

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk AAA: Part 1 of 2
Nicholas de Belleville Katzenbach interviewed by Richard Rusk
1985 March

The complete interview also includes Rusk BBB: Part 2.

RICHARD RUSK: We are talking today with Mr. Nick Katzenbach, who was Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department 1961-62, Deputy Attorney General '62-'64, Attorney General '65-'66, Under Secretary of State 1966-69. And I guess my first question would be the obvious one. What were your first contacts with Dean Rusk? I presume you did not know him before the 1960s, is that right?

KATZENBACH: No, I had heard of him, but I didn't know him. I didn't know him before I joined the administration. I'm not one hundred percent sure just when I first met him. I think it probably was at a reception that President Kennedy gave for cabinet and sub-cabinet appointees in January of '61.

RICHARD RUSK: You lived through an exciting period of history there, back in the early sixties with the Justice Department and the State of Mississippi, and Civil Rights. Have you written about that period? I know you have one book out.

KATZENBACH: No, I haven't.

RICHARD RUSK: Does any of that early civil rights activity with the Justice Department involve my father in a way that you can cast some light on?

KATZENBACH: I don't know that it would be accurate to say that it involved him. He did say to me once, and I couldn't pinpoint the time except that it was ever before I went over to the State Department--

[break in recording]

KATZENBACH: --Justice Department, and I suspect it was still when Bobby Kennedy was Attorney General, when he said to me that what we were doing with respect to civil rights was extremely helpful, as far as the Department of State was concerned in their African matters, and beyond that also in Asia.

RICHARD RUSK: He did say that?

KATZENBACH: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: There is definitely a relationship between our domestic policies on civil rights and the application of foreign affairs.

KATZENBACH: Yes. It gave us increased credibility. They may not have been the most important countries in the world, but nonetheless--and there was a good deal of interest in Africa on the part of the American people, perhaps for just that reason, because they were interested in civil rights here.

RICHARD RUSK: My Dad got a task force going in the Department of State to try to more thoroughly integrate the foreign service. I don't imagine you were involved with that.

KATZENBACH: No, I was not.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you know my brother, Dave [David Patrick Rusk], in Washington?

KATZENBACH: I may have met him, but I didn't know him really.

RICHARD RUSK: No contacts between him--he was assistant to Sterling Tucker at the Urban League back there and right in the thick of all that.

KATZENBACH: I know that, but I don't really remember ever having any contacts with him at all. If he remembered something, it might refresh my recollection.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you privy to my dad's relationship with Robert Kennedy? You must have known--were you close enough to Robert Kennedy to have some feeling, some sense of how he regarded my father and perhaps what some of the problems in their early relationship might have been? I am aware of the fact that Robert Kennedy didn't hold my dad in very high regard. And that was very much reciprocated. And I wonder why.

KATZENBACH: Maybe I ought to say that I didn't know Robert Kennedy before I joined the administration either. So, I didn't meet him until probably early January 1961. So I was never--you know, it's not a long-standing closeness of a relationship. I just think that as far as Bobby and your father are concerned, that it was just a personality difference more than anything. A different approach to problems; and this is probably particularly true early--

RICHARD RUSK: The first couple of years?

KATZENBACH: --In the relationship before Bobby got as much involved as he did with many things. He was very much of an activist about all kinds of things. Dean Rusk was much more cautious about many things. Part of that, perhaps, went with age, and part of that went with experience, and part of that went with the job he was in. So my guess would be that your father thought that Bobby didn't often know what the hell he was talking about in foreign affairs and he wanted to do things that would be the wrong thing to do because they would offend so-and-so here, there, and other places. And I think Bobby thought that the Department of State was always saying "no" or dragging its feet about doing things. There is truth to both positions. The Department of State does sometimes tend to be over cautious. And Bobby certainly would sometimes want to do things and not think seriously about what he was doing. I think it was just more personality than it was anything else.

RICHARD RUSK: They got into it initially over appointment of ambassadors and appointment of people to the Department. Do you recall any of this in a way that might be of use to me, in staffing the personnel positions for the Kennedy government? My dad would be inclined to rely on the Department, the career people. And Bobby would want people oriented heavily towards the President.

KATZENBACH: Yes. And again, each position is quite understandable. Your father wanted people who he believed had experience. He had spent a long time, so to speak, in and out of the Department. He had a lot of respect for people who were there. And I don't know, but I am sure that it is difficult to have somebody subordinate to you, who may not have his loyalties running towards you. So I think that may have been a factor. On the other hand, Bobby was enormously loyal to his brother and really wanted to populate the whole government with people who shared that feeling of loyalty.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me ask you about John Paton Davies [Jr.]. And of course, he had been more or less rubbed out during the [Joseph Raymond] McCarthy period. My dad was concerned about that. Apparently they were not able to successfully resurrect John Paton Davies and clear his career until 1968. You were involved with it, according to the literature.

