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Interview #5

Fulbright and the Bay of Pigs

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Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

RITCHIE: We left off last week with J. William Fulbright becoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, a major turning point in its history. Could you start by giving your opinion of Senator Fulbright, and what type of a person he was to work for in those years?

HOLT: Well, he was a joy to work for. As a matter of fact, when Wiley became chairman in '53 I thought about going back into journalism, I hadn't been out of it all that long at that point. But then I looked down the seniority on the Democratic side of the committee and thought if I stick around here a little bit, one of these days Fulbright will be chairman and it will be fun--and it was. I said he was a joy to work for, and that is true, but he was at the same time hard to work for in the sense that he had very high standards and a very low tolerance for mediocrity or run-of-the-mill performance, which I guess is one of the things that made it a joy, because it was a challenge. He was, most of the time, very low-keyed, not excitable, relaxed, easy-going. He is not overly endowed

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with patience and has a rather low threshold of boredom. But he didn't particularly take his frustration, his boredom, his impatience out on the staff. It was easy enough to tell when he was in a bad humor, and at those times it was prudent to postpone approaching him with something. Sometimes it couldn't be postponed. He was very open-minded, quite willing to consider almost any point of view or body of facts that concerned something which interested him. He used the staff in a way that no other chairman in my experience either before or after him did, that is, he would call one of us or more than one of us in to kick a problem around, what should be done about it and so on. Frequently he would get a variety of views or suggestions from the staff and he would then make up his mind himself. He was very open to dissent and argument. As a matter of fact, the most probing questions you would get from him was when you agreed with him. If he said, "It occurred to me this morning that such and such would be a good thing to do, what do you think of that?" And if you said, "Gee, I think that's a great idea," then he would come back at you: "Why?" You really had to have a pretty damn good case to convince him! On the other hand, if you said, "Well, I don't think that's a very good idea," he was very open to listen to why you didn't, sometimes he would abandon it and sometimes he wouldn't.

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He maintained a very sharp division between his office and staff as a senator from Arkansas and the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee, although during the period of his chairmanship there were some people that moved from his personal staff to the committee staff. The committee staff as such was never involved in Arkansas or in purely domestic affairs. As a matter of fact, even before he became chairman he was talking to Carl Marcy and me one day about the situation in the Middle East and proposed an idea for action--when he had an idea about what United States policy used to be it generally found its way into a speech, sometimes into conversation with the administration or a letter, but frequently into a speech. I've forgotten the specific topic that was being considered that day, but he was saying what would you think of doing so-and-so. And Marcy and I thought it was a sensible thing to do, but Carl raised the question of what would the reaction to it be in Arkansas. And Fulbright sort of bristled and said, "You leave Arkansas to me. I will trim on domestic matters for the sake of Arkansas and my constituents, but I'll be damned if I'll trim on foreign policy." I never saw him deviate from that, except possibly in the case of the famous "chicken war" in which he raised an enormous amount of hell because of the European Economic Community's restrictions on the importation of chickens,

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a large number of which are produced in Arkansas. That's a sort of a border line case. I thought I had something else in mind to say, but it escapes me.

RITCHIE: During the period we've been talking about, the 1950's, Fulbright became increasingly the most critical member of the committee toward the Eisenhower administration. In some respects the breakdown of the old bipartisan spirit of the committee towards the administration seemed to begin with his speeches about Suez and the Eisenhower Doctrine. He seemed very skeptical about Eisenhower and Dulles. Did you have any sense of that evolving in those days, and why he of all the senators seemed to be looking for a more independent role for the committee from the administration?

HOLT: No, I don't really. It was quite in character for him, and it reflected the evolution of his own thinking about things. He was very independent intellectually, politically, so far as foreign policy was concerned. I'm not quite sure if the way you put it is entirely accurate. Wayne Morse much more than Fulbright made a career out of disagreeing on policy matters and started it long before Fulbright, as a matter of fact. I've forgotten when Morse came on the Foreign Relations Committee.

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RITCHIE: It seems to me it was when he became a Democrat in 1955, wasn't it?

