

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

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Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas J. Schoenbaum

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RICHARD RUSK: We're talking with Dean Rusk about the Tet Offensive and the post-Tet policy review back in February and March of 1968. Tom Schoenbaum and Rich Rusk are doing the interviewing, and this is October 1985.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, maybe you can tell us a little bit about that crucial meeting in late March just prior to the Presidential speech, when you and Clark [McAdams] Clifford and others reviewed the draft of the President's speech.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I noted that Clark Clifford somehow didn't quite understand why he and I found ourselves in agreement in changing the text of the President's speech. In some important ways, particularly the general tone of it. Well, from my point of view the answer is relatively simple. The Tet Offensive, in my mind still, despite what Clark Clifford had to say, was a very severe military setback for the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. It was somewhat like the Battle of the Bulge that Adolf Hitler--later on it was--they paid very heavily for it. But the political impact, particularly in the United States, was very strong and opposed to the war. See, by March we had had many indications that people at the grass roots--not college demonstrations and things of that sort--people at the grass roots had come to the conclusion that if we couldn't really tell them when this struggle was going to be over, we might as well chuck it. Now, you can't carry on a struggle of that sort without the support of the American Congress and of the American people. I felt, by March, that the American people had concluded that we should wind this thing up. And so, in the spring of '68, following the Tet Offensive, I was pressing very hard for a, if you like, a political solution to the war--negotiations--to see what could be done at the negotiating table to bring this conflict to a close. And you'll remember that we tried during the summer and fall there to begin serious negotiations with the North Vietnamese, which did in fact lead to the later negotiations. But I felt that the political impact of the Tet offensive in the United States had been fundamental, perhaps unnecessarily so, because of the nature of the reporting about the Tet offensive by our media back home here. And Peter Braestrup, in his book *The Big Story*, has indicated how that reporting might have affected the reaction to the Tet offensive.

SCHOENBAUM: Let me ask you this. I'm remembering a time--one of the things that set people off, I think, even perhaps more than the Tet offensive itself, was the [Earle Gilmore] Wheeler/[William Childs] Westmoreland request for 200,000 more troops that provoked the Clifford review of policy: the Ad Hoc committee policy. Question number one: Was that, in retrospect, a mistake to send Wheeler out there? What was Wheeler going to say? Being a general he wants more troops. Should a political figure have been sent, perhaps you yourself have gone to look at the situation and made a political evaluation. And question number two:

You were pressing for a political settlement. Isn't it fair to say that others, including Wheeler and Westmoreland, perhaps, were pressing for a military settlement?

DEAN RUSK: Well, that reported request from Westmoreland for another 200,000 troops was stimulated by President [Lyndon Baines] Johnson himself. He, in effect, invited Westmoreland to put in a bid for additional resources to accomplish his purpose as quickly as possible, all based upon certain contingencies about what the North Vietnamese were going to do. Well, when a general is invited by his President to put in a bid, he's going to put it in. And it's not going to be a modest request. But, it seemed clear that there was no chance that we would be--[interruption] We had several meetings about that request for another 200,000 troops and it was clear from the very beginning that such an increase was simply not in the cards. Now, I had some problems about this matter of troop strength all along, because, to begin with we had an enormous tail behind our combat forces out there. And at one time I looked into it and found that any fellow in the combat units would be in combat maybe three days a month. We did not use South Vietnamese as support troops for our combat forces nearly to the extent that I thought we ought to. For example, I couldn't even get Westmoreland to use South Vietnamese truck drivers to haul food and supplies to our forces in the field. He said, "We've got to have American forces to do that." And I could never get Westmoreland to agree to repeating the experience that we'd had in Korea where we merged Korean personnel right into our own units right down to the rifle platoons. An American division in Korea might have 7,000 Koreans in it. And that would have given us much more impact for the number of Americans we had in uniform out there to carry the battle. So it's my feeling that we had a swollen force out there in relation to the actual combat effect.

SCHOENBAUM: And LBJ sided with Westmoreland on those issues.

