredible civilization, an incredible background, and we are just—we have seen the destruction of the middle class, the destruction of all the leaders of this area, the purposeful object of the various insurgent groups to destroy every aspect of leadership so the thuggery and brutality can remain. We cannot escape our responsibility here.

Young: Certainly. I suppose it is a different situation on the ground in that you have not a unified force like the Viet Cong, backed by the North Vietnamese government to come in and take over. Here you have contention within, sectarian violence and fighting and jockeying for power within.

Kennedy: Well, you could negotiate with those figures, the Viet Cong, even though you had—

Young: That's what I was going to ask.

Kennedy: But you had the age-old historic conflict between the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. They weren't natural partners.

Young: That's true.

Kennedy: But they were prepared to—even though they were incredible rivals and a lot of hostility between them, but they could, the North Vietnamese could get them to halt and stop the fighting.

I think in Iraq it's been the major collapse of any kind of diplomatic initiatives and outreach in those areas, and I think that an awful lot goes back to the initial policy, which was all single minded, single driven by President Bush and the Americans. The countries in the area said, "If you want that, be our guest," and they just stepped aside. The idea that we think that that would go into chaos. You've got chaos now and I don't think the forces in that area would tolerate a chaotic situation. They don't have the firepower. They have enough firepower to kill each other, but there isn't the firepower for these massive kinds of larger brutality, where you get these military groups with tanks and all, that just go in and destroy different communities.

Young: How do you think it will end?

Kennedy: I think it does depend on whether you get any change in this administration, any willingness to try and break away completely from their policy and to see if they couldn't try to really get some kind of political, diplomatic initiatives moving. That would take a very dramatic shift and change in terms of this President and what he is prepared to do. I think what would happen if they said, you try to work out with the Congress that you don't do things now for 90 days and I'll let [James] Baker go over, I'll let President Clinton, whoever it is, to go in there to work those regions, and we'll all agree to do something differently on this part if President Bush takes a step back.

I mean, I think a lot of different kinds of things could be done, particularly leaders of the Senate who are bipartisan—we can try and see if they could have them go for three weeks and see what can be done, what would have to be done. I mean, just a major, major alteration and shift. Get religious leaders. Where are these religious in those areas? Where are they? The Turkish Foreign Minister says he knows the leading Sunnis on that thing, and he's never been asked to talk to any of them. What's going on? I think the whole—and none of them will, because they're not going to pull George Bush's chestnuts out of the fire, and whether you could ever get people to talk to each other, whether we've gone too far for that, I think is—we may very well have now, but I think it was all possible.

Young: So it will take a new President.

Kennedy: Yes, I think so, because I don't think this one's going to do anything. It's my feeling he still could, but I don't think he will. Unfortunately, he's going to keep the war continuing to go on, probably draw down some troops but continue to go on until he's out of there, to protect his own tradition on this thing. I think that's an enormously sad and unfortunate judgment.

Young: I wonder what it is about Presidents who get locked, whether it be by ideology or because they've got to believe that they're prevailing, that the country is prevailing. I wonder what other force there is.

Kennedy: It's isolation, isn't it, complete isolation.

Young: Yes. Do you think Lyndon Johnson was really isolated from the facts on the ground, or was he deluded or deceived, or did he have a great deal of trouble understanding?

Kennedy: Well, I don't think he wanted to believe—he just couldn't do anything *but* believe, and then he got out of the Presidency. I think he just couldn't get any—he couldn't bear it any further, so he just got out. I think that's where it ended up with him.

Young: Well, it is interesting that—the circumstances are different—that the Congress did stipulate the number of Americans who would be in Vietnam not to exceed 4,000, when they were drawing down and that we haven't heard anything about in this Congress, except the efforts to have phased benchmarks. We're not nearly to the stage I guess where Congress is.

Kennedy: As you well know, we passed a repeal to Gulf of Tonkin and it didn't make any difference, and I don't believe repealing this resolution will make any difference. In Vietnam we started to reduce the funding in the early '70s for the war until finally it ended.

One particularly interesting little event that took place in relationship to Vietnam was the communication that I had from the Vietnamese about prisoners of war. This was in December of 1970. Prior to that time, we had explored with the Vietnamese the possibilities of getting a list of the names of the POWs. Then in December, I received a communication from Paris, from the government over there, that they would be willing to provide the list of the POWs to me. I think I called, at that time, Averell Harriman and perhaps one or two other people, to get an idea about how to handle it. I think Harriman suggested that I send someone over right away, who was a trustworthy, reliable person, and I asked John Nolan, who had been the representative of President Kennedy for getting some of the release of the Bay of Pig prisoners out of Cuba, to go over. He had been in the Justice Department, a prominent attorney, very trustworthy, loyal, and had gone to Vietnam for me in 1968. Highly regarded and respected.

He went over there, to Paris, and received the list, and immediately went to the American Embassy to give the list, so that they could notify the families. He was impressed that they were going to take a good deal of time to go over the list so that they didn't make any mistakes on it, which I suppose in retrospect made some sense, but it did seem to me to be a painfully long time, given the fact that these families were separated from their loved ones and they were constantly worrying about the condition of members of their family.

I had been on the Senate floor probably the day before, two days before, and I just, by coincidence, was sitting beside Bill Fulbright, and I mentioned to him that I had received this communication. He said that this was something that should be taken up by the Foreign Relations Committee, and I indicated to him that I had already asked somebody to go over there and he said, "Well, you should have let us know. We handle these things, and we should have followed up on it." I learned subsequently that they notified him, I guess, at the same time they notified me, and he sent someone over but Nolan got there before Fulbright's person. Fulbright's person brought the list back and we left ours there with the embassy, and they let people know about it. It was interesting with Fulbright because shortly after that, when I ran for the Senate Whip position—again, Fulbright had been with me earlier but this time he voted against, and we figured that this was one of the reasons or probably *the* reason, because he was piqued at this, even though I had a good relationship with him up to that time.

There was one other interesting contact from the North Vietnamese, and that was whether I had any interest in visiting. Again, we talked to—Dave Burke went and talked to Averell Harriman and said that Dave Burke ought to go, which he did, and talked to Le Duc Tho, I think, the principal negotiator for the Vietnamese, and told him that the only way I could possibly do it is if I got 30 or 40, 50 prisoners of war out of North Vietnam, but I couldn't do it for three or four. We've got the notes of those conversations, which are somewhat interesting. But we never heard anything else. These negotiations then were on track in terms of the peace negotiations were sort of moving along and on track then, and I think they just let this time just pass. But this really is a result of the continuing interest that we had in the humanitarian aspects, about POWs, about the refugees, about what was happening in the draft and those who had left and gone to Canada. There was a range of different issues, besides the direct issues, that related to stopping the war.

Young: So the North Vietnamese got in touch with you directly.

Kennedy: With me directly.

Young: On prisoners of war. Were there other things they got in touch with you about?

Kennedy: This was the one thing that they got in touch with us directly about.

Young: And did the Executive encourage this?

Kennedy: I don't remember having the—other than we let the embassy know right away. I don't believe that I had contact beyond that with the Secretary of State.