KATZENBACH: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Helped push the thing along a little bit. Can you cast some light from where you sit on what some of the problems were? And why it was such a difficult thing to clear that fellow?

KATZENBACH: I don't really know, except that we talked a minute ago about foot dragging in the Department. And there was certainly foot dragging there. Your father asked me to see if I couldn't do something to make sure that his name was clear. And he said to me, "Look, I can't be involved in this."

RICHARD RUSK: Why did he say that?

KATZENBACH: I think the reason for that was because he felt that there was a friendship or loyalties or relationships going way back into the past with Davies. But he felt that Davies ought to be clear. He felt there was an injustice that had been done there, and he thought that I could figure out some way of getting this thing accomplished. And he must have said that to me a good year before it happened.

RICHARD RUSK: Was that 1967?

KATZENBACH: I would think so, yeah. So I tried to figure out a way of getting this done. What you had to do was to get a clearance. You had to have somebody say they wanted to employ him for something, so that you could then go get a security clearance. And then, you could get that in the ordinary course of things. And I tried to find something for Davies to do as far as the Department of State was concerned. And for whatever reasons, we didn't seem to be

able to come up with anything. And I am not at all sure that the fellow for the administration, [Idar] Rimestad I think is his name, he was a foreign service officer. I am just not sure that he wanted to do anything about this. He had something going in Latin America, which looked that it might somehow work out.

RICHARD RUSK: A position for Davies in Latin America?

KATZENBACH: It would be as a consultant, an adviser. It could be phony. It didn't make any difference if he ever consulted or gave any advice if you could get him appointed as such and gave him necessary security clearance. That didn't work out. And time went by. So I finally went to Bill [William S.] Gaud [Jr.], with the A.I.D. [Agency for International Development] program, and said, "Isn't there something you've got?" And he was interested in doing it, so he came up with something that didn't make a great deal of sense. And I am reaching here on my memory: a consulting of one kind or another. He thought it might do. Again, I kept asking to get a security clearance. He had to ask for the security clearance to get him to be a consultant in A.I.D. because in the course of things, that would come back over to the Department of State because he worked in the Department of State. So we would be asked about that. And we could say that as far as we were concerned, he could be given a top-secret clearance. And that was the device that we had for getting him cleared; because he would have to be cleared by State to be able to work for A.I.D. and consulting them. Time went on and time went on and time went on, and we didn't have it. I couldn't get the papers up on it. And I kept trying and trying to get it. And finally the job was running out, the administration was running out.

RICHARD RUSK: Right. You wanted to do this before the change.

KATZENBACH: I wanted to do it before the change of administration. It had to be done before the change of administration. So finally we got it up and sent it over to A.I.D. And we were very near the end: a week, two weeks, before the end of the administration. And I was very concerned that a new Republican administration would come in and cancel the whole thing and it never would get completed or done, because A.I.D. still hadn't completed all the clearances and gotten all the work they needed done. Obviously, it didn't make much sense a month before the end of the administration. So that was why I decided that the way to do this was to leak it to the press that the State Department had cleared him, to get it out public, because it might never have otherwise happened. I talked with his lawyer about that and he said that was fine. So what I did was get the reporter from the *New York Times*, who had nothing to do, probably was still at college when this thing originally happened to Davies. But he was Bernard Gwertzman. I got him in and sat him down for an hour. And I said, "I'm going to give this to other reporters, but you've got twenty-four hours to write that story. And I'm going to go through just the background of clearance procedure. Why I am telling you is because I want it to get public. He has been cleared and I will let the rest of the press know in twenty-four hours. But you've got an exclusive on it for twenty-four hours." Because both Davies' lawyer and I felt that it was important to get the whole story out. Who was Davies? What had happened to him in the past? The whole thing. I had picked Bernie Gwertzman as the reporter because, as I said, no contact, very thorough, very objective guy who couldn't be identified as a conservative or liberal or anything else, just a very good reporter. So he came out and we had a nice front page story in the *New York Times*, which was his vindication. I don't believe the A.I.D. contract was ever signed, ever actually got the

whole formalities done. But the paper had gone from State to A.I.D. that said that he was cleared as far as State Department was concerned. That was what the story was about.

RICHARD RUSK: It wasn't possible for the Department, itself, or the Secretary of State, or someone high up in government to have held a kind of public ceremony and for the Department itself to put out a statement?

KATZENBACH: I believe, and that's only what the administrative people told me, that the only basis for clearing somebody was to employ them to do something. So you had to re-employ him, and we looked around for quite a while. But I really think there were people in the Department of State who were scared to death of this proposition. I think there were people also who thought that what I was doing might be embarrassing to the Secretary. And I didn't want to say at that time, "For Christ's sake! It's the Secretary's idea!" because your father had said he thought it would go best if he weren't involved in any way. He didn't want to pressure anybody.