HOLT: I don't know, there was some delay because of his progression from Republican to Independent to Democrat. Morse maintained that Vandenberg had promised him the next Republican seat on the committee, and then when one developed the Republicans wouldn't give it to him. When he finally did come on it was as a Democrat, but before he was on Foreign Relations he was on Armed Services and those two committees were doing a lot of things jointly in those days. So Morse made his presence felt.

RITCHIE: When Fulbright became chairman, did the committee change? Did the way it did its work change? And was the atmosphere different on the committee?

HOLT: Well, it didn't change in any fundamental sense. The atmospheric, so to speak, changed in that in contrast to the Green period of something approaching a vacuum in the chairmanship the vacuum was filled, and there was a sense of direction, and things went more smoothly, and the press was enlightened instead of confused when it was briefed after committee meetings, and things like that. It was just a smoother operation.

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But the fundamental approach of the committee, the issues or the way it operated or so on, didn't change. As a matter of fact, it reverted to what it had been under George, who preceded Green.

RITCHIE: One remarkable thing about that whole period, I think, is that the staff basically stayed the same. After Francis Wilcox went to the State Department Carl Marcy became chief of staff, and you have all those changes in chairmen throughout the '50's until Fulbright became chairman, and yet there was very little shakeup in the staff.

HOLT: That's right.

RITCHIE: How do you account for that? Nowadays there are much more dramatic shakeups than that.

HOLT: Oh, goodness, yes. Well, staffs are much bigger now. Well, the Foreign Relations Committee had a tradition, not a very long one as Senate traditions go, but beginning with the effective date of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, it was effective in January of '47 with the beginning of the 80th Congress, primarily because of Vandenberg but also because most if not all of the rest of the committee agreed with Vandenberg on this point. This was stated explicitly in

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the committee rules, which adopted the point of view that we're going to take seriously the provisions of the Reorganization Act about professional career committee staffs. And they did.

RITCHIE: You do have a strong line of southern chairmen, with the exception of Wiley and Green. I wondered if that perhaps might have had some effect. Was there any affinity there that might have helped staff continuity?

HOLT: No, I don't think so. I think I'd quarrel a little bit with your description of a "strong line" of southern chairmen. The southern chairmen you had were strong characters. But you only had two of them for a period--let's see, Connally after 1947 was chairman for four years and George for two. You had Vandenberg for two years and Wiley for two and Green for two, so it's six and six. Well, of course, Fulbright was a southerner, and when you get to his era you had a strong line of southern chairmen if you take the whole period from '47 until now. No, I don't think that had anything to do with it. There's sort of a popular image that southerners may be a little bit more addicted to patronage than northerners, but I don't think there's much hard evidence to support it.

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RITCHIE: Where was Carl Marcy from? He came to the committee from . . .

HOLT: From the State Department.

RITCHIE: He was your colleague for many years. What was his role on the committee and how did you function with him?

HOLT: Very well. Of course he was chief of staff from '55 to '73 and his function was to run the staff, which he did very well. The staff in those days was not very formally structured. All the professionals were given the title "consultant," which I didn't like very much because I thought it was misleading. They eventually got away from that and started calling them something else, but that's the way it was for along time. There was nobody designated as deputy or number two to Marcy, but in fact I performed that function, acting as chief of staff during his absences and that sort of thing. Carl and I got along very well indeed. We have mutual respect for each other. We don't and we didn't always agree on everything, but who does? We communicated to a large degree by a process of osmosis. This particularly was true after most of the staff moved into the Dirksen Building and we were not in that cozy arrangement in the Capitol where we saw each other fifty times a day. But I guess as a result of long experience

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and close association with each other, with respect to any particular situation each of us could sense what the other one was thinking about it, or what approach the other one would take, without having a conversation about it. We used to go for days at a time without any contact with each other.

RITCHIE: Did you work mostly in the Dirksen Building and he in the Capitol?

HOLT: Yes.

RITCHIE: That was after 1958.

HOLT: When we moved into the Dirksen Building. I was one of those who moved. I guess maybe a part of the deal to get office space in the Dirksen Building was to give up a couple of rooms we had in the Capitol, one of which I had been located in, so I had to move. But I was glad to do it. To revert a moment to Green, the question of moving to the Dirksen Building came up while Green was chairman and Green resisted it. The original idea was to move everything to the Dirksen Building, and Green didn't like that. He was comfortable with that old place in the Capitol and he wanted to stay there. He had no notion what soever of the crowded conditions under which the staff had to work.