DEAN RUSK: Well, it didn't really go to LBJ as I remember. I talked to Bob [Robert Strange] McNamara about it and he said he had so many problems on the table with the Joint Chiefs that he didn't want to take that one on, just as he did not take on the unity of command problem.

RICHARD RUSK: So, Westmoreland's point of view would have been that for security reasons Americans had better help their own and not involve or integrate South Vietnam forces?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, and you could make an argument that the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese had infiltrated South Vietnamese forces much more than was true in Korea and that therefore they would be unreliable for such functions.

SCHOENBAUM: But if that was true, then we had no--They weren't our allies then. I mean, if they were infiltrated to that extent, then there wouldn't be much point--It would really show things--

DEAN RUSK: But, see, what we did in Korea not only filled out our own forces, but also left behind an experienced cadre of Koreans on which the new Korean army could be built, and it's a very good army. Another thing that bothered me about the experience out there is that we never achieved unity of command, not even on the American side, let alone the unity of command with regard to the South Vietnamese and the Koreans and the Australians and others. The battle in

South Vietnam was under Westmoreland. The bombing in the far north of North Vietnam was under Commander-in-Chief Pacific at Honolulu and the B-52s remained under the operational control of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. I felt, for example, that the Koreans, those two Korean divisions there, could have been given a much larger territorial responsibility. They did a very good job in the area in which they were stationed. They were tough, but they were respected by the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. They tended to leave the Koreans alone. I was hoping that we would extend their area of responsibility and get more benefit from them. But in handling the Australians and Koreans and others, Westmoreland was very careful not to ask them to do too much, whereas we were having to ask our own men to do an awful lot. But anyhow, there were some issues there that we never sorted out, and we ought to be attentive to if we ever, God forbid, get into this kind of situation again. You see, the division of command meant that at CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief-Pacific] in Hawaii they wanted to win the war their way, with bombing in the far north. And that bombing was not closely coordinated with the needs of the battle in the south: South Vietnam. And I think there were some disadvantages to that.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, one of the reasons the Tet offensive came as quite a shock to the American people was that prior to that time, the administration had reported substantial progress in Vietnam. I believe Westmoreland and some of the military intelligence people were reporting progress in various categories, and overall that the war was being won. Was that your assessment of the situation going into the Tet offensive? Prior to the Tet offensive?

DEAN RUSK: Well we knew that the other side was gearing up for a major push in early 1968. There were a lot of indications of that. I think that the only point that caught us somewhat by surprise was that their offensive was launched in the middle of the Tet holidays. Culturally it's like Christmas time.

RICHARD RUSK: Right, it just seemed to be unthinkable.

DEAN RUSK: The western front in World War I, both sides would stand down during Christmas. And culturally it had been the habit out there not to do much fighting during the Tet because many people on both sides would want to spend Tet with their families if possible. Although a good many of the South Vietnamese forces had been given leave to spend Tet with their families, the American troops were on a fair degree of alert. But it was the timing of the Tet offensive, right in the middle of the Tet holidays, that surprised us, rather than the fact that some big push was coming.

RICHARD RUSK: What about prior to the Tet offensive. Obviously you anticipated that something would happen. But did you agree with these assessments that the war in fact was being won over there?

DEAN RUSK: Well, to some extent I have been something of a victim of my own experience. For example, I'd lived through March 1942, three months after Pearl Harbor. Hitler's forces were knocking at the gates of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. [Erwin] Rommel was rushing through North Africa toward Cairo. Our intelligence people told us that Russia would be knocked out of the war in the next six to eight weeks. The Japanese had just destroyed the heart

of our fleet at Pearl Harbor and they were rushing through Asia, and we saw no way to stop them. Now, I'd also lived through the period when U.S., South Korean, and allied forces were driven into that tiny perimeter on the southern tip of the Korean peninsula around the harbor of Pusan. I'd seen tough days and seen us come through those tough days. The blockade of Berlin was another instance where from a military point of view there was no way that we could have broken that blockade with military force, yet we had managed to get the blockade lifted, with the help of a dramatic airlift, to sustain the people of West Berlin. So, I must say I thought there would come a point when the North Vietnamese would come to the table and agree to call the whole damn thing off, because by 1966 we'd established in South Vietnam the combination of forces which they could not possibly have overrun regardless of what they did from a military point of view. And, but you see, to repeat what I've said before, '67 or '68, the people in Hanoi began to hear all sorts of voices out of the United States which, whatever the words and whatever the motivation, in effect said to them, "Just hang in there fellows and you'll win politically what you could not win militarily."

