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PART III, NO. 84

THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION PROJECT

CHALMERS ROBERTS

GLEN ROCK, N.J.

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July, 1976

Louis M. Starr
Director

EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION PROJECT

Chalmers Roberts

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1967

Interview with Mr. Chalmers Roberts by John Luter
Washington, D.C. August 29, 1967

Q: Mr. Roberts, first would you outline your personal background, and tell us the circumstances under which you were a correspondent in Washington during the Eisenhower Administration?

Mr. Roberts: Well, I've been in Washington, on and off, since 1933. But I started covering diplomatic news, foreign policy, almost immediately after Eisenhower's inauguration in 1953. So except for the first couple of months, I lived continuously through the eight years of the Eisenhower Administration with the administration's foreign policy, and that meant, for most of that time, of course, with Secretary Dulles.

Q: Would you tell us something of your personal relations with Secretary Dulles, and the association that you had with President Eisenhower?

Mr. Roberts: Well, those are two different things. Eisenhower was not approachable to the press, in the sense that other Presidents have been, to newspapermen. At least he certainly wasn't to me. I never had a personal conversation with Eisenhower, as I have had with other Presidents. A few journalists did, but

their number and occasions were very few.

Dulles was a very different proposition, and partly, I think, compensated for Eisenhower's way of doing business. Dulles, as everyone knows, was so dominant, in terms of the administration's foreign policy, that Ike left a great deal to Dulles--certainly the relationship to the press generally, "press" being used in the broadest sense of all communications media. Dulles, had two levels of operation, a public one and a private one. The public one was a record of many press conferences, far more than has been the case since, and more than any since Cordell Hull's day, when Hull used to have a daily press conference before the war, in which very little was actually said of substance. Dulles used the press conference for very important purposes, and he considered it very important. As he said, and others have said about him, he agonized over them quite a good deal. He always considered what came out in press conferences, what he said there, to be in effect state papers.

In fact, there was a ruckus one time over one of his press conferences in which I was involved. He made a mis-cue, something he said. I'd have to look it up to find out exactly what it was, but he said something that he didn't really mean to say on the public record. So the transcript which the State Department at that time was putting out, later the same day, in mimeographed form, was altered, and the phrase was either expunged or changed to get it back to the limits of what he intended to say on the public

record. Well, at that point the transcript had a heading on it, under Department of State label, saying "Transcript of Remarks of the Secretary of State at the Press Conference of such and such a date." In fact this was not a transcript, and when I got back to the office and compared my own notes with the transcript, I discovered the discrepancy.

I called up Lincoln White, who was then the State Department press spokesman, and said, "What are you doing? You can't do this. You can't put this out and say thisis a transcript, and then change it, doctor it."

I raised a little hell with him, and he tried to apologize for Dulles, and then he turned around and called Dulles and said, "Roberts is raising hell about this, what are you going to do about it?"

Dulles called me and said, "I understand you've got some problem."

I said, "Well, Mr. Secretary, I don't think you can call this a transcript of your press conference if in fact you change it."

He said, "Well, I consider these things to be state papers, and they become part of the offfcial doctrine of the United States government. I made a mis-cue and I'm not going to allow that to go on the public record that way."

Beginning with the next press conference, the label was changed to say: "This is the State Department's transcript," or some phrase to show that they had a right to change it.

Well, of course that didn't stop me or anyone else from writing what he actually had said, but it shows you the degree to which he considered the press conference an important operation. Now, his second level of operation was a private level, which was sort of subdivided into a great many background lunches and dinners, not drinking sessions but sessions at which we had a drink, between the Secretary and a number of correspondents who were covering foreign affairs, basically almost always American. He did this sometimes with foreign correspondents too, but not,to my recollection seldom were they mixed. These sessions were very productive and very useful. In addition to that, there were individual meetings, talks with him. I remember being at his house one time when he was unhappya about a piece I had written during the Suez affairs, and he tried to sell me his position and what he was doing.

Dulles, in these background sessions, where the rules were that you couldnot quote him or the State Department -- so called rule of compulsory plagiarism, you could only say "The administration's view" or "The Secretary is known to feel" or some device like that. In all of these things, he always was trying to put over his point of view, which is a perfectly proper function for a Secretary of State. And it became something of a game, for the reporter to be sure he wasn't just buying a pig in a poke and becoming just a transmission belt for the administration, a problem which is still unresolved and probably never will be resolved because of the internal conflict that's built in between the press

and the government. Not just in foreign affairs.

But Dulles had one habit, as I look back on it, one trick, you might even say, that was very important and very interesting historically. Somehow or other, he had an intuitive feeling that you had to feed the lions, so he always had some tidbits for us in the form of hard news. That is, he would drop some little item of some current interest that heknew we would consider worth printing, and that always provided a news peg on which to hang whatever his views were on the current topic. It was a sort of device to be sure that this got into the papers and into the radio and TV, and got a good display, one way or another. How conscious he was of this, I never was sure, but it certainly was an effective device, and one that his successors have not been as clever at as he was.