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There was resistance in the committee generally to the notion of giving up all of its space in the Capitol. They wanted to hold onto S-116 and S-117 and eventually that's the way it worked out. But it took a great deal of persuasion of Green to get us any space at all in the Dirksen Building. Morse was very helpful on that. At some point in Morse's education before he went into law he had studied a lot of psychology and he applied it very well in persuading people to do things without arguing with them. It was sort of ironic, because Morse was so argumentative about damn near everything, but when he wanted somebody to do something, as for example Green to agree to move to the Dirksen Building, he was very clever and skillful. But that's a digression, where were we?

RITCHIE: The move to the new building also gave you capabilities of having many more public meetings . . .

HOLT: Sure.

RITCHIE: More television and radio broadcasting than before. I guess you had to move to the Caucus Room for your public hearings.

HOLT: That's right.

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RITCHIE: But that wasn't particularly a concern of Green's?

HOLT: Well, Green just wanted to keep on doing things the way they had been done!

RITCHIE: The other members of the committee of that time included Mansfield and Humphrey, who both became the Democratic leader and whip in 1961, and Kennedy and Humphrey who were running for president. Did presidential politics ever intrude into the committee or get in the way of the committee's work in that period from '59 to '60?

HOLT: Well, the most striking intrusion that I recall is that it became damn near impossible to get a quorum because so many members of the committee were out campaigning. This is a recurring problem around the Senate in election years anyway, presidential politics aside from it, because senators concerned about their own races for reelection as senators aren't around very much. But particularly beginning in the late '50's presidential politics had intruded on it as well. You know, there have been years when three or four members of the Foreign Relations Committee were running for president.

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RITCHIE: John Kennedy was on the committee from '57 to '60, and you worked with him on a couple of occasions. What was your impression of him as a senator and as a member of the committee?

HOLT: Damn good. One of the brightest guys I've ever known, as a matter of fact. He could grasp a complicated thing very quickly, ask very penetrating questions. If you were going to brief him you'd damn well better do your homework. And he was very courageous in a political sense. The first thing I recall that really struck me about Kennedy was before he came on the committee, after he came to the Senate, during the debate over the St. Lawrence Seaway legislation, on which I did the staff work for the Foreign Relations Committee. Kennedy made a very well reasoned speech in favor of the seaway, which coming from a Massachusetts senator with the port of Boston strongly opposed to it was unprecedented and close to earth shattering. After he was on the committee he was a member of the subcommittee on Latin America at the time that the subcommittee under Morse's chairmanship began the study of United States Latin American relations, following the Nixon trip in '58. I was in charge of the study and I outlined it and sent copies around to the members of the subcommittee and they had a meeting over there one afternoon to consider

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this outline. Kennedy said, "I want to know what John Kenneth Galbraith thinks about this, he was in Latin America not long ago." So at his direction I called Galbraith and made an appointment and flew up to Boston one morning and spent the afternoon with Galbraith and then flew back to Washington and reported to Kennedy that Galbraith thinks this is fine, he had one or two other suggestions about people who should be brought in on it, and Kennedy said okay. He liked to search out for other opinions and it didn't really matter to him how much trouble it was on somebody's part to get them. I thought it was pretty *avant garde* to go to Boston and back in one day for maybe an hour's conversation with somebody, well hell around this period somebody on Kennedy's personal staff had done a speech for him on foreign policy and Kennedy said to him, "See what Walt Rostow thinks about it." Well, it turned out that Rostow was spending a year at Oxford in England, so one of Kennedy's guys got on an airplane and flew to England and discussed this thing with Rostow and came back!

The last two years that Kennedy was on the committee we didn't see a hell of a lot of him, you know he had other things on his mind. He was not the most faithful member of the committee in attendance, but when he was there he made a contribution.

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RITCHIE: Did you have any sense of what the relationship between Kennedy and Fulbright was at that time? Did they work together well or were they relatively independent of each other?