RICHARD RUSK: He didn't explain that to you, did he?

KATZENBACH: No, he didn't explain that to me.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you remember being involved with it back in the sixties at Justice when Robert Kennedy made his input on this matter, not only with Davies but the old China hands in general? Were you privy to that at all?

KATZENBACH: It doesn't ring any bell with me.

RICHARD RUSK: Apparently Bobby Kennedy fought that tooth-and-nail. He didn't want that back then, fearing the political consequences to his brother's administration.

KATZENBACH: I could imagine that that would have been his position. And I think it probably was not his position four or five years later. But I think probably earlier it was because there were other circumstances of that kind.

RICHARD RUSK: It's a minor point, but it's a real sore point and I would sure like to get some clarity on it. John Davies, incidentally, was the only fellow who didn't respond to my letter of inquiry. He's in North Carolina now. I guess it's just one of those things.

KATZENBACH: I believe he was totally satisfied with what was done. You probably have seen the piece in the--

RICHARD RUSK: No, but I will look for it. Do you recall what day it came out?

KATZENBACH: It was just before the end of the administration, so it would have been December '68. It was a heck of a good story. The only thing that came out which really made me irritated later on was Marvin Kalb, who wrote a piece in New York Times Magazine about two years later--And I had talked with Marvin Kalb--in which he criticized the whole procedure of leaking to the press, saying this was in a backhanded way of clearing John Davies, and so on. It

was ridiculous, because if it hadn't been done that way, there wouldn't have ever been any clearance.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I am glad we got that.

KATZENBACH: He knew that. Well, he should have known it. I did it in a way, talking with Davies; it wasn't with his lawyer. So, it wasn't as if I were doing something underhanded as far as he was concerned. He wanted it out. And I think the Gwertzman piece was about as good as--

RICHARD RUSK: How do you spell Gwertzman?

KATZENBACH: G-W-I-R-T-Z-M-A-N [sic]. He's still with the *New York Times*. He later was a correspondent in the Soviet Union. And he's now head of their Washington bureau.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad brought this matter up at the very beginning of the administration and ran into two things: Robert Kennedy's opposition and also the advice of the State Department General Counsel that it was best he not get involved with it because there were legal complications if he did.

KATZENBACH: A matter of association and so forth.

RICHARD RUSK: Perhaps it was that, because he testified earlier in the 1950's on Davies behalf.

KATZENBACH: That I think I probably did know. He probably did tell me.

RICHARD RUSK: He did tell you that?

KATZENBACH: Yes. Because he told me something about the reasons why he shouldn't be involved.

RICHARD RUSK: He never put an order out to the people in the Department to get Davies clear. It was you working--

KATZENBACH: I used to sit very often in the evenings with him, drink with him, about 6:00.

RICHARD RUSK: Was that the "bottle club?"

KATZENBACH: Yes. It was really at that time, one night that he asked me if I would do it. And I was all for doing it.

RICHARD RUSK: Is there anything further to add on that Davies story?

KATZENBACH: I don't think so, unless reading some of the stories, you have any other questions you might ask.

RICHARD RUSK: There was supposedly a lot of opposition from the Justice security people on that thing, too, even in '67 and '68.

KATZENBACH: Oh, I think there was, yes. I think they did have trouble getting him cleared. And they ran into some problems doing it. But I'm not at all sure that State Department people, who were doing the more reacting with great enthusiasm--who did I have that played a very active role? He is a lawyer in Washington who was head of some job in security over in the Defense Department who I had working on this, and who also wanted to get this done. What was his name? Maybe it will come to me.

RICHARD RUSK: If I have any more questions, I'll get back to you. But I think that will do it for the Davies matter. Later on as you--

KATZENBACH: Walter something.

RICHARD RUSK: It's been twenty years. Later on, in your period with the Justice Department up through and including your years as Attorney General, were there any contacts of significance with my father that I should be alerted to? Again, I'm not trying to do a detailed policy study of my dad. It's more of a personal story.

KATZENBACH: I used to see him from time to time, but I've forgotten now. I guess one of the times when there was a lot of contact was during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you a member of EXCOM [Executive Committee of the National Security Council]?

KATZENBACH: No, but I attended almost all the meetings.

RICHARD RUSK: As an assistant to Robert Kennedy?

KATZENBACH: Yes. So I had a lot of contact then with him. That was a time when I really think there wasn't that much tension between Bobby and your father on that particular issue. I think they really were pretty much on the same wave length, the problem was to, I think, to keep all the hawks from dropping all the bombs and killing us: a big problem. The way the Air Force always thinks that they can surgically take out anything by bombing forty miles of (unintelligible)

RICHARD RUSK: You had had some insight on that based on your World War II experience.