A goodmany of the journalists who covered State Department, foreign affairs, at that period also knew him personally. Some had known him longer than I had. Scotty (James) Reston, for example. But we all got to know him personally, and we did see him in differing degrees individually or in small groups, or talk to him on the telephone, and he was quite accessible in this way. Of course, it was in a sense an adversary proceeding.

But basically, looking back on it, I think it was a pretty good relationship. It kept us all on our toes, and it kept him on his toes.

Q: How often would youe stimate that he held group background

sessions for members of the press that were covering the State Department?

Roberts: Well, I'd have to go back to the files on that, John, to know how many times. I saved all my notes from all those background sessions that I attended, both here and abroad, and I've promised to give these eventually to the Dulles papers at Princeton. It ran into considerable number. It tended to be not too regular. It tended to be related to the news; if there was a crisis going on and he wanted his view put out without doing it so directly, why, we were more likely to see him than if there was a dull period. So I'd have tocheck the record on the number, but it was quitefrequent.

Q: These would be attended usually by how many correspondents?

Roberts: Oh, 20, I would suppose.

Q: At the sessions was he formal or relaxed?

Roberts: He was quite relaxed. These sometimes-- most of them, I guess, were held in hotels, rooms rented for the occasion, either a dinner or sometimes not over a meal, depending on the press of circumstance. Sometimes they were at individual houses. Dick Harkness, I remember, had a number at his house in Georgetown, as it was physically convenient. We usually started -- everybody

had a drink, and he always stirred his bourbon with his big finger, and he was quite relaxed, and convivial, but always totally in control of what he was saying and doing.

Q: Do you consider that he made effective use of the press during his term in office?

Roberts: Yes, I certainly do.

Q: What would be your appraisal of Mr. Dulles as a Secretary of State?

Roberts: Well, that's a very mixed bag, and I don't know just how I'd come down in the end. I think the appraisal of any public official has got to be bounded, somehow or other, first by the times in which he's operating, and secondly the circumstances. A Cabinet member is the servant of the President, and that relationship determines to a great degree what he can do.

Dulles certainly had Eisenhower's confidence, to a very extraordinarily high degree. There were occasions when Eisenhower overruled him, but Dulles was very careful never to try to get ahead of Ike or get out in front of him. He knew that Ike's political popularity and international standing were, in effect, critical to anything that he, Dulles, wanted to do, and he traded on those strengths, as was quite normal. But he

always was careful to telephone Eisenhower from wherever he was, before he did anything. Eisenhower I don't think ever read anything in the papers that Dulles had said or done that he hadn't been fully informed in advance Dulles was going to do. There was never any Jimmy Byrnes-Truman kind of problem between them. They didn't have a social poker playing relationship, but they had a close personal relationship.

Now, within that limit, I think Dulles was, for Eisenhower, a good Secretary of State. In fact, if he did in general what Eisenhower wanted, their general lines, attitudes toward foreign affairs were similar. Dulles had an immense amount of expertise built up over many years which I'm sure awed Eisenhower, as it did so many other people, including lots of newspapermen. Perhaps he took unfair advantage of this with the President. I don't know. That's a hard question to answer. But basically I think he was an effective Secretary for Eisenhower.

Now, the times in which he operated, perhaps even more important -- this was the period of change. Remember that Stalin died I think six weeks after Eisenhower was inaugurated, and the whole world began to change. Looking back on it, it's a lot clearer now than it was at the time that the so-called Communist monolith was breaking up. Dulles has been castigated for not seeing this sooner, and perhaps some of that criticism is justified. He also had to live with the fact that the Pentagon, under Charlie Wilson, and the Treasury, under George Humphre, and the

Congress initially under Senator Taft wanted to cut back heavily on Defense spending. This cut the military budget, after the end of the Korean War, and the military muscle, Dulles realized, was an instrument of foreign policy. So there were certain inhibitions on him, and out of that kind of a situation he developed things like the theory of massive retalization which he enunciated. He had this phraseology trick of dreaming up phrases -- "agonizing reappraisal" is another -- which got a lot of headlines, and usually got distorted beyond what he initially meant. Even the brinkmanship thing,which was not his phrase--nevertheless, it was his technique, and he never denied it. He used the term "going to the brink" in that interview with Jim Shepley of Life that caused so much flap.

I think in sum, Dulles was an effective Secretary of State for the President for whom he operated, that he had a great deal of understanding of the world, that he probably didn't appreciate soon enough the degree to which the Communist part of the world was changing, and his innate suspicion made it difficult for him to accept many of these changes. And of course, on top of this he had this Presbyterian morality that offended so many people, and I think in many cases did get into and color his thinking--as when he got into all that nonsense about "the immorality of neutrality" from which he finally had to backtrack. In sum, he was a strong Secretary ofState, and there's something to be said for just being a strong Secretary of State.