HOLT: I don't have any particular or very good sense of that. My impression is that they did not particularly work together. One reason being that Kennedy wasn't there all that much. Fulbright constantly complained as chairman about the difficulty of getting members to come to committee meetings. He used to growl at the staff: "Get so and so, call so and so and get him over here."

Particularly junior members, of whom Kennedy was one. He used to have us chasing Kennedy to get him to a committee meeting, with no success or even much hope of any success. And he would growl about Kennedy's absenteeism, and others too for that matter, but I remember Kennedy particularly. Fulbright supported Johnson for the Democratic nomination in 1960. I don't know, I don't recall that he made much of a public display about this, but it wasn't any secret. At one point during the spring, I guess, Harry Truman happened to be in town for something or other and Fulbright had an off-the-record appointment with Truman in an effort to persuade him to support Johnson. But after the convention Fulbright was very

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happy with the ticket, he was very happy about Kennedy's election. Kennedy wanted Fulbright to become Secretary of State, and there's a great deal of public misunderstanding about why Fulbright did not become Secretary of State. The popular story, which is embedded in the literature somewhere I guess, is that after considering the appointment of Fulbright Kennedy backed away from it because of Fulbright's southern connections and record on civil rights and so on. One version has it that Bobby Kennedy in effect vetoed Fulbright, or talked his brother out of it. What consideration the Kennedy brothers gave to that aspect of the thing I don't know, but I do know Fulbright's thinking.

Along about December 1960, there was a lot of speculation about Fulbright becoming Secretary of State, which scared Fulbright to death because he didn't really want to be Secretary of State and he didn't want to have to say no if Kennedy asked him. Fulbright somehow or another became aware of the fact that Senator Russell was going to see Kennedy about an unrelated matter at some point, and called Russell and said, "I hope you can convince Kennedy that I ought not to be Secretary of State." And Russell said, "I will try to do no such thing. I think you would be great as Secretary of State." And Fulbright said, "Dick, for God's sake, I don't want to be Secretary of State! I don't want him to ask me to be! And I can be a whole lot

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more help to him in the Senate as chairman of this committee than I can as Secretary of State. And furthermore, if I resign from the Senate my successor as the Senator from Arkansas is most likely to be Orville Faubus, and Kennedy doesn't want *him* in the Senate." And Dick Russell said, "Oh, well, on that basis I'll talk to the president-elect." So he did, and Lyndon Johnson was very unhappy about this because Lyndon, in his version of it anyway, had been instrumental in promoting Fulbright with Kennedy to begin with. Johnson afterwards said to Carl Marcy that he, Johnson, had it all set for Fulbright to become Secretary of State and Fulbright queered the deal.

But after Kennedy became president the relations with Fulbright were really pretty close. Kennedy used to send Fulbright particular pieces of foreign service reporting that had intrigued Kennedy, some of them quite sensitive. It's ironic given the long history of any president resisting efforts on the part of the Senate to have access to stuff like this that here was a president on his own initiative passing them on to the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Fulbright never shared them very widely; I'm sure he got a bunch that I don't even know about. I do know about some of them.

RITCHIE: Very early in the Kennedy administration, Kennedy let Fulbright know about the plans

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for the Bay of Pigs invasion, and from what I understand you got involved in that story through the writing of a memorandum. Could you give me the background on that?

HOLT: Yes. I don't know at what point Kennedy "let Fulbright know about this," as you put it. But beginning during the winter of 1960-61, I started to pick up little straws in the wind from around town and from people I talked to that something of this nature was a foot. Nobody ever briefed me on it or told me about it, but I had been around long enough to put a couple of straws in the wind together. As a matter of fact, on supposition and intuition, I constructed what I thought was a likely scenario, which turned out to be pretty damn close to the plan they actually had in mind. This disturbed me a good deal and I didn't quite know what the hell to do about it. I thought about going to Morse, and while I was thinking whether I ought to or not, simply by coincidence one day after a committee meeting, Fulbright was just sitting around the committee room as he frequently did talking to the staff, me, and I guess Marcy was there, and it was a natural thing to bring this up. I said, "Senator, I get the indication that this and this is in process and it bothers me because I don't think it will work and I don't think we ought to try it if it would work." He said, "I agree with you. I think that's what they've got in mind."