RICHARD RUSK: By answering my question in the way that you have, you're inferring that in fact, prior to the Tet offensive we were not in a good military position over there and that the war was not being won.

DEAN RUSK: No, I don't mean that. I still think--And this could take a lot of discussion--that the people in uniform out there achieved the mission which they were sent out there to accomplish, but that the end result of the war turned more on dissidence on the home front here in the United States. You can't negotiate with people who are quoting your own senators back to you.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you feel uncomfortable at the time, prior to the Tet offensive, with some of the official optimism that was being projected by the administration?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, you know, people in government are like people in business and other parts of our society. They are advocates. They are advocating the policies which they are supporting. You don't have a minister of a church saying to his flock, "Go down to the next corner there and attend that other church because that fellow preaches better sermons than I do." You don't have a Chrysler salesman recommend to somebody that they go buy a Buick because it's a better car. I don't believe you should expect public officials to poor-mouth what it is they are trying to accomplish. I mean, again, think back to the months immediately after our entry into World War II. All the objective data indicated that the jig was up. But we built upon hope and confidence and necessity and we defeated the Axis powers. So, if a Secretary of State or a President were to start poor-mouthing what it is we were trying to accomplish, then you'd pull the troops out straightaway. You mustn't ask your troops to stay in to do something that you yourself think is not going to work.

RICHARD RUSK: Except in the role of advocacy. And I agree with you on that point, Pop. Did you feel uncomfortable with the official optimism that was projected?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I was a little uncomfortable back in '62 when McNamara was very optimistic and said something about bringing the troops home by Christmas or something like

that. I thought that was unfounded and was an unwise thing for him to say. But, I think the solid evidence was that the North Vietnamese had lost the ability to win that battle militarily, and that was from 1966 onward. And if anything, the Tet offensive proved it. But the political impact of the Tet offensive on this country was very far-reaching, and even people like Dean [Gooderham] Acheson, and people like that who had supported the war, turned around after the Tet offensive.

SCHOENBAUM: Did they call you? Did Dean Acheson call you?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was another meeting of the so-called "wise men," and for the first time these wise men split right down the middle over whether or not we should try to continue the struggle.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you at one point have a serious discussion with LBJ and lay this all out to LBJ? Do you remember that? Do you want to talk about that at all? You must have had a conversation with LBJ along those lines.

DEAN RUSK: Well, some of the evidence of a change of attitude at the grass roots in the first half of '68 came from LBJ and the reports that he was getting from his own political leaders around the country: Democratic governors--well, Republican governors, too--the governors and Democratic state chairmen and people like that saw that--yeah, he and I discussed it, but we didn't lay on a specific meeting in which this came up. But it was a continuing process. We'd talk about Vietnam three or four times a week, at least, throughout this period. And one other thing that happened during this period. I think it started happening in '67. Up well into 1966 our principal opponents about Vietnam had been the "hawks." They were pounding the table and demanding that we use much more military pressure, military action, things of that sort. But then, when it was clear that LBJ was not going to widen the war or run the risk if widening the war by much heavier military action, which might have brought in the Chinese or something else, then a number of these hawks, super hawks, became super doves. And, well I remember Senator [William] Stuart Symington as an example of that, you see. Some of these hawks wanted us to obliterate North Vietnam, all of its cities and all of the rest of it with bombing: not nuclear weapons, but with bombing. But, we felt that we were not fighting a war against the North Vietnamese civilians, but against the armed forces that they were sending into the south. And so they, in effect, said, "Well, if you're not going to do it our way, then you ought to get out." And some of them became super doves. And that had a bearing on our attitude in the first half of '68.