Q: Is it your impression that his doctrine of massive retaliation was developed more or less as a necessity, because of the desire in other parts of the administration to cut expenditures?

Roberts: Well, tthe doctrine of course began --I think it had its origins even before he came into office, but he knew that he was coming into office with an administration that was determined to cut down government spending, and that meant cut financial military spending. So there's a certain rationalization involved there. This is not peculiar tothe Eisenhower Administration, eithrr. I think the answer is generally yes.

Q: How would you describe his relations with the major countries with which we were allied at the time -- for example, the British, the French?

Roberts: Well,his relations with the British were colored by the terrible personal relationship with Eden, ending in the disaster of Suez, in which I think that personal relationship played a part. As you know, this went back to the Indochina business, before he was Secretary, and I think the British disliked him for his moralizing, because they tend to be more pragmatic than Americans. This is an Anglo-American problem at any time, but with Dulles it was somewhat more intense. I think his

relationship there was not good. Things changed so much for the better when Macmillan came in. His relations with the French were never -- well, the French government in the Fourth Republic, there were so many governments that he was constantly struggling with one problem or another. His relations with personalities I think varied, one to another. I think his French relationship was a mixed bag. His German relationship of course was a very close personal relationship with Adenauer, and that colored the French relationship, because the Franco-German rapprochement was only then beginning. He did see, he knew and he worked for that rapprochement, because he knew it was vital to any development in Western Europe. I think there have been a lot of unfair criticisms of Dulles because of his pre-war relations with business and legal relations with the Germans. I don't think any of those things-- of course, those things are in the subconscious of anybody, but I don't think they consciously affected what he was trying to do with the Germans. He knew first of all that you had to get the French and Germans to stop fighting. He knew that you had to get Western Europe back on its feet, which the Marshall Plan had already begun, and that a strong Germany was important. The arming of Germany had already begun before Dulles came in. The Adenauer relationship became his most important foreign relationship.

Q: Did he seem to place great value on his personal relations

with leaders of other countries? Did he feel that that was an important aspect of diplomacy?

Roberts: Well, I think he did where the relationships were good, and he didn't where they weren't good. That's sort of human. He did with Adenauer, and I think he did less so with others.

Q: I recall that Eisenhower in his memoirs says that Eden, before Eisenhower became President, expressed the hope that he would not make Dulles his Secretary of State. According to Eisenhower, he said this to Eisenhower before he left --

Roberts: -- that's only an indication of how bad the relationship was before Dulles even became Secretary ofState, and of course this kind of thing was the foundation of a not good relationship that continued as long as Eden was in office,either as foreign secretary or prime minister.

Q: Can you recall any specific instances in which Eisenhower overruled Dulles on questions of foreign policy?

Roberts: Well, I think there were two basic issues. One was the intervention in Indochina, and the other was the approach to the Russians that culminated in the Geneva Summit meeting in 1955. In the Indochina affair, the so called first Indochina war,

which ended with the debacle at Dienbienphu and the Geneva Conference which divided Vietnam, Dulles was determined to try to hang onto that part of the world. He had a fixation about any more of the map of the world being colored Red. After all, the Republicans had gone through this whole period charging that the Democrats had lost China, and they were not going to lose anything themselves if Dulles could help it. On the other hand, he knew that the French colonial situation in Indochina had been very bad. He pressed the French on that, but not sufficiently, because of the problems in Europe. Indochina was an adjunct of our relations with France in Europe.

Well, Dulles, in his determination not to let any more territory go Communist, as he viewed it, cranked up what amounted to an intervention scheme, with the military, chiefly Admiral Radford who was then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the thing, as isnow well known, got to the edge of intervention. General Ridgeway and some others fought it with the President, and the thing finally collapsed, for a number of reasons, but basically because Eisenhower, having gotten out of a land war in Asia in Korea, didn't want to get into another land war in Asia in Indochina, as we subsequently have done.

I think in that case, Dulles was prepared for some military action, whereas Eisenhower was against it. The exact details of some of that are still not on the public record. But I think that was a case in which you could fairly say that Eisenhower

overruled Dulles. He didn't want to go that far. He was willing to compromise it out, which eventually was done at the Geneva meeting.

Now the other case of the Summit Meeting in '55 was a somewhat different proposition. Here I think it's necessary to remember, not the atmosphere of 1967 but the atmosphere of 1955. At that time, we were at the end of about ten years of very cold, cold war, which had included the Berlin blockade, the Korean War, and a great number of incidents between the United States and the Soviet Union, including shooting down of planes--not yet the Hungarian revolt, but a lot of incidents and atmosphere in which there was a very frozen relationship and a very suspicious relationship. This country was worried about Russians stealing nuclear secrets, worried about a nuclearPearl Harbor. We'd been through the beginning, I guess by then most of the McCarthy period. So the atmosphere at that time was not conducive even to the idea of the President of the United States sitting down with the head of the Soviet Union. If you look back at what people said at that time, you'll find that amply demonstrated on the record. It took all of Eisenhower's very great personal prestige to agree to go to the Geneva Summit Meeting.