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I don't know whether he had had prior knowledge or whether he was intuitive like I was.

So we kicked this around for a while as to what to do about it and what we decided was that I should prepare a memorandum which Fulbright could give to Kennedy. We felt some urgency about this, so I did it that afternoon and that night. I think I worked on the damn thing until about eleven o'clock that night, and got it typed the next morning, and Fulbright mulled over it some, and talked about it some more and changed it a little bit. By this point, I guess, we were getting close to Easter, which came in March that year. By coincidence, Kennedy had learned that the Fulbrights were going to Florida during the Easter recess of the Senate to see one of Mrs. Fulbright's cousins, or some relative like that. Kennedy was also going to spend Easter at Palm Beach, and he invited the Fulbrights to go with him on Air Force One, which they did. During the trip Fulbright just gave him the memorandum and said, "Here's something I hope you'll read and think about." Kennedy read it on the spot and at the time made no particular comment. All of this I'm saying now I was told later by Fulbright. On the return from Florida, on the plane Kennedy said to Fulbright, "We're having a meeting as soon as I get back about Cuba, and I hope you can come to it with me." So Fulbright did. Big meeting over in the State Department. It was the meeting at which

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the go/no go decision was supposed to be made. Everybody there, the Joint Chiefs, Allen Dulles, the CIA, Rusk and so on were saying "go." Fulbright was the only guy who said "don't go." Kennedy said, "Well, let's sleep on it." So they didn't make the decision.

Fulbright and Hickenlooper--who so far as I know didn't know anything about any of this--and I then went off to Rio de Janeiro with Douglas Dillon, who was then Secretary of the Treasury, to a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank. While we were in Rio, Kennedy told a press conference that American forces would not involve themselves in any operation in Cuba, and Fulbright and I thought that meant that he had decided against the damn operation. On our way back from Rio we over-nighted at Ramey Air Force Base in Puerto Rico and the next morning got the word--this was a Sunday, I think--that Cuban exiles had bombed Havana, and we thought, "Oh, hell, we misread what Kennedy said to the press." Then the next day there was the Bay of Pigs invasion and it all began to come out in the wash. Kennedy later said to Fulbright, "You're the only guy in town who can say I told you so." Fulbright refrained from saying I told you so. He did preside over a thoroughly extensive series of hearings, post-mortem on the thing, which as you move into Publishing the executive transcripts from the '60's I hope

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you can jar loose. It really didn't consist of much more than rehashing all the bad advice the Kennedy had received, but it was an interesting exercise. It's interesting on that point, after the failure of the Bay of Pigs the Foreign Relations Committee was hell bent to investigate it, which they did. Eighteen months later, after the success of the Missile Crisis, Dean Rusk practically begged the committee to investigate it, offered to make the total executive branch records available. The committee didn't have the slightest interest in it, which I thought at the time was missing a great opportunity, but I think it proves the point that Congress is more interested in picking over the corpse of a failure than in studying the anatomy of a success.

RITCHIE: I think it's very impressive that you and Fulbright came to a conclusion that was against the consensus of the rest of the government, but wound up basically being the most accurate view of what was going on. How did you come to that analysis of the Cuban situation?

HOLT: Well, it's pretty well set forth in that memorandum which I wrote, which Fulbright gave to Kennedy. The text of the memo, or most of it, has since been published in two or three places. There were three chains of reasoning in it. One of them was that

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the prospects of success for this--we proceeded on the basis in this memo, since we really didn't know what the hell they had in mind, we approached it from the point of view of what ought to be done about Cuba, what American policy towards Cuba ought to be. One of the options available for American policy was to try to overthrow Castro, and how might this be done? Well, it might be done through the landing of a group of exiles who would establish a beachhead and then form a government which the United States would recognize and respond to appeals for help. If this happened it would succeed in overthrowing Castro only at the cost of massive and pervasive American entanglement in Cuba, the end of which could not be foreseen. Then the argument was made that even if we thought it would work, we ought not to do it because it violated a number of treaties to which the United States was a party. Indeed, to the degree that these Cuban exiles came from the United States or were supported in exile by the United States, it violated domestic laws of the United States. The point was made that one of the things which distinguished us from the Soviet Union was respect for law and by God we ought to respect it. And then, finally, the argument was made that the threat to United States interests posed by Cuba was not great enough to warrant this kind of effort, in any event. The phrase, which has frequently been quoted, we used was that Cuba is a thorn in the flesh, it's not a dagger in the heart.

