

## INTERVIEW OF JAMES C. THOMSON, JR.

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Jim, thank you very much for agreeing to help me with this project although I realize it was on the periphery of your responsibilities, to say the least, during your service in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Could you begin by giving me some background regarding your education and your entry into federal service?
- Thomson: Sure. By the way, on my name I still use Jr. usually so it's James C. Thomson, Jr. Education was in China and America. I'd grown up in China and then ended up in Yale College graduating in the class of 1953, took a two year fellowship in Cambridge, England in modern history. Came back to the Harvard Graduate School and pursued what I thought was an M.A. but became a Ph.D in modern Chinese history under John Fairbanks, whose works I had been reading from afar as I left China in 1949 trying to figure what on earth had brought on that revolution. My interest in my academic work was a distant second to my desire to change the world, so I got involved in politics in the 1950s. The first year working was extremely hard for me. I'd been in some of the campaigns in 1952 and 1956. In 1956 and thereafter, Chester Bowles reached out and grabbed me. I worked for Chuck Bowles who was foreign policy adviser in 1956 and then became Kennedy's foreign policy adviser in the 1960s. I was just part of that. When he became a Congressman, I went down to join his office in the second year.
- Willens: When was that?
- Thomson: He was a Congressman in 1958. I came in for his second year. Then the Democrats put Tom Dodd in the Senate again which seat Bowles wanted to take. So Bowles got the consolation prize of becoming the Under Secretary of State for Kennedy.
- Willens: Had you completed your Ph.D work by that time?
- Thomson: I completed my Ph.D soon after I left Harvard. I was still working on the final draft in Washington, although I'd been down here a year and a quarter. I got my Ph.D in 1961 but was already in the federal government from January 1960 and then in the State Department as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary, Mr. Bowles.
- Willens: What were his responsibilities as Under Secretary?
- Thomson: Well, Rusk I think was very distrustful of Bowles. There was no meeting of minds in terms of style. Bowles would find whatever he could grab other than trying to be an alter ego, understanding when the Secretary was away, what was supposed to be done. He worked on the appointment process, mainly of ambassadors but also some of the assistant secretaryships in the department, the regional assistant secretaries, media adviser, education and cultural affairs, political and military affairs, and so forth, and a number of embassies beginning with Japan. Bowles was also, in his own view, sort of a longer-term policy planner. I think this didn't work out too well because people like Rusk and Kennedy found his memos too frequent and too long. But what Bowles was urging, particularly regarding Southeast Asia, he could not have been more right. I think by November, Rusk was very dissatisfied with the situation at State. To put it in a partisan fashion, Rusk felt he [Bowles] could not, from Bowles' partisan view point, follow Rusk so he [Rusk] moved him [Bowles] into an ambassadorship called, with a special long title sort of at-large ambassador, pro-counsel for underdeveloped people.

- Willens: Was that in 1961?
- Thomson: November 1961. He was only in [as Under Secretary] eleven months.
- Willens: Was that when George Baldwin became Under Secretary?
- Thomson: Yes. George had been number two Under Secretary and George moved in as number one Under Secretary. Bowles was allegedly a White House appointment as well as a State Department appointment. I worked with him until he went back to India.
- Willens: Were you then his special assistant while he was Under Secretary?
- Thomson: I was one of his special assistants while he was Under Secretary and one of his special assistants in the new job. My field though was China and East Asia and his heart belonged to India. I went into the Far East Bureau as special assistant to Dr. Hillsman, who had become Assistant Secretary for East Asia. The reason I'd gone was my hope to bring some kind of reconciliation between my old home country China and the United States. For several of my years in the government the Vietnam War predominated which was not entirely what I had in mind. Plus Bowles was in residence in Des Moines and was saying too often and too loudly that we should get out of Indochina peacefully. He said the time had come when we should not escalate, internationalize the conflict, neutralize the issue, and just make whatever reason we had to because Indochina was a place where we could not succeed. But what he did got us nowhere. Our recommendations were known to Johnson and to Rusk especially.
- Willens: How long did you remain within . . . .
- Thomson: Hillsman was kicked out after the assassination. He handled, with the Vice President, Mr. Johnson, a number of meetings on Vietnam while Kennedy was still alive and in February 1964 Johnson made it clear that he wanted Hillsman out, at which point Bill Bundy became Assistant Secretary and I became a special assistant to Bill Bundy. That came just at a point when Mr. McGeorge Bundy started bickering for me to come join him (Mac Bundy) on the NSC staff. I found myself in a difficult situation of working for one of two brothers and Mac did not want, as he told me, to be stealing me from his older brother and so I was in given three months in which to prove that I was not indispensable to Bill Bundy but that I was so competent and creative that Mac Bundy would need me.
- Willens: That's a tough act.
- Thomson: By July 1964 I joined the Bundy staff. We were able to run a Vietnam task force in the State Department for awhile and then we, still being in such a state of grief over the death of Kennedy, just resigned from the government entirely.
- Willens: Was he a personal and professional friend of yours?
- Thomson: He had become a friend of mine from 1962 onwards. I met him at a conference and it turned out that he and I shared exactly the same views, it was time to get going reconciling with China, it was time to get out of Indochina. From then on we just conspired to run our plans jointly.
- Willens: Did your China upbringing relate to your plans in . . . .
- Thomson: There's a lot of educational investment in China. I had spent thirty-five years. My father was Dean of Science University and my mother taught at the women's college. They left China in 1949 but operated under the U.N. WHO and FAO for successive years thereafter.
- Willens: Just to complete the chronology, how long did you remain on the NSC staff?