KATZENBACH: That's where I always thought that I and Walt (Whitman) Rostow didn't get on together. I liked him; it wasn't personal. I once said to him, "You know, the difference between you and I is that you were doing analysis in bombing and making everything look good in World War II and I was dropping the bombs and knew we weren't hitting the targets."

RICHARD RUSK: Plus you spent two years in a prisoner of war camp.

KATZENBACH: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: That's a good point. As far as the Cuban Missile Crisis goes, I recall reading an account where my dad--Warren (I.) Cohen called his performance there--Warren Cohen wrote the only biography of my dad to date. It's called Dean Rusk. It was published in 1980. Did you ever see a copy of that?

KATZENBACH: No, I never even heard of it.

RICHARD RUSK: It didn't sell, it was just dull as hell and no one I have run into has read it yet.

KATZENBACH: I'm sorry, I would have read it. I mean I would have been interested in reading it.

RICHARD RUSK: If you really get into it, I might send you a copy of it.

KATZENBACH: I'll get hold of a copy of it. I never knew it had been written.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, it wasn't pushed by the publisher. It's part of the American Secretaries of State series. Cohen compared my dad's performance with the Cuban Missiles with his earlier performance with the Bay of Pigs. He called it "a virtuoso performance": not playing an active leadership role in bigger meetings, but doing other things in private sorts of ways. How did you see my dad's overall conduct during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

KATZENBACH: Well, your father liked to do things, which probably was one of the reasons for tension with Bobby, in ways that I didn't totally agree with myself. Because he saw himself as Secretary of State, which he was, and he saw that as a job where he should not make commitments to one course of action or another until he really was fairly confident, not only of his own view but the fact that the President would be amenable to that. That is, he didn't want to cross the President by recommending something to the President, which the President would say, "Oh, for Pete's sake! I don't want to do that!"

RICHARD RUSK: I see. Even in his private conversations with the President?

KATZENBACH: No, if there was nobody else present, he wouldn't be concerned. But he was concerned about taking positions if there were others present. Well as I say, I don't totally agree with that myself, because it makes it very awkward, sometimes running. He didn't mind other people taking positions. But that would be very different from Bobby who didn't mind taking positions and didn't mind being wrong about it and backing off. Your father didn't like to do that. Once he came down on a position; that was pretty much it.

RICHARD RUSK: As Under Secretary, did you ever confront him on that style of administration?

KATZENBACH: Oh, yes I've told him. I've had conversations with him about that. And he said he thought it was a very serious matter when the President and the Secretary of State disagreed

about something and that meant you couldn't continue to be Secretary of State if you had disagreements. Very many of them were very serious. And I argued with him. If you are not seeing eye-to-eye with the President on a lot of matters, then you are the wrong Secretary of State. But you hurt your own leadership, in my view, if you don't take positions. So I had debates with him. I was, and am, very fond of your father and I felt perfectly able to say to him, "I don't like this way to do that." It wouldn't change his mind about it. But even when he had his conversations with the President, he would go back on the phone out of my hearing to have conversations. All of which I thought--I had a lot of disagreements from time to time, and it never bothered me that much.

RICHARD RUSK: You never were privy to his personal conversations with Lyndon [Baines] Johnson?

KATZENBACH: No, no.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you the fellow in my dad's office who could tap him on the shoulder whenever and if he needed it and tell him, "You're being a damn fool"? Did you have that kind of a relationship with him? Supposedly, my dad says, every man, including the President, needs at least one staffer willing to do that.

KATZENBACH: Well, I think I never had any problem disagreeing with him about something. I think he would agree that I always did what he wanted me to do. That seems to be the job. I think probably for a long time Bob [Robert R.] Bowie played that role more than anybody else.

RICHARD RUSK: How do you spell his last name?

KATZENBACH: That's a difficult one. B-U-O-Y [sic].

RICHARD RUSK: I've never run into this name. What position?

KATZENBACH: Counselor. And I think he was fairly unhappy as Counselor. I don't think your father gave him enough to do. On the other hand, I think that his use was that.

RICHARD RUSK: Whenever you did confront my dad or argue with him, would he be receptive to dissent?

KATZENBACH: Yes, he would be receptive to dissent. Sometimes he would even agree with you but still not be willing to take that position. And he was very conscious, I think, of departmental prerogatives. He used to be very angry at ways in which the military was conducting the war in Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: Tell me some more. I'm not privy to this yet.

KATZENBACH: This was the role, I would say, that any division could tell, that this was the Colonel Rusk role, where he would say, "How could they have allowed this to happen? If you're in that kind of a situation you've got to do things this way. Go back to World War II in this." But

he would never have dreamed of saying that to Bob [Robert Strange] McNamara.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting. Interesting. Do you recall what some of the issues might have been?