When you contrast that with what happened this year between Kosygin and Johnson at the Glassboro Summit, where there would have been a great outcry in this country and everywhere if

the two of them hadn't met, because we'd reached the point where the world was aware that heads of these two nuclear super powers have got to be in communication. It's just too dangerous not to. But in '55, that had not been established, and Dulles's attitude was that the Soviet Union was essentially a second rate power, the United States should do nothing to give her the recognition on the world stage, it was an immoral nation, it was an atheistic nation, they were a bunch of bastards. They didn't live up to their obligations, and all the rest of the criticism.

Eisenhower instinctively felt that somehow or other, this nuclear weapon had changed the world, and that you just could not go on having this kind of frozen relationship between the two super powers. I think this is an instinct that Presidents come to. Maybe it's because of what they know about nuclear weapons, and the fact that they're the ones with the finger that can be put on the button, and nobody else.

So there was a sort of an internal struggle there, before that meeting, between Eisenhower and Dulles, about going to the meeting. It was capsuled in Herblock's famous cartoon of Eisenhower in his sports clothes and Dulles in a big winter overcoat with skiis, saying to Bulganin and Khrushchev, "Yes, we're coming." That was the atmosphere in which the two of them went.

Now, looking back on that, I think this was in many ways the most significant thing that the Eisenhower Administation did,

for which I give Eisenhower a great deal of credit, credit which I don't think he's generally been given, which he deserves, historically. He sort of pulled Dulles along dragging and screaming -- as Stevenson once said, "Kicking and screaming into the 20th century."

To me, what Eisenhower did was to break the cold war patina by agreeing to go to this meeting, by talking to these people. It's perfectly true that the so-called Spirit of Geneva evaporated, the specifics of the conference and the subsequent foreign ministers' conference, which was supposed to be about Germany, didn't resolve any of those problems. In fact, they got more frozen. But I think it's fair to say historically that that meeting established the tacit understanding between the two sides that nuclear war was out, that neither of them could afford it. At that point, we had a great many more nuclear weapons than the Russians did, but they had enough that they could have killed a hell of a lot of Americans, if there'd been a nuclear war. It was not a great satisfaction that we could have wiped their country out maybe totally. It had just become too dangerous. Ike realized this, and he wanted to do something about it, instinctively, and he agreed to talk to these people to see what could be done. That was one of the reasons he proposed his so-called Open Skies plan at that meeting, which was the genesis of a great deal of the subsequent disarmament discussion.

So I think that was the second case in which Eisenhower overrode Dulles, and, I think, where Eisenhower was right and Dulles was wrong.

Q: Did you have the impression that Secretary Dulles accepted the Open Skies idea rather reluctantly?

Roberts: Well, Dulles was always suspicious of disarmament. I think you'll find in Andy Berding's book of Dulles quotations the quote where he said, "It's dangerous if Americans get the idea that disarmament is going to happen, because then everybody will want to cut down on our Defense budget and our military strength, and that will weaken our position." It was sort of a vicious circle. Dulles had a high degree of skepticism about disarmament, and of course it was a personality problem and a policy problem, because of Harold Stassen, whom Eisenhower had made his disarmament man.

Q: What were the relations between Dulles and Stassen?

Roberts: Well, not very good, because they were both strong-minded intelligent men. Stassen had been set up in the White House office, and it gave him a direct access to Eisenhower, and Dulles, like most Secretaries of State, worked on the principle that nobody should come between the Secretary and the President.

That's fundamentally a good rule. Stassen, foolishly, at one of the London disarmament meetings, made a mis-cue by showing a paper to the Russians before it had been cleared by all the Allies, or telling them about it, and this created a big uproar, and Dulles was able to use the fall-out from this as a device to get Eisenhower to shift the whole operation into the State Department, where he had better control of it. Then Stassen got into the political mix too, and in the end he disappeared and Dulles was top dog.

Q: Do you have any impression as to relations between Dulles and Nelson Rockefeller?

Roberts: I don't think Dulles was very conscious of Nelson Rockefeller, but I can't be too sure about that. I remember Rockefeller when he was in the White House. He was terribly frustrated. He was frustrated by Dulles. He didn't agree with Dulles in a lot of ways. But he was, I think, a relatively minor pinprick to Dulles. It was partly out of that experience that Rockefeller concluded, as he subsequently said, that elective office was where the power was, so he went back to New York and ran for Governor.

Q: How would you describe the relations between Secretary Dulles and the career people in the State Department?