- Thomson: I stayed there, feeling extremely fulfilled, because that's a marvelous business to work for. Bundy was a person who would tolerate any kind of dissent as long as it was phrased as risky and as long you had facts to support it. I found very few men in government who could tolerate much dissent. But there as long as you're discreet in not making your dissent known publicly, it was okay. Bundy saw the writing on the wall prior to [leaving the government and] running the foundation starting March 1, 1966. I stayed to see what would happen, then in September 1966 I went back to Harvard. That was really my career.
- Willens: You've not been back in the government since that time?
- Thomson: No. As a consultant on and off some years, but I have not ever been full time.
- Willens: Turning to the general problem of Micronesia or the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands as it was formally called, you've seen from the documents that I provided you that there was a re-examination of U.S. policy in the first year or so of the Kennedy Administration. It resulted in the issuance of this National Security Action Memorandum No. 145 in April 1962. I received from the government agencies very few documents that reflected the deliberations among the agencies that must have taken place before that Action Memorandum was issued. One of them is the letter from the Secretary of Interior to Harlan Cleveland dated February 26, 1962. Do you have any recollection of a process that involved the State Department that was directed toward re-examining policy toward Micronesia in the early years of the Kennedy Administration?
- Thomson: I have only the vaguest recollection, and I see that some of these papers are in my file because among the notes on the distribution list, after the Secretary of State the next letter is U, that means Under Secretary, two copies to U and I assume that Mr. Bowles kept one copy in his files and gave me the other one since I was suppose to keep a watch and brief on things relating to East and West Pacific. So it was merely happenstance that I got informed about Micronesia. I knew nothing about this process at the time, though I do remember part early on, maybe even that spring or even a little before . . .
- Willens: In 1962?
- Thomson: Or may even in 1961, although it was probably by April 1962. I kind of remember what initial we had for our office. Anyway we got, for our information, copies of these matters. That's how they ended up in my in-box. I remember being discouraged, very pessimistic on the management of Far Eastern affairs. Specifically, I think she was Frances McReynolds, also known as Frances Smith.
- Willens: I've seen her name here in these materials, and I have never encountered it before.
- Thomson: For her "wonderful little people," as she use to put it, out in the Trust Territories. She found in me a sympathetic ear because apparently I must have got bored with hearing from her and having her warn of the neglect we were giving to those islands and eventually that this was going to be quite embarrassing for us in the U.N. I remember Frances Smith coming into my office. I remember her finding me in the corridor, hauling me into her office, and basically pleading for more high level attention to Micronesia. And I remember saying to her, "Frances, if you can get me, with my wife of course, a paid one month look-see mission to find out the real facts in Micronesia, I will really take it on." She understood that that was not a very realistic offer.
- Willens: Well, it subsequently did happen, but only by way of the NSC process.
- Thomson: So all this happened, but really passed me by. I remember now these things happening, some of them.