KATZENBACH: They were usually where somebody suffered some kind of big loss on some surprise attack. Something on the evening news and he would listen to it, and he'd be shaking his head and saying, "How the hell can you be that incompetent in fighting a war?" But he would never say that. And I think he had his own problems about what was going on and how well we were doing there, although he probably wouldn't have said any of those things publicly. He certainly wasn't happy in a lot of private conversations. And I don't mean by this he was saying that war is a mistake or anything of that kind. But he would, I think, resort to, as Americans put it, "shoulder to the wheel": something's going to happen of that kind.

RICHARD RUSK: That's a faith that, ultimately, given our technology--

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, what did you think of [David] Halberstam's book? You were mentioned in there a couple of times.

KATZENBACH: I get irritated, really irritated. I think he thinks that he's the 'best and the brightest.' (laughter) He was enormously unfair to a lot of people.

RICHARD RUSK: As Under Secretary in those three years, you two were involved in a great many things other than Vietnam. Is there anything in particular that we should discuss here that may illustrate that larger story? And I might ask again about his administrative style. Follow that up with that question. What kind of boss was he for you?

KATZENBACH: He was a miraculous person to work with. I think there was a very major personnel problem in the Department of State that I wanted to try to face up to. But I don't think your dad wanted to face up to it all that much. And the problem was the hourglass shape of the personnel in the Department. That is to say, you had as many FSOs as you did FS07s. And that's a very difficult organization to run because you had a whole bunch of very senior foreign officers who were getting assignments that were not any better than, and perhaps not as good as, assignments that they had had fifteen years before. And that creates enormous morale problems. And they ought to be getting up and out. We should have been getting them out. And this was not a pleasant problem.

RICHARD RUSK: Getting them out by retiring them?

KATZENBACH: By retiring them. You see, you could do that with a lot of them if you just failed to promote them for ten years, they had to get out. Nobody ever did that. Nine years and nine months later, they give them promotions and they have a whole ten more years to go. What we needed was some kind of a window plan, some kind of a retirement plan that gave people an incentive to retire. The legislation that existed at that time was really quite the opposite because the retirement pay was based on your last five years pay, times whatever it was: one and one-half percent or one percent for every year that you had of service, based on the average of your last five years. You see, every time you had pay increases that increased the retirement, so people were hanging on. I wanted to put in legislation that would incent them to get out, saying if the job you're in gets paid more for the next five years, you will get the benefit.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you alone in that?

KATZENBACH: He just really didn't want to face up to that, he wanted me to do it. When it came to getting him involved, he didn't want to get involved. He had other things on his mind. And I don't think administration was the thing that interested him the most. So, I did a lot of work on that, but I never really got it going. I once asked him, "Dean, do you know how many special assistants you have?" He said, "Of course I do." I said, "How many do you think you have?" And he counted on his fingers and said, "eight or nine." I said, "You've got over fifty." He said, "What?" I said, "You have over fifty." He said, "My God! I didn't know that." And I started telling him that some of them he had never met. You know, special assistants for fishery problems, special assistants for science this, special assistants for that, which is a reflection of the problem I was talking about earlier. If you've got a bunch of senior foreign service officers around, you've got to find some suitable job for them. So they made them special assistants for some particular problem. And one result of that was they got their initials on coordinations; so to get a cable out of there on some subject, you've got some forty people signing off on every damn cable. But again, he deplored that, but he wasn't really prepared to do anything about it if doing anything about it is going to create any unpleasantness for people whom he genuinely liked and respected. So there was a nice--

RICHARD RUSK: There was a mushrooming of the Department of State under his eight years?

KATZENBACH: It wasn't under his eight years. It just happened because after World War II the Department of State and the Foreign Service grew very rapidly. So if you think of it like a baby boom you will see what happened.

RICHARD RUSK: Did he encourage you to go down that trail?

KATZENBACH: Oh, yes! Oh, he encouraged me. He said he knew there were personnel problems and if I could spend some time on them, and so forth, that would be terrific. But as soon as it came to doing anything unpleasant, he wouldn't do it. So there was a nice side to it too.

RICHARD RUSK: Anything else about his administrative style that you should comment on? Were his standing orders to you the same as what he gave to other people? "Decide what you can decide and feel comfortable with. Whatever you can't decide bring to me. And, in general, I will back you up." You know, did he delegate massive--

KATZENBACH: I guess so. It never really occurred to me. I think that's the way I operated. I think those things are easy to do if you have any kind of closeness with the person you are working with it. It's really pretty easy to do. And the Joint-Secretary there, who serves the Secretary and the Under Secretary, keeps that going in that way. Ben [Benjamin H.] Read was doing it then, and he wouldn't let you make a mistake. If you were going to approve a cable that he thought the Secretary wasn't going to like, he would bring it to your attention. He wouldn't tell you, you couldn't do it. He'd say, "You may not know, but he has turned that down three times." He had a fairly good check on it.