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RITCHIE: Do you think that this opinion evolved from your travels through Latin America in the 1950's, and the meeting you attended with Castro and the Foreign Relations Committee in 1959? Was it something you were arriving at over the years?

HOLT: Well, I guess so.

RITCHIE: I find it interesting, because your opinion was out of step with what was the prevailing atmosphere in both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations in 1959, '60, and '61.

HOLT: Yes, you know the Eisenhower administration in its last days, early in January of '61, severed diplomatic relations with Cuba in response to a Cuban action which limited to ten or eleven, or some small number, the number of people which they would allow us to have in our embassy in Havana. The Eisenhower administration, mainly Tom Mann, said, "Well, hell it takes more gardeners than that. If we can't have any more than that we won't have anybody." I have since suspected that that might have been more pretext than reason, that what they were doing was preparing for the situation which would result from the Bay of Pigs, when they didn't want to be responding to the pleas for help from a provisional government on a beachhead at the same time

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we had diplomatic relations with the other one. But, you know, taking the pretext as the real reason I thought at the time, before I got very much involved in the Bay of Pigs, I thought that this was a bad idea. I was not under any illusions about the possibilities of working with the Castro government, or what a handful of diplomats might be able to do, but I thought--and I still do--as a matter of principle that you have some kind of diplomatic relations with any body that has a legitimate government. At least maintain the possibility of talking to them if they have anything they want to talk about. I thought that about Peking too, long before it was the conventional wisdom around here!

RITCHIE: The Kennedy administration did come forth with probably the sharpest break in United States-Latin American relations for a long time with the Alliance for Progress, a more positive response to Latin America. Were you involved at all in the early planning of that? And what was the role of the Foreign Relations Committee in the establishment of the Alliance for Progress?

HOLT: Well, indirect, in the sense that I'm not aware of any committee involvement in the period immediately preceding the Kennedy announcement of the Alliance, but there is a history to this. The

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Kennedy Alliance for Progress was not all that sharp a break with the immediate past. American policy towards Latin America had begun to change about in 1957 or '58, as a result of a number of factors, one of which was sort of unfocused pressure from the Hill and particularly the Foreign Relations Committee. Morse, Aiken, Hickenlooper, to some extent, and there were people in the executive branch who were sort of pushing the Eisenhower administration the same way. Tom Mann was one, Douglas Dillon was another. Milton Eisenhower thought so--he might have been the most influential of the lot, I don't know. Anyway, in the summer of 1960 President Eisenhower issued a statement of policy about Latin America which was really a forerunner of the Kennedy Alliance for Progress speech the following March. The Eisenhower statement laid the basis for United States participation in the Bogota Conference of September 1960, which produced the Act of Bogota, which was the forerunner of the charter of Punta del Este, which formalized the Alliance for Progress in Uruguay a year later. In all of this ferment and change in the last couple of years of the Eisenhower administration the Foreign Relations Committee, and particularly Morse's subcommittee on Latin America, was a pretty heavily involved. Morse and Hickenlooper and I went to the Bogota Conference in September of '60, for example. Also, Kennedy had been a member of the Morse subcommittee and

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had contributed to shaping the study that subcommittee made of Latin America following the Nixon trip in 1958.

RITCHIE: So the groundwork was all laid before the Kennedy administration made their announcement.

HOLT: Right.

RITCHIE: The other major Latin American event of the Kennedy administration was the Missile Crisis of 1962. By this time, presumably, Kennedy was taking Fulbright's advice a little more seriously than he had at the Bay of Pigs. Did you get involved in the crisis atmosphere of 1962?

HOLT: No. As a matter of fact, at the time the Missile Crisis broke I was in Rio on my way to a meeting of the Interparliamentary Union in Brasilia, with a sizeable delegation of senators. We proceeded to Brasilia according to plan the next morning, and by the time we left Brasilia the damn crisis was over! So all I know about the Missile Crisis comes from what I've read in books. It's been extensively studied. And a couple of things that Fulbright said. The Congress, as a matter of fact, had practically no role in the Missile Crisis. It wasn't in session at the time it broke. Kennedy sent the Air Force flying around the country to bring a number of

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them back the day of the evening when he made his speech. You know, the advice he got from Fulbright on that occasion he didn't take either, but in retrospect it seems like pretty bad advice.

RITCHIE: Fulbright was in favor of an air strike, wasn't he?

HOLT: Fulbright and Russell were both in favor of air strikes. Fulbright thought--I think "surgical air strikes" was the term the Air Force favored, sort of like you cut out a cancer or something--Fulbright's reasoning was that this would be less provocative than interfering with freedom of the seas and possibly boarding Soviet ships and all that kind of thing. I think the lesson to be drawn from the Missile Crisis, so far as Congressional involvement in matters of this kind is concerned, is that Congress, in a crisis situation of that kind, really cannot make a very constructive or considered contribution unless it has been involved in the process that leads to the decision. This means unless it is totally informed. You know, here were these ten or twenty or whatever number members of Congress who were confronted with the problem by Kennedy at five o'clock in the afternoon and in thirty minutes were supposed to react to it. Well, you just don't react very sensibly in that kind of thing. In Theodore Sorensen's book on Kennedy he quotes the president

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as saying after this conference, "If they," meaning members of Congress, "had been through what we've been through for the last week they would have come out at the same place." The whole point is that they had not been through it.

RITCHIE: Would you say in general that the Kennedy administration was more open with the Congress and the Foreign Relations Committee in particular than the Eisenhower administration had been? You gave the example of Kennedy turning over documents to Fulbright, but was that institutional or was the just the relationship between the president and the chairman?

HOLT: So far as I know that was because of the personal relationship between Kennedy and Fulbright. Now, I don't know who else on the Hill that Kennedy might have been sending these little things to. I'm not aware of anybody, but that doesn't mean he wasn't doing it. No, it was not institutional. I don't off-hand think of an instance in which the committee had a major quarrel with the Kennedy administration over access to information. I'm inclined to attribute that more to the fact that the Kennedy administration only lasted two and a half years or a little bit more, almost three years, than to the fact that it was inherently more open and forthcoming. If it had endured as long as the Eisenhower administration,

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I'm sure there would probably have been some point when this would have happened. It happened with Eisenhower, but on the other hand the Eisenhower administration on occasion was quite forthcoming. You know, I mentioned earlier those several file drawers of stuff they gave us on the Middle East. I think there is an axiom about any administration. It's forthcoming when it thinks that will help its case, and it's resistant when it doesn't think so.

RITCHIE: What were the relations of Dean Rusk to the committee, as Secretary of State? In those years before Vietnam.

HOLT: Well I was about to say, Rusk's relations with the committee followed a constant downward trend! They started off quite good, as a matter of fact. Rusk was known to the committee and the staff from his earlier service in the State Department, and while he was president of the Rockefeller Foundation the committee had called on him for advice from time to time. So it started off quite good. I went to the Punta del Este conference in January or February of '62, the one that excluded Cuba from the OAS. Morse and Hickenlooper were there. Rusk himself was there. We had a very good relationship with him and with the State Department people generally at that conference. They included us in everything, which is not always the case when you go to a conference like that.

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I guess, well things started to go downhill really with the intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, although that did not involve Rusk very much. It involved the president more than Rusk. That's another set of transcripts I hope you can break loose when you reach that point. Rusk's problems with the committee, or the committee's problems with Rusk really are due almost entirely to Vietnam.

RITCHIE: The last major foreign policy action of the Kennedy administration is the one that gets it probably the best credit in the textbooks, and that was the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963. I know that for years the Foreign Relations Committee had been investigating nuclear disarmament. Hubert Humphrey had a subcommittee that he was constantly managing to continue despite some hesitation from the rest of the committee.

HOLT: Yes.

RITCHIE: Were you involved in any way in the disarmament issue and the plans for the Test Ban Treaty?

HOLT: Not directly, no. I was present at a lot of committee meetings when these things were discussed, and so on, but I did not particularly get involved in the substance of what was going on.

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RITCHIE: Fulbright acted as sort of the point man for the administration on the treaty. He led the fight on the Senate floor.

HOLT: Yes, as a matter of fact he and Aiken and I don't know who else went to Moscow for the signing of the damn thing. That was a purely ceremonial occasion, but it's illustrative of Kennedy's efforts to involve the Senate in the process, to get their pictures in the papers with him and Khrushchev and so on.

RITCHIE: Were they involved in it before the ceremonies, or was it basically window dressing?

HOLT: Well, again with the caveat that I wasn't too closely involved with this myself so there might have been something going on that I was not, am not, aware of, it's my impression that they didn't have much to do with it. Of course, there's a long history of arms control negotiations of one kind or another, and a long history of Senate interest in it, going back to the Humphrey subcommittee that you talked about. And there's a long history of individual senators dropping in on negotiating conferences, and that kind of thing. But the Test Ban Treaty fell

in place pretty damn quickly, as a matter of fact, during the summer of 1963. It all came together

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really over a period of about two months or so, and I do not have any recollection that the committee was very much involved in that particular process.

RITCHIE: By the end of that year the Kennedy administration was abruptly terminated and we move into the Johnson years. Do you sense that in the long run there was continuity between the Kennedy administration and the Johnson administration, or a real deviation? In other words, do you think that the way things were going under Kennedy, particularly in foreign policy and his relations with the committee, that things would have developed the same way if Kennedy had remained as president, or was it your sense that things began to change?

HOLT: Well, over the long term, who the hell knows? I certainly don't. Over the short term there wasn't all that much change, I don't think. As a matter of fact, one of Johnson's first efforts was to provide some continuity. In the first weeks, months even, particularly the first weeks of the Johnson administration he was on the phone to senators constantly, with a variety of things on his mind. I think a part of it was to protect or strengthen his political base in the Senate. Part of it, I guess, was a sort of natural wanting to talk to the people he knew best in Washington out-

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side of his immediate staff and associates, because he had played the Senate like a violin for so damn long. The Fulbrights and the Johnsons in this period were quite close. Betty Fulbright did the president's Christmas shopping for Lady Bird and Lynda and Luci that year. And Dick Russell was another one who got a lot of these phone calls, some of them at very odd hours of the night. Fulbright complained once that the president called him at eleven o'clock at night or something and he said, "Geez, he just won't hang up, and you can't hang up on him!

"But the first real problem of foreign policy that the Johnson administration faced, as I recall it, was the riots in Panama, which broke out on January the 8th or 9th in 1964. The committee and other interested senators were briefed on that while it was happening. They had a good many discussions with Tom Mann about policy toward Panama. Fulbright had a lot of conversations with the president about it, so did Mansfield. Mansfield and Fulbright both, and so far as I know independently, were urging upon the president a more forthcoming policy, looking toward renegotiation of the 1903 treaty. In the aftermath of the riots, Panama broke diplomatic relations with the United States. So then the problem became one of getting these relations reestablished. The Panamanians made renegotiation of the 1903 treaty a condition for this.

There were long negotiations about what to negotiate about, and at one point they got hung up over the use of the words "discutir" and "negociar" in the Spanish text of the communique. "Discutir" meaning to discuss, and "negociar" meaning to negotiate. Johnson really got stubborn as hell about this and insisted that he would talk about anything but he didn't want to nail down commitment to negotiate. Well, a lot of people, including Fulbright, thought that this was a semantic quibble which was not worth holding up international diplomacy for. Adlai Stevenson thought the same thing. He and Fulbright talked about this. Fulbright brought Stevenson to see me to talk about it. Fulbright and Mansfield were saying to the president or to anybody else who'd listen to them, "Don't be so unbending on this point." I don't recall that the committee as a committee did very much about it. But of course Johnson was under contrary advice from other senators. During the riots Russell even suggested, during one of the briefings that we had, that the Air Force should bomb Panama, or strafe the mobs, or something. Anyway, he wanted to use more force than they were doing, and Russell carried a lot of weight with Johnson.

RITCHIE: Well, now as we begin to move into the Johnson years and the issues begin somewhat to change, I think we should look forward to that in another session.

[End of Interview #5]