- Willens: Well one thing that is reflected in the documents is that the IO or International Organization Bureau, headed then by Assistant Secretary Cleveland, seemed to have primary responsibility for this part of the world. Mr. Cleveland remembers that it was more or less by default because of the U.N. aspect of the matter even though geographically it fell within the area of the Far East Bureau. Was there any tension between the two bureaus as to who really had the policy-making responsibility for the Trust Territory?
- Thomson: I would have said no, not from my memory of Ms. McReynolds presentation and also her boss David Cassell, who's now deceased. I think it would be interesting if you could track down Frances McReynolds or another deputy in that very office, Francis Underhill, a man who is retired near Asheville, North Carolina, and is alive and well and very smart as a walking encyclopedia of memories of policy issues. I have his address and I think I have his phone number because we've seen him a couple of times.
- Willens: Wonderful.
- Thomson: My sense was that in the southwest Pacific and particular in those areas that one or two folks whose responsibility covered Micronesia, that their feeling was a sense of neglect in the Far East Bureau itself with the Assistant Secretary. The reason being of course that southeast Asia was gobbling up most of the attention of first Howerman and then Hillsman and then Bundy. It was very hard for what I called the waifs and strays to get the attention of the Assistant Secretary. Now it did have a clear U.N. aspect to it, a trust territory under the U.N. or the U.S. being the Trustee, right?
- Willens: Right.
- Thomson: It was I'm sure the easy way—no battle at all—for the Assistant Secretary to let IO handle it. It was rather a pleasure. It probably was not so much a pleasure for Ms. McReynolds and those who cared more. But that's how it went. It was just not a battle that I knew about.
- Willens: That certainly seems to be confirmed by the documents that I've had access to. Mr. Cleveland remembers, and explains with some perception, that U.N. concerns loomed relatively large in the thinking of certainly his office and the Department generally in the early 1960s. The documents that I shared with you do reflect a concern about the enlarged membership of the U.N. and the role of this so-called Committee of 24. Did you have any view at the time as to how United Nations concerns should be factored into the formation of U.S. policy?
- Thomson: Well, I did. My view was probably more somewhat at odds with others. For instance, I and a few others had long felt that we had to let U Thant quietly, in his own Burmese way, seek out very, very discreet contacts whereby we could arrange a meeting between a high level American emissary and representatives who would be coming in from Hanoi to find a way to stop escalating our involvement, to give us a decent interval because the prospects for winning through escalation seemed slim to those of us who felt this way. Well they didn't. I felt that the U.N., or at least individuals like U Thant, could be very helpful. I also was pleased, as a dissenter, when U.N. voices caused us increasing embarrassment about our actions in southeast Asia. I felt that any kind of pressure, especially from friends like Canada and Japan, might have helped avert this ongoing developing catastrophe. And as I say, my view of the U.N. was quite different from those in power. The IO office in years gone by liked the idea of an old fashioned U.N. where they didn't have so many new nations who had difficult opinions that might mess things up. And there was generally, I heard, the view of things that the increasing membership of the small and

newly independent nations was going to make life harder and harder for us and that these people would be “irresponsible”.

Willens: You can see that the national security interests of the United States with respect to the western Pacific loomed large in this re-examination of U.S. policy in the first few years of the Kennedy Administration. Was that an aspect of Micronesia that you heard referred to from time to time in meetings in which you participated?

Thomson: Barely at all.

Willens: There certainly seems to be some uncertainty within the documents and among the people that I've interviewed as to exactly what prompted this kind of re-examination. We just identified three hypotheses and the answer may all of the above. The national security interest is certainly one factor that is emphasized in the documents. Concern about the United Nations' criticism is the second, and sort of a Kennedy Administration liberal view that the Administration can do better by the people in Micronesia is offered sometimes as a third hypothesis for the fairly dramatic revision of U.S. policy in 1962. Do you have any reaction to those various hypotheses?

Thomson: Well they all make sense. I don't know how much they increase the priority but, if you put them all together, they're significant in that region. I would think that there would be other members of the NSC staff in this period, 1962, when I was not on the staff who were the sort of free spirits who might be helpful to you. The name that comes to mind first and foremost is Marcus Raskin, who got out very early but was always looking for ways to make us as a power look more humane and do things for underdeveloped people. He was helpful to me in trying to at least get agreement to give licenses for food shipments to mainland China. Mark Raskin has long been running the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington and may have a memory and, if he doesn't, he would know others who would.

Willens: Mike Forrestal seems to be the one name on the NSC staff that figures in the document.

Thomson: Michael only came in, as I remember, in January of 1962. I think he'd just come on the job then. He was not there in 1961 as far as I know. Michael recently died, about a year ago. Michael, I was sure must have a cache of papers lodged in some library and I wonder if he has an oral history. Check with the archive library on that.