RICHARD RUSK: Regarding the Vietnam decision making--Where can I start here? Incidentally, was my dad involved in your move from Justice to State?

KATZENBACH: Oh, sure he was.

RICHARD RUSK: Partly his initiation?

KATZENBACH: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Why did he want you over there?

KATZENBACH: I think we liked each other a lot. I think probably it was just about as simple as that. He thought that the President had a fair amount of confidence in my judgment on one thing or another, and that was some help. That was hard to do. I was interested, had always been interested in foreign affairs. I was interested in doing it. I had been with the Department of Justice six years then. And I had used up about all of my good will with Mr. [John Edgar] Hoover on a few things. So I think it was all of that. I was happy to do it; I wanted to do it. I volunteered long before it happened to the President. The President asked me about somebody as Under Secretary to replace George [Wildman] Ball and I had said that I had a good candidate for the job. He said, "Who?" And I said, "Me. I'll take it."

RICHARD RUSK: Was one of the reasons for wanting that job to try to do something about this Vietnam War?

KATZENBACH: Oh, a little bit. But it wasn't a major--To this day, I think that every step of the way in getting involved in Vietnam was done for the right, perfectly good and moral, political, both reasons. I was very interested in getting out of Vietnam, not because I thought it was wrong to have gotten in, but because I thought we were not getting anywhere. And I also thought, you know, the way in which we were fighting that war was the horror of it, not the fact that we were fighting it, not even the people whom we were supporting. You don't have much choice in some of that. Even what has happened since shows that we weren't supporting the bad guys against the good guys. We may have been supporting bad guys against bad guys, but it wasn't good guys against bad guys.

RICHARD RUSK: It's certainly been true. Post-Vietnam War developments have made fools out of a lot of those sixties radicals.

KATZENBACH: So, we were anxious. Dean knew that I would have been anxious to have found some kind of way of getting out of there and explored a lot of them. He never stopped that. He didn't want to stop that.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm really interested in the Tet Offensive and the policy review that took place in its aftermath. And that was a very important period in decision making. Townsend [Walter] Hoopes wrote a book called *The Limits of Intervention* in which he said that Clark [McAdams] Clifford played a substantial role in changing the President's mind. Were you, at State, aware of what Clifford and his crew at Defense were up to?

KATZENBACH: Oh, sure, sure. I went over and I sat in most of the meetings that he had over there.

RICHARD RUSK: That was part of that task force?

KATZENBACH: Part of the task force. But, again, you see, it was the same--you talked earlier about your father's style. He wasn't willing to go over to--

RICHARD RUSK: He was unwilling you say?

KATZENBACH: He was unwilling to go over to Pentagon to sit at a task force that was chaired by Clark Clifford. It would be all right for me to go. I was Under Secretary. But it wasn't appropriate for him because if he was going to be there, he had to be Chair. And that was the role he saw for Secretary of State. So I think he cut himself out of some of that. I think--

RICHARD RUSK: Was that issue on which he cut himself out? That fact that Clifford was chairing it?

KATZENBACH: Yeah, I think so. Also, I suppose he thought that Clark Clifford was going to take a very objective and fair look at this whole thing. And I think he probably thought that he was going to come out just where he had come out before. So I think he was surprised. Although he should not have been (unintelligible). Every meeting that went on there and happened was being faithfully reported.

RICHARD RUSK: You did faithfully and daily report to him exactly what went on there?

KATZENBACH: Oh, yeah. Sure. Sure.

RICHARD RUSK: Was my Dad sympathetic toward this effort to take another look?

KATZENBACH: I think he was more sympathetic to--I think he thought all the way down the line, when it was clear that that wasn't happening, I don't think he believed that that would end up taking any different view than the view that they had taken before. And I thought he thought it would strengthen things.

RICHARD RUSK: The policy analysis and review would strengthen our commitments?

KATZENBACH: Yes, strengthen our commitments: useful to do, but would end up with bad (unintelligible). There wasn't anything else. The President couldn't back out. He couldn't get out of it, which was true: you couldn't.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you under any particular set of instructions from him?

KATZENBACH: No. He never really did that to me. As a free agent, I would not have said anything that I thought he would be deeply in disagreement with, offended by, or something. I do think if you are in a Department, you owe loyalty to the head of the Department. I feel very strongly about that. I didn't want anyone working for me who was going to undercut me. You've got to remember, the thing that I think wasn't fully appreciated by either the President or Secretary of State about Clark Clifford was that fundamentally Clark Clifford's an isolationist. He doesn't want to be involved in foreign matters.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. That's part of it. What about that final session on the eve of the President's speech, where you fellows went over the draft, the text of the President's message? The initial draft was quite hawkish. Clark Clifford began to argue, and others began to argue, to tone it down a bit and cut back on the troop commitments and the bombing pause and various things. And my dad went along with a lot of that. You were at that meeting. Were you surprised by my father's role, his input on that particular day, in revising the presidential speech?

KATZENBACH: You know, it's hard since I don't really remember. I don't think I was surprised by anything of that kind that he did. You see, there was a real sense that time was running out. The only time I ever did anything behind his back was with that. I say behind his back: I wrote a memorandum to the President about Vietnam, a long one, and I sent it. Then I took a copy in to your father. I said, "I want you to see the memorandum I just sent."

RICHARD RUSK: I see. What year was that?

KATZENBACH: 67, '68. After Tet. I said, "I just want you to see this because I have sent it. But I didn't want you to see it before I sent it because then I would have involved you. I want you to be able to say you didn't see it before it went. But now you have a copy. So if he calls you about it, you will know what to say."

RICHARD RUSK: Did he go along with that all right?

KATZENBACH: Oh, yeah. He read it through. He said to me afterwards, "You'd be surprised how much I do agree with."

RICHARD RUSK: Is that right? This is prior to the President's speech?

KATZENBACH: Yes, I think it was prior to the President's speech. The elections were coming along.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you keep a copy of that memo?

KATZENBACH: No, but I know Harry [C.] McPherson [Jr.] saw it. It's mentioned in LBJ's book; just barely mentioned. It must be somewhere in the library.

RICHARD RUSK: Was it in the Pentagon papers?

KATZENBACH: I don't know. I never looked at the Pentagon papers. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: I don't think most of those fellows did. Do you remember what day it might have been? It was probably in March.

KATZENBACH: Probably in March, yeah. It was before the Vermont primaries. I simply said you can't put the two together. The public opinion is moving at a rate. And whatever you think is happening in Vietnam and that we are making progress, that's a turtle. We've got a rabbit over here. We aren't going to make it. You can't put those two together politically. You're not going to be able to stay in Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: You don't recall being surprised by my dad's input during the revising of the draft of the presidential speech on March 28th?

KATZENBACH: No, I just don't remember that. I remember the speech, and I remember contributing one thing or another. But I don't remember even being there. I don't know.

RICHARD RUSK: That's possible. I'll check it. I thought you were. Do you think my dad may have also been working in parallel with Clark Clifford to help swing Lyndon Johnson around on the war?

KATZENBACH: I think that's entirely possible.

RICHARD RUSK: Did he ever discuss it?

KATZENBACH: No. I guess the closest he came was when he said something like, "You'd be surprised at how much I agree with you." And I always felt that he did agree with a lot of things. And part of it was he was not very much prepared to say to me what his view was if he thought there was any possibility that wasn't the President's view. Even to me.

RICHARD RUSK: Even you?

KATZENBACH: Yeah. Sometimes a little bit, but not very much. So it became hard to know. But you know McNamara was disenchanted with it and trying to control the military. He used to talk at length with your father about that, and about not bombing, and so forth and so on. I think again if someone said (unintelligible), I think that Rusk would indicate to him that he agreed with a lot of that. But he wasn't going to go very far in that until he knew just how the President felt about it. That's why I disagree with it as a style.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall him talking one on one, individually, during the last few months of Robert McNamara's tenure?

KATZENBACH: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting. Were you at the Tuesday luncheons in February through March 1968?

KATZENBACH: I don't know. I went there when the Secretary was away. So, I went to some of them.

RICHARD RUSK: But only in my dad's absence?

KATZENBACH: Yeah, only in your dad's absence, with a couple of exceptions when they had a lot of other people there. They may have been breakfasts and not lunches; I don't know: meals.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: He was astonished that my dad took the position he did in the revising of that Presidential draft. And Warren Cohen, the only fellow to have written about my dad, concluded--And he was not fan of my Dad's, he was critical as hell about my dad's role. But he concluded that my dad was indeed operating in parallel with Clifford and his group to help swing Johnson around, privately, in one-on-one sessions with the President.

KATZENBACH: You couldn't figure out the President's views on some of these things. It was terribly difficult. I believe that LBJ's view was that he was probably for the right. And if he got too soft as far as Vietnam was concerned, then you would have major problems with the right. That would affect all of his domestic programs. You would have another McCarthy period. He was scared of all of that.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you fellows of the highest levels ever discuss domestic politics as a factor in the Vietnam decision making?

KATZENBACH: Well, I did, certainly.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad doesn't remember any of these concerns entering into the discussions.