Roberts: Well, they got off on a very bad footing because of the McCarthy business, and in his initial address to the State Department foreign service types, he called for -- I think the phrase was "positive loyalty," and this caused a great flap because it implied that a lot of people were disloyal, as McCarthy was saying. And it is true that Dulles went to great lengths to appease McCarthy, and this had a terrible influence on the State Department. It lasted through his whole lifetime. Secondly, Dulles essentially carried the work of the Department around in his hat, and a great many people felt that their views never got a chance to be heard, or they never knew what Dulles was doing except what they read in the papers and so on. A lot of these things were exaggerated, and some of Dulles's collaborators will deny even to this day that that's true, but I think it was essentially true. And that added to, if not an estrangement, an strained relationship between Dulles and many, if not large numbers, of the professionals.

Q: You say that he went to great lengths to appease McCarthy.

Roberts: Well, he did, because Eisenhower did. Eisenhower, --you know, I think it was Sherman Adams who wrote that Eisenhower said, "I won't get down in the gutter with that fellow." It was Ike's sort of personal reaction to McCarthy, whom he obviously detested as an individual. And if the President

says, "We're not going to have that kind of fight with this guy," then the whole Cabinet and the government is bound by this dictum, and Dulles was bound by it, and Dulles tried to play this game, as Eisenhower did, of appeasement. Of course, it got worse, and ended up with the debacle of the Army and all the well known stories. Dulles didn't stand up for some of the people in the State Department who were under suspicion, as I think he probably should have. He did fight through the (Charles) Bohlen case, but he didn't have much appetite for taking on that kind of a problem, because he felt this stuff got in his way. What he wanted to do were things in foreign policy, and this kind of domestic thing was a nuisance, so he was inclined to say, "OK, throw McCarthy a bone and see if we can keep him quiet for a while." Of course, that technique seldom works.

Q: How did Scott McLeod figure in this?

Roberts: Well, McLeod was a spy for the McCarthyites, in the administration, and everybody knew it. So Dulles treaded gingerly around him, too. That was part of the whole operation.

Q: Do you have any impressions as to the views of Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower with regard to recognition of Red China? Was Dulles more firmly against that than Eisenhower, or what is your impression?

Roberts: Well, you know, Dulles was originally for it, before the Korean War, as he wrote in his book. Then when he re-did the book after he became Secretary, brought out a new edition, he explained in the Preface why he'd changed his mind. I think Eisenhower subscribed to the general principle that it's ridiculous that 500 million people, whatever the population then was, should be isolated. But the Korean War made this politically impossible. I don't think there was essentially much difference between them onthat issue.

Q: You mean they both regarded it as theoretically perhaps a good idea, but --

Roberts: -- practically impossible, and they both realized that it was tied up with the UN membership issue, and that that got them in a lot of problems with Nationalist China. Dulles had a good relationship with Chiang Kai-shek, and considered that Formosa was important, and that various tests with the Chinese over the offshore islands were involved with this. And I think in retrospect, Dulles looks pretty good on standing up. In that respect, the evidence is pretty well collected in Donald Zagoria's book, about that incident, on the Sino-Soviet conflict.

Q: Do you have any impressions on the views of Dulles and President Eisenhower with regard to defense of the offshore islands, Quemoy and Matsu primarily?

Roberts: Well, the islands themselves, both of them recognized were insignificant pieces of real estate. You remember, we did get Chiang off some islands called the Tachens, on the ground that they were less defensible militarily, as I remember it now. They were not interested in defending these islands. They were interested in defending the principle that the Chinese couldn't do anything by aggression, couldn't get anything by aggression. I think Eisenhower was frustrated, terribly frustrated by Chiang's stubborn determination to hang onto Quemoy and Matsu, and worried that he wanted to use them as a springboard for all his talk about going back to the mainland. It took quite a while for the Eisenhower Administration to get around to really telling Chiang, "Look, this going back to the mainland stuff is for the birds. Now, you gotta get it out of your mind." They pussy-footed around this for a long, long time.

Finally, Dulles did tie Chiang up in a commitment over the thing, and we kept them on short leash by not giving them landing craft, and holding their gasoline supply for aircraft down and things like that. But the realestate wasn't anything, it was the potential of the thing, and of course the whole business of the offshore islands exacerbated our relationship with our allies, especially the British. I remember Eden once saying, "Why couldn't we get 90 miles of blue water between China and Formosa? If you could get rid of these offshore islands it would make the thing much simpler."

Well, Dulles's answer was that the Chinese have never said they want the offshore islands, they've said they want Formosa, which is a part of China in Peking's view. And that's all over true, but as a practical fact, if we'd been able to get Chiang to give up all the offshore islands when he got out of the Tachens, it would have made the issue much easier, and it would make it easier today if we had a clearer line, because then Formosa would be in a much better position to be a separate entity, even though aeither Chiang nor Mao accepts it as such.