Willens: I did check and did not find any papers there. Would it have been sort of the customary mode of operation for someone on the NSC staff to serve as a role to bring the agencies together on a problem like this?

Thomson: Very much so.

Willens: Well you see that, in the national security action memorandum issued by President Kennedy in April of 1962, he asked that a task force be formed at assistant secretary level. A year later he requested reports as to what had happened in the year, and I've provided you with a copy of a letter from the State Department to Interior setting forth its views as to what needed to be done. Although there were certain legislative initiatives during that period of time, the record shows that really relatively little was done by any task force. Was the task force mechanism one that you participated in from time to time, and do you have any views about it?

Thomson: I had no participation in this particular task force. I think it was often something that existed on paper rather than in reality and only a push from the NSC outside this memo of March 21, 1963 might get a little action. This was addressed to all these high level people. High level people wouldn't go to such a meeting. They'd have their underlings

who had the time check with one another and then we finally put forward something that was responsive. Did you say there was a response to this?

Willens: There was a response from the State Department to Interior that's reflected in the letter dated March 27, 1963. I think that's from Harlan Cleveland to Assistant Secretary Carver of the Department of Interior. And there were some other submissions, but I never saw or have been provided with the consolidated views of the agencies to this March 21, 1963 memorandum from the President. Shortly thereafter, however, the President designated Tony Solomon to head up a mission to the Trust Territory. Did you know him?

Thomson: Just met him socially.

Willens: Did you know any of the other members of the commission?

Thomson: Who was one of the . . .

Willens: One man that may certainly be familiar is Richard Cooper, who was then a young economist. There was a Professor Mangone from, I think, Syracuse.

Thomson: Dick Cooper is the one who now teaches here, I believe, and was the interim Provost of Yale a few years ago.

Willens: I think that's correct.

Thomson: He's an economist here. Yes, Dick Cooper I see occasionally, but really don't keep up with. Of the officers in charge, I notice at the end of this list, David Cassell. David Cassell was the office Director of NFE. For instance, the letter to Carver from Cleveland has a drafting officer at the bottom, FESPA, D. Cassell. Now that's where it's lodged in State, in NFE, and looking for Cassell with these two Francis's, I would commend to you as people who could really provide you with more information. One is Cassell's immediate deputy, Francis Underhill in North Carolina and the other is a spirited woman, Frances McReynolds, Frances Smith. They would know about this and it might be that only that level the so-called inter-agency task force would come to life. As I say, Cassell is deceased, which is too bad, and Forrestal is deceased. You come too late.

Willens: I know. I sure have been reminded of that from time to time. Certainly from the documents at the JFK Library, I guess including memos that you and others wrote to your colleagues, I mean it's quite clear that the Trust Territory was very far down the list among the priorities. One is reminded in looking at those documents about the Cuba problem at the time, and Berlin, the Congo. A wide range of international issues must have preoccupied everyone's time.

Thomson: I would say this took about lowest possible priority, which is too bad; though I don't think we suffered badly from that oversight. Do you?

Willens: Well, no. It raises some interesting questions as to what might have happened if indeed the objectives set forth in President Kennedy's 1962 memorandum had been achieved by 1968. If in fact the matter had been pushed to a vote in the Trust Territory before 1968, it is very likely that a majority would have opted for integration with the United States.

Thomson: Mm-hmm.

Willens: The question then for we historians is whether we could have survived the divisive tendencies that came with the greater economic development and education.

Thomson: How are they doing these days?

Willens: Well, as you may or may not know, Micronesia has now ended up in four separate political