KATZENBACH: You know, I couldn't avoid discussing domestic politics because it affected what you were doing in Vietnam. It wasn't the question of the right or wrong. It's not domestic politics in the sense of Republicans versus Democrats, or something of that kind, but domestic, political considerations in terms of "Can I get support to stay there?" Those I don't think can be ignored. It's not partisan politics.

RICHARD RUSK: During this, you must have been aware of some of my dad's activities, being up there close to him. During this post-Tet Offensive policy review, was he reaching out within

the Department and other types of--wasn't it both to people within the Department and to, perhaps, other individuals or groups, as a means of restudying the commitment? Was that part of it or was it all very privately done and privately ended?

KATZENBACH: I think it was all very privately done. I mean, he had discussions with people like Bill Bundy I'm sure. And then he brought the WOMs in.

RICHARD RUSK: Wise Old Men? (laughs) And you were at that meeting?

KATZENBACH: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: I guess that was a pretty traumatic thing for Lyndon Johnson to have that group swing like that.

KATZENBACH: The funny, astounding note I know about that meeting was--yeah, it was funny. One of the wise old men was (William) Averell Harriman. But since he was the heart of the administration, he wasn't invited to that White House meeting.

RICHARD RUSK: Huh? He wasn't invited?

KATZENBACH: Your father told him he wasn't invited. But that bothered Averell not for one second. He got in a car and went right over to that breakfast.

RICHARD RUSK: Went over to the meeting anyway?

KATZENBACH: But he wasn't invited! (laughs) I don't see how anybody could keep from laughing.

RICHARD RUSK: Didn't they call him the crocodile?

KATZENBACH: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, that is funny. That is funny. Got any more like that? The old anecdotes are the kind of thing that makes books readable.

KATZENBACH: The only other one that I remember that had to do with Vietnam was (Joseph) Arthur Goldberg's speech that he wanted to make in the U.N. He wanted to announce some kind of peace offensive. But the President was not (unintelligible). The President said he wanted to put that in his speech, he didn't want Arthur Goldberg to use it. Arthur was insisting on doing it. But what was happening was that the President called me and said, "Keep that out of Goldberg's speech." I would call up Arthur and say, "That's got to be out of your speech." He would say, "It's going to be in my speech, unless the President tells me to take it out." And I would say, "Arthur, the President just told me he wanted it out of your speech. Now, you take it out. And if you're not happy with that, you know his phone number. You call him." Arthur would say, "I'm not going to phone him. He's got to call me." And it went on and on like that right down until two hours. Neither one would call the other one.

RICHARD RUSK: '67, would that have been?

KATZENBACH: Yeah, probably. It may have been '68, I don't know. No, it's got to be '68. I don't know when he went into that job. He came off the street.

RICHARD RUSK: He was at Justice from '62 to '65. Out of that, what was the final outcome of that?

KATZENBACH: At the last minute, Arthur took it out of his speech without any call. Pure brinksmanship.

RICHARD RUSK: While we are on the anecdotes, do you have any stories about my dad, anecdotal or things that stick in your mind after all these years on anything that might illustrate his humor or idiosyncrasies or style?

KATZENBACH: Oh, he had a lot of them. Well, one of the things that was most impressive about him was when he had private, off-the-record meetings with people. He was just extremely good and very blunt with people. I remember in some of the very small luncheons where there would be four or five people present. And he could be very, very blunt with some leading foreign visitors. It always surprised me. He was very knowledgeable but he could be very clear in what he was telling them. It was very different because he has a soft style. But he could be very blunt with them.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall any occasions for that?

KATZENBACH: There were several of them and they are all just merged together. It's been years. There was one which was a very fascinating session. This was after he was out of government. [Robert] Anthony Eden was still around and was there. That was one. This one is reminiscing.

RICHARD RUSK: After my dad had left government?

KATZENBACH: No, Eden. Eden was well out of government. Some of the conversations with the Israelis were pretty blunt. With Abba Eban.

RICHARD RUSK: Don't recall the specifics?

KATZENBACH: No, I don't recall the specifics.

RICHARD RUSK: Gus [P.] Peleuses, my dad's security man, remembers my dad up on the eighth floor with a representative of a Latin American country, poking the man in the chest saying, "You consider the United States as a cow to be milked? I'm here telling you now that this cow has grown horns!" Every time he would make a point, he would thump the guy right in the chest.

KATZENBACH: I always thought that one of the most useful things that he did was when he came to the U.N. and went over those marathon meetings with all the representatives, well all the foreign ministers, who came. I don't care how much experience you have had in foreign affairs, to go through half a dozen and more foreign ministers in one day and keep all your cookies straight is no easy matter.

RICHARD RUSK: He would have five minutes between sessions, apparently, to flip through these cards to bone up.

KATZENBACH: Sessions, too. He did that just terribly well. I think they were very, very useful. But the Vietnam thing is of course the most--the saddest part--

END OF SIDE 2