I remember an Asian foreign minister--I think he was either from Australia or New Zealand, in that period -- telling me that he'd come in and tried to argue Dulles into getting Chiang off the islands, so that you could get a united allied posture behind Formosa for separate status, regardless of whether either of the Chinese regimes would accept it, that you sort of could enforce this onto China's view, on everybody, on the two Chinas. Of course, a great many people believe this is what the United States should have done. I think Dulles was very slow to proceed here, because he felt the slightest movement would upset Chiang. He overrated Chiang, he overrated the China Lobby. I think the China Lobby collapsed over these offshore island affairs, because it became perfectly clear the United States didn't want to get in a war. That is, the American people didn't want to get in a war with Communist China over a couple of

islands. It was ridiculous. It was not like the possibility of getting into a war over West Berlin, which had much more popular support if it became necessary.

Q: How did Secretary Dulles view the importance of his extensive travel to foreign countries?

Roberts: Well, he justified this on a number of grounds. One of the grounds was that he got away from the telephone, and he could think, and he wrote a lot of speeches flying around in airplanes. I don't know how much of that was really true or how much was justification after the fact. It annoyed a lot of ambassadors, and a lot of unfavorable things were written about it. In fact, it ended up by Dean Rusk writing a piece in Foreign Affairs x criticizing Dulles for this, and saying that Secretaries of State shouldn't do this. Of course, when Rusk became Secretary of State, he racked up more mileage than Dulles did.

Q: To come for a moment to an overall appraisal of the Eisenhower Administration, what would be your estimate of its chief accomplishments?

Roberts: Well, I've already told you what I think, in a way, was Eisenhower's chief accomplishment--that he broke the crest of the cold war by agreeing to deal with the Russian leadership,

which was then Bulganin and Khrushchev, and he discovered at that meeting what was very important: that it was Khrushchev who really was the Number 1 guy. That's where we found it out. I think that was the important thing.

On other things, I think you can fault the Eisenhower Administration in a lot of ways. Dulles got in a lot of silly business about neutralism, over India, but when you look back on it historically, the Eisenhower Administration continued the Truman Administration's containment policy in Europe, which has since been continued by the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. There's been variance of this, but fundamentally, it's created a stable line between the Communist and the non-Communist worlds in Europe. The instability has been in the rest of the world, particularly in the ex-colonial world. The British were always very critical of Dulles, that he pushed them too hard on colonialism and getting out of their colonial possessions. Dulles once told me (I think it was during the Suez affair) that it would take ten years to clean up all this colonial problem, and that it would create problems between the United States and the European countries which then had colonies, for a long long time. Well, actually it has taken really less time than he thought, although some of these problems still exist, after the period he was talking about, ten years or so.

Part of that colonial problem was reflected in the Indochina thing. I think that we made a mistake, if you try to

look back at Vietnam and Indochina from today's perspective, of the immense American involvement there. We made a mistake in not looking at that problem in its own light. It was looked upon by Dulles too much as simply an adjunct to American policy in relation to France in Europe. Remember that Dulles was then pressing for a European army, in order to bring Germany into the scheme of things. The Berlin Conference in 1954, which I was at with Dulles, was supposed to discuss Austria and Germany. The one thing that it accomplished was to call the Geneva meeting on Indochina, or actually on Indochina and Korea, though nothing happened in Korea. Bidault was then the French Foreign Minister, and insisted that he couldn't do anything on EDC, the European Army, unless he could get a conference on Indochina that would find some way out of the Indochina mess for the French. Dulles didn't want this conference, but he agreed to it in order to get Bidault's promise that there would be a vote, and presumably a favorable vote, in the French Assembly, on the European army. So we backed into it. We backed into the Indochina conference that way. We didn't -- we were so dominated by our European relationships at that period that we had not really taken enough look at the Asian relationships, in particular the Indochina one, on our own. If we had, maybe we'd never have gotten into Indochina the way we did.

In the end, of course, the EDC was killed in the French Assembly when Mendes-France became PrimeMinister, and there's

always been a lingering suspicion, although no proof, that there was some kind of a deal between the Russians and the French that the French would kill EDC, which was then the major Soviet preoccupation in foreign affairs in relation to the West," in exchange for Russian pressure on Ho Chi Minh to agree to a settlement of the Indochina war. And it is true that at Geneva in '54, both Molotov, who was then the Foreign Minister (of Russia) and Chou en Lai, the Chinese Foreign Minister at that time, pressured the North Vietnamese into signing an agreement to divide the country, when they thought they had won a battle at Dienbienphu which entitled them to all of the country. This was designed to keep us out, and had this European mix in it, and I think that was part of our problem. We were so preoccupied with Europe, Dulles was, because he considered the Soviet Union the major threat, and the point of the threat to be Western Europe, that we got dragged into the Pacific thing in Southeast Asia without really realizing what was happening.

Q: You speak of the containment of the Russians in Europe. Do you believe that Dulles had any real hope of rolling back Communism in Eastern Europe?