- entities. There is the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, which I represented, which is part of the United States.
- Thomson: Is currently a part of the U.S.?
- Willens: Yes, it is a commonwealth under U.S. sovereignty and the people there are U.S. citizens and they govern themselves internally.
- Thomson: Has tourism occurred much between the U.S. . . .
- Willens: Yes, very extensive. Well, not as much between the U.S. and Micronesia as one might anticipate . . .
- Thomson: Japan?
- Willens: . . . but Japan now has between 500,000 and 600,000 tourists a year coming to the Northern Marianas islands. About 80 percent of the tourists come from Japan.
- Thomson: Well, it's closer to Japan.
- Willens: Yes, it essentially functions as a convenient and American-based resort area.
- Thomson: Is Guam an entirely separate . . .
- Willens: Guam is ethnically and geographically part of the Marianas chain of islands and there are close personal relationships among the families, but Guam has been a territory of the United States since 1898.
- Thomson: Right. So, what happened to the other chunks?
- Willens: There's now a Republic of the Marshall Islands; there recently was inaugurated a Republic of Palau; and then the other districts of Micronesia—Yap, Pohnpei and Truk—consolidated in what's called the Federated States of Micronesia. They are all related to the United States by a somewhat looser relationship called free association, which has no precedent in U.S. practice.
- Thomson: During the history I worked on about the 1920s and 1930s, I researched a Washington conference in 1922 that makes much reference to Yap and Truk.
- Willens: Really?
- Thomson: Yes. What kind of relationship they should have with Japan. I think we allowed the Japanese rather more than we should have at that conference.
- Willens: Well, they ended up not only colonizing, but fortifying the islands.
- Thomson: It was a treaty.
- Willens: Is that what it was?
- Thomson: Yes. They were not supposed to fortify.
- Willens: These are the documents that the JFK Library informed me could not be disclosed from your papers until they were declassified pursuant to a request that I or another researcher might choose to make.
- Thomson: Let me ask, does it make you more interested in these particular items since they've been judged too sensitive to be released? Does that necessarily mean that there's stuff there that would be of great interest to you?
- Willens: No, really not. As you see, some of the documents that are withheld refer to the national security action memoranda, copies of which I've already obtained from other sources.

So, no. But the first item under the March 29, 1962 date suggests that there was a paper being developed within the State Department entitled, "Guidelines of U.S. Policy and Operations Toward the Pacific Islands." Do you have any recollection of a process that was directed against . . .?

Thomson: George Meaney was the Chief of Policy Planning at that point, I believe. And Rice was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Far East and had been himself in the Planning Office. This would be the highest memo of this bunch from the upstairs of the Far East Division. I don't think you had any from Assistant Secretaries of State when I was here. But Ed Rice was the Deputy Assistant Secretary and probably this was a think paper to the Policy Planning Chief, McGhee. Whether that makes it very significant or not, I don't know. Mr. Rice is alive and well and living in California, but I'm sure he doesn't keep a file in his mind of two-page memos.

Willens: No. Another item listed on this sheet refers to a memorandum of a conversation in early 1964 and relates to something called the "South Pacific Commission Ceiling Legislation."

Thomson: Well, there is the name of that lady who I think, if she is alive, will remember every word of every memo that was ever published on this subject—Frances McReynolds. I don't know where she would be, but the Department of State does have a personnel biographic division that could at least give you her address in retirement.

Willens: I've run up against some difficulties in getting current addresses of foreign service officers.

Thomson: I'll tell you what I can do. I can give you Frank Underhill and then he can give you hers, if you give me that phone book a second. Let me see.

Willens: This one?

Thomson: Yes. Because I'm sure he knows where all of his underlings went and Frank also has a good memory. There we go. [F.E.S.] Underhill. P.O. Box 412. Flat Rock, North Carolina. 28731. Phone number. It might be easier just to ask him about Ms. McReynolds and if you want to ask him other preliminary inquiry, area code 704-692-7726. His last post I think was Ambassador to Malaysia. And then he retired.

Willens: Do you recall a change in policy toward the Trust Territory that took place upon President Johnson's assuming the Presidency?

Thomson: No, I don't.

Willens: The memorandum under tab 11 seems to have been sent to you by Ms. McReynolds and it relates to a conversation in which she participated. It's unclear to me from the document whether you were a party to this conversation or whether she was sending you these notes to reflect some of the subjects that were covered in a conversation she had with other people.

Thomson: I was not party to these conversations. She liked to keep me informed because she hoped that I could get others who were higher up in the chain of command to focus on what's happening out there.

Willens: At this point you were on the NSC staff, in July of 1964?

Thomson: That's right. Just arrived.

Willens: In your capacity on the NSC staff, did you have any even peripheral responsibilities with the Trust Territory?