SCHOENBAUM: And you were a voice against that obliteration theory, were you not? Let me say that two weeks ago I saw Barry [Morris] Goldwater on television. And Barry Goldwater is such a wonderful man. I really believe that. But they asked him about Vietnam, and he said in his own inimitable way, "What I would have done is: First of all I would have dropped leaflets on North Vietnam and said, 'If you don't stop this war in three days, we're going to bomb.' And then," he said, "if they didn't stop within three days," he said, "I would have taken those B-52s and carpet bombed that whole country and turn it into a swamp."

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I saw him on that program. I've always admired Barry Goldwater, although he and I would disagree on some things. But you see, one question that we'll have to think about if, God forbid, we get into this kind of situation again, is whether we show the same kind of

restraint with respect to civilians that we showed in Vietnam. For example, I remember that after a full year of bombing, the first full year of bombing, North Vietnam themselves put out a report saying that they had lost five hundred civilians. Now that is almost a nothing compared to what was going on: the amount of bombing. In the north we tried to bomb military targets instead of wiping out Haiphong and Hanoi. The B-52s were not necessarily the best instrument for that, because given the fighter planes that the North Vietnamese had, and given anti-aircraft missiles, the B-52s were pretty slow and were sitting ducks, whereas fighter planes could actually dodge anti-aircraft missiles when they pick them up on their radar. But, I'm not sure that the B-52s would have been the appropriate instrument for doing it. But we could have bombed Hanoi and Haiphong out of existence and there wouldn't have been any place for some of these peace people to visit. But you see, you can't really accomplish much by that kind of bombing in a place where there's no place to fall. I mean, they had a basically agricultural economy. You couldn't destroy their economy by bombing the cities and that sort of thing. And we weren't aiming to kill civilians. There's an untold story, and I've mentioned it to some reporters who've shown no interest whatever in it. And this is something that's on my conscience. I'm confident that we took additional American casualties because of the rules of engagement which were aimed at, among other things, protecting civilian populations. And this story has never been told.

SCHOENBAUM: One of the things that people could not understand, I think, at the time--I mean those that wished the United States well--was how battalion strength, large troop concentrations, could develop at Khe Sanh, for instance, during the Tet offensive, when we had been bombing the trail and bombing the north, and how suddenly there could be these large conventional troop concentrations.

DEAN RUSK: Well, we held Khe Sanh chiefly because we just saturated the area around it with bombing. I mean, I don't know that we've ever seen an area which was so completely obliterated by bombing than the area around Khe Sanh. And for some reason this got to be a kind of symbolic thing, partly for Hanoi but also in LBJ's mind. And he was determined that we were going to hang on to Khe Sanh. But there was the most intensive period of bombardment that I think we've seen in a long, long time. Hanoi just couldn't stand up to the sacrifices they were taking around Khe Sanh. But, I thought there would come a time--And this is where I made one mistake in judgment. I thought there would come a time, as had been true in Korea, the Berlin blockade, and other incidents, where the North Vietnamese would, given their frightful casualties, be ready to call it off more or less on the basis of the status quo ante. But that time never arrived. They showed extraordinary persistence despite frightful casualties, and from their point of view they won what they were going after: Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: To what do you attribute that, other than the encouragement that domestic protest may have given the North Vietnamese leadership through the political process?

DEAN RUSK: Well, they had an apparatus for the rigid control of their own people, and they used that not only psychologically, but physically. There was just no possibility of any real dissent developing or the failure of people to carry out their duties. I mean, on the battlefield it was safer to go forward in attack than it was to stay behind because they'd get shot by their own people if they stayed behind.

RICHARD RUSK: You really believe that?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, sure.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, how could they have conducted something like the Tet offensive without every North Vietnamese and Vietcong who took part in that being totally committed to their cause?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I have no doubt that there were substantial numbers who were committed as a matter of principle or doctrine or whatever else, but that wouldn't apply to their total population. They had extraordinary discipline among their own populations.

SCHOENBAUM: Maybe we could just talk about some of the facts of what happened in connection with the ad hoc committee. Was the ad hoc committee LBJ's idea to appoint Clifford? Clifford was coming in as Secretary of State, of course. Who had the idea of a reexamination based on Wheeler's and