Roberts: Well, the rollback business was part of the political polemics of the 1952 Presidential campaign. I don't think he really did. I think Dulles had an illusion that Communism was weak

because it was based on, to him, false premises, including its atheistic qualities, and he came from a church family, as you know. The Soviet Union was weak. It was weaker than a lot of people realized. Because of the secrecy they were able to impose, and because of the psychological warfare they used, they made themselves look stronger than they were. I think that's true, and Dulles realized this, but still he under-estimated their strength, and he under-estimated the ability of the Communist regime to enforce its will through the dictatorship that runs the country.

Again according to Berding's quotes, he once told Gromyko that they were making all sorts of trouble for themselves in the satellites in Eastern Europe by their heavy-handed rule. Gromyko's answer was, "We don't need any advice from you, we can take aare of our own problems." Well, Dulles turned out to be more right than wrong, because both Poland and Hungary subsequently exploded. But when the test came on rollback in Hungary, the United States was not prepared to do anything. And Dulles, again quoted in Berding, said, "If we had intervened in Hungary, the only way to save Hungary would have been through nuclear war, and that would have destroyed Hungary."

In other words, when it came to the nut-cutting, he realized this was a Russian sphere of influence, and that the Russians were not going to give it up under any circumstances, and he assumed --who knows? rightly or wrongly, but he assumed that the

Russians would go to nuclear war over it if necessary. Now, whether they would have or not, no man knows, at least no man here. So when it came to nut-cutting, the liberation turned out to be nothing but words.

Q: Was there any strong sentiment in the administration for intervention in Hungary?

Roberts: No. I don't think there was. You must remember that Hungary came at the same time as Suez. This was the tragedy of Hungary, and Dulles realized it, and often complained about it. If you hadn't had Suez at the same time, I don't suppose Hungary essentially would have turned out differently, but the pressures on the Russians and the propaganda defeat of the Russians which they suffered from Hungary, which was immense, perhaps would have been even greater, if there'd been a concentration of opinion and attention on Hungary at that time. But the world was divided because of Suez, and you had an internal Western conflict between the United States on the one hand, and the French and British and Israelis on Suez. Then you had the United States and the Soviet Union working together over Suez, whereas they were on opposite sides over Hungary. No, I don't think there was ever any serious thought or intention of going into Hungary.

Q: To what extent was Dulles intent on checking the British,

French and Israelis in the Suez crisis? Do you think he was the prime mover in shaping American policy in that case?

Roberts: Well, I think he and Eisenhower both agreed on this. Some of the books that have been written about Suez subsequently make this point. This book called Suez by Hugh Thomas that's just been published in England says that (from the British View essentially) that Eden made the mistake of thinking he could separate Eisenhower from Dulles, and I think that's correct. There was no difference of opinion between them. They both took what to them was a moral view that this was a wrong thing for the British and the French to do, it was an immoral act, it was a re-imposition of colonialism, to them, and this went against their moralistic grain, and I don't think there was any difference between the President and the Secretary on that. They were both determined to stop it. I think Dulles was a somewhat more cynical fellow than Eisenhower. I think he would have been happy, without saying this out loud, if somehow or other this had resulted in throwing Nasser out, at the time. He would have liked to have had his cake and eaten it too, so to speak. But his fundamental objection here was that this was a re-imposition of colonialism, and it just couldn't possibly work in the world as it then existed.

Q: To what extent were the views of Mr. Dulles and President Eisenhower influenced by their outrage at having been deceived

by the British and the French?

Roberts: Well, partially. Partially. That was a tangential thing. It was not the main point, however.

Q: Do you believe that both Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower were intent on a policy of ending European colonialism?

Roberts: They both shared the basic and simplistic American view that colonialism is bad per se. Roosevelt had pressured Churchill to get out of India. Americans have the general view that colonialism is bad, and that we've always been against it, as a country -- except that we got into a little of it ourselves, which we've always had a certain guilty conscience about. And that's what makes a lot of people unhappy today when we're charged with being a colonial power in Vietnam. I think that's part of our present internal problem, is this feeling that somehow or other we're doing what we've condemned others for doing.

Q: To what extent did Secretary Dulles take an interest in relations with Latin America? Was that a province that was left largely to Milton Eisenhower?

Roberts: I think Dulles, like most Americans, considered Latin America a nuisance. I mean, intellectually he knew it was

there, that it had a certain importance, and he could say all the right things about it in public. He went to a number of conferences there, but it was strictly a back burner operation, and Milton Eisenhower, being the President's brother, gave it a special cast, but Milton himself has testified how frustrated he was trying to get much done. Nonetheless Milton was the one who sort of was the precursor of the Alliance for Progress.

Q: Mr. Roberts, what would be your estimate of President Eisenhower's grasp of foreign affairs?

Roberts: I think it was very spotty, and I think -- Eisenhower, you go back and read his books, and you see that he was raised in that period at West Point when military men really did not think much about the relationship of military power and foreign policy. The whole debacle of how Berlin got left out in the middle of the East German Communist sea -- Eisenhower's part in that -- he was not alone in this, the whole Roosevelt-Churchill correspondence is full of evidence that Roosevelt was pretty naive about a lot of this too, and Churchill spent a great deal of his time trying to make the Americans understand that what we did in war was going to have something to do with postwar relationships. That's why he wanted to land in the Balkans and so on. Roosevelt didn't understand this adequately, and Eisenhower didn't either. They were so concentrating on, you know,

how could you win a war in a military sense with the least loss of life, that they forgot that wars never end in the finite sense. There's always the postwar problems which the war creates, and we've still got the postwar problems in Europe in Germany.

I think Eisenhower never had sufficient grasp of this, which was a common fault of many people, and still is, in some cases. I think people now going through the service schools get a much better grasp of this interrelationship. Some of this carried over into his Presidency.

On the other hand, he had, as he showed when he was Supreme Commander during the war, a certain political and personal skill with people. It's a curious thing there about his linguistics. A great deal of fun was made about Eisenhower and his press conferences, where he had this fantastic syntax. I remember going to Eisenhower press conferences on many occasions when I would sit there and listen to him say something, volunteer something or give an answer to a question. It seemed to be perfectly clear what he was saying, but unless it had been a prepared statement, if it were ad lib, when you came out and read the transcript, he never really had quite said what you'd thought he said. But he had an ability to get over to you what was in his mind, even though he was fighting to do it over the words. He was so bad at expressing himself. I think this was true not only with reporters but with people he dealt with, with

foreign statesmen. He had an intensity that made it possible for people to understand him despite his frequent inability to express himself clearly. That's a facet of this.

He had a simplistic view, as Dulles did, of the Communist world. As I said, Stalin died six weeks after he came to office. There was not an early enough realization of what this meant. We didn't know enough about what was going on in the Soviet Union in those early years. We suffered from the China experience. We didn't try to understand China sufficiently well. We understood something about the changing colonial world, but we didn't understand enough about the problems of the Third World, as we now call it. Eisenhower had a pretty limited grasp of a lot of these things, and Dulles had a lot of expertise, but it was essentially Europe-based, although he'd been involved in the Japanese peace treaty during the Truman Administration. It took the United States quite a while to see that the world after World War II was not the old world of Europe and America. The Eisenhower Administration was in office during a period of great change, and I don't think Eisenhower understood all these things.

On the other hand, you look back to the Truman years, where the immediate postwar changes began, and you can fault Truman and his Secretaries of State equally well. We're too close to the Kennedy and Johnson years yet probably to have much perspective there, but there's plenty of criticism along

the same lines. I think the main thing about Eisenhower -- he was elected President at a time when people were tired of the cold war, tired of the whole wartime complex, in the early postwar period. They wanted some relief, and here was this gallant figure, great hero, and everybody wanted to leave it to Ike. That's exactly what the public mood was, and that's exactly what happened. They left it to Ike, and Dulles was his right hand man. And a lot of things were done that maybe shouldn't have been done, a lot of things weren't done that should have been done -- as is true probably in any administration.

On balance, probably I think the administration historically is probably going to come off better than some of the early judgments have given it credit. But again, we don't know everything from the Communist side of that period yet, and we don't know everything from even Dulles's side.

One of the great troubles of the Dulles period is the telephone. In the old days, everything was written down. There was lots of correspondence. The telephone becomes such an instrument of doing business. There are not transcripts kept of many of these things. Eisenhower said once, at the end of his term, that Dulles had kept a record of all of their telephone conversations. I think these records are now in the Eisenhower library, but to my knowledge they've never been opened. And what kind of records Dulles kept of those would be rather interesting to see. But there's just so many missing pieces that

total judgment, I think, is very hard to make.

Q: You regard the meeting at Geneva as a landmark, in foreign policy?

Roberts: I do, and I get more and more convinced of this every day, by subsequent events, and I think it probably was the landmark of the Eisenhower Administration in foreign policy.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Roberts. This concludes the interview with Mr. Chalmers Roberts on August 29, 1967. The interview was conducted in Mr. Roberts' office at the Washington Post in Washington, D.C. The interviewer was John Luter.

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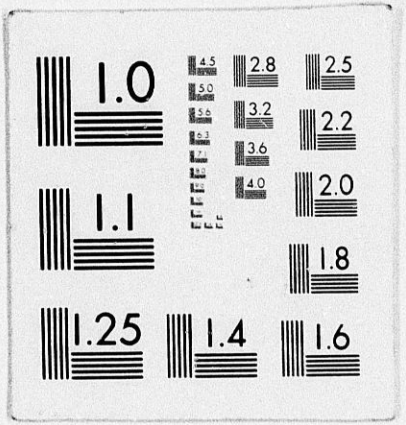
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