- Thomson: My responsibilities were extremely general, never stated to me by Mr. Bundy, but had to do with roughly what the State Department viewed as a geographic region, which would be FE—Far East. Within that region there was the Trust Territory way down at the bottom of everyone's interest. I don't know what I would have done with notes from Frances. This is obviously a quickie dashed off about what they discussed and what the problem was. I'm afraid that I probably just put it aside awaiting, well, because of the pressure of other issues.
- Willens: Do you recall now having any further involvement in the aspects of the Trust Territory that are discussed in this memo, such as the creation of the Congress of Micronesia or the political future of the Trust Territory?
- Thomson: No, I don't.
- Willens: In this memorandum and in some of the others that I've provided you there is a State Department recommendation from time to time that there be a new special assistant designated with presidential support to coordinate the agencies with respect to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Did you have any view at the time as to whether creation of such a special assistant position for this purpose would be useful?
- Thomson: Special Assistant at the White House?
- Willens: A Special Assistant appointed by the President to be in charge of policy toward Micronesia and implementing the various national security action memoranda.
- Thomson: I don't recall the proposal, and I therefore wouldn't remember any views about it.
- Willens: There is some correspondence here between you and Haydn Williams when he was President of the Asia Foundation. Did you have an acquaintance with Haydn Williams in the 1960s?
- Thomson: Yes. I traveled to the Middle East and India and back—Cypress and India and then back to Greece and Italy—with the President's Special Representative, Mr. Bowles. That would be during the year, sometime during the year 1962 or early 1963. And Haydn was on the delegation representing whatever he was representing at that time. What department was he in before he moved?
- Willens: The Defense Department.
- Thomson: Right. He was a DOD representative for these ambassadorial annual meetings and I got to know him quite well on that trip. We shared watching the trouble in Greece. I had to land in Greece. Haydn and I became friends.
- Willens: You recall that he was ultimately designated in 1971 by President Nixon to serve as the President's personal representative in dealing with Micronesian status negotiations?
- Thomson: Nope. I was out of government by then and I didn't follow that.
- Willens: You had no conversations with Haydn Williams on this subject.
- Thomson: Not on this subject. I talked to him occasionally because when I was running the Neiman Foundation at Harvard we used to have the opportunity to select candidates for Harvard special fellowships for journalists in Asia funded by the Asia Foundation. Haydn would push these people forward to our attention. I also addressed once a meeting of the board of the Asia Foundation I guess that was in the early 1980s.

- Willens: Is it fair to say then that when you were at the NSC staff if there was any interest within the NSC staff on the subject of the Trust Territory it would have fallen into your broad area of responsibility?
- Thomson: Probably would have unless I was being urgently pushed on some other issue like for instance the state visit to the Philippines. Or the state visit with the Prime Minister of Japan. Or some crisis involving China, the Warsaw talks, or some crisis in Taiwan. It is conceivable that Robert Komer who was sort of an imperialist and expansionist in the turf he liked to cover—you know Bob?
- Willens: I met him on several occasions.
- Thomson: Bob normally was . . .
- Willens: Years and years later when he was I guess in the Defense Department.
- Thomson: Bob Komer was, his watching brief was the Middle East and south Asia but he liked to sort of move over, in Defense, of what's interesting in the Pacific region and he'd been there longer so it's possible that Bundy would pass Komer a piece of work on this matter.
- Willens: There's very little evidence in the documentary record that the NSC staff spent any time on this whatsoever. There are a few efforts that seemed to have centered around Mr. Forrestal. The efforts by the State Department to get White House attention at one point produced a preliminary decision by McGeorge Bundy to support the idea of a special assistant for the Trust Territory but it never was in fact implemented.
- Thomson: I've seen some mention from these documents of fishing questions, and that reminds me of one time I sent to McGeorge Bundy a piece of paper relating to international fisheries problems somewhere. He looked at it, looked at me, and he said, "James, the rule of thumb around here is never, never, never get me involved in any issue having to do with either international fisheries or international civil aviation, okay?" I said, "Okay." Mainly the complexities and dullness of these issues didn't interest the man at all. Like Emory Utley did, he said, "Why don't you sign off on it?"
- Willens: I mentioned some names to you earlier and also in the letter that I wrote you. One was Harlan Cleveland. What was your assessment of Mr. Cleveland during the years that he served in the State Department?
- Thomson: I find that very hard to answer. He seems to be very much a loner. I noticed when we went off places on delegations, I have this image of Harlan being off at a little table by himself either reading something or writing something. He was not very valuable. He didn't speak out much in meetings. I never quite got through to figuring out who lived there. I know an awful lot of the people at the top more closely than that, but Harlan sort of mystified me. He had the job of being sort of mother superior to Adlai Stevenson. Stevenson had cabinet status, so it was a curious arrangement to me. He [Cleveland] was the assistant secretary for Stevenson's business at the U.N. and probably other little dicey . . .
- Willens: Well he remembers that there was some sensitivity because President recognized that Adlai Stevenson was very much better recognized internationally than he was and so there was considerable effort devoted to make certain that Ambassador Stevenson was on board with major U.S. policies especially those that related to the U.N. Was that your sense at the time that Adlai Stevenson continued to be a political factor that had to be taken into account?
- Thomson: Yes. Though not a threat. It was more sort of a cautionary need to make him like things and to keep him easily on the happy side.

- Willens: Did you have any dealings with William Gleysteen?
- Thomson: I know him very well. Many years. When I knew him he was not at State. He was in Tokyo and then he was in Hong Kong. How did he get involved in this?
- Willens: He came into the IO bureau sometime in the 1960s. And I think you may have left about the time that he came into my purview. I wanted to ask about Joe Sisco in part because he became a figure of some controversy. The Interior Department believed that he and others including some of the Peace Corps were conspiring to remove responsibility for the Trust Territory from Interior over to State and there'd been some flak about that ever since.
- Thomson: All I can say is he probably wanted it. I have no need to confirm it. State liked to take things on from other people unless they were helpless.
- Willens: And did you have any dealings with any of the Interior Department people that played a role at the time such people as Ruth Van Cleve, George Milner or John Carver?
- Thomson: Nope. Not one of them.
- Willens: Did you have any experience in dealing with people on the Hill with respect to foreign policy matters in which you were involved?
- Thomson: Used to go along with Roger Hillsman and Bill Bundy when they had to testify before the Congressional subcommittee on the Far East. I knew Senator Fulbright and others. I was once called upon to persuade Birch Bayh not to go on to floor of the Senate and call for a declaration of war against Hanoi. What Birch Bayh had in mind was, you know, either there's a war or let's get out. Bundy wanted to assure Bayh that this would only complicate matters.
- Willens: Did you have any dealings with the Peace Corps and particularly with respect to the decision to extend the Peace Corps to Micronesia?
- Thomson: Well I can see from these documents that I was informed that that was happening. I wasn't involved in the decision-making. I think it struck me as a nice idea including Peace Corps people and probably for Micronesia.
- Willens: Did you know Ross Pritchard?
- Thomson: The name is familiar.
- Willens: I think he was at the time he was an official of the Peace Corps with special responsibilities for the Pacific.
- Thomson: Soli Bowles was my major connection at the Peace Corps. I knew Bill Morris when he was over there.
- Willens: There generally is a sense that Peace Corps volunteers contributed in a way that would be valuable to Micronesia.
- Thomson: That was always the thought. We were idealistic about the Peace Corps. They could not but do good. You think that was misplaced?
- Willens: No. It subsequently became a matter of some controversy because of the number of volunteers that were out in the Trust Territory. And of course under the Nixon Administration it was became even more controversial in part because of some of the Peace Corps volunteers, including several who were lawyers, became activist in terms of advising the Micronesians about their constitutional rights and entitlement to some form of self-determination. It became a source of some controversy. Any other thoughts or reflections that you have on this relatively minor problem going back to the 1960s?

- Thomson: In terms of geographic status it was a big problem. How many square miles were there?
- Willens: As big as the lower 48 in the United States, and it had some 2000 islands and a population of only about 90,000 to 100,000 people in the 1960s. The military was principally interested in making certain it was denied to other foreign powers and secondarily with respect to some use on a contingency basis in the event of fallback from . . .
- Thomson: The Philippines.
- Willens: . . . the Philippines, Okinawa and others. The fallback prospect seems to have been weighed very heavily in the deliberations within the agency in the 1960s including the years after you left. Do you recall having any judgment at the time about what would happen in post-Vietnam years in terms of protecting U.S. interest in that part of the world?
- Thomson: Well it was my view that the Philippine bases would sooner or later and probably sooner become untenable, and we [at the NSC] would speculate on the U.S. living without the Philippine bases. We would speculate about the idea as to whether the [bases in the] eastern Philippines could be relocated and I remember aspects of the Trust Territories was in the islands side of things. Nothing was said with much immediacy or conviction. They were nice to think about and I wish I'd been there but that's about as close as I got. I hope, I hope that, if I've given you nothing else, I've given you two or three sources who really were deeply involved.
- Willens: Well, thank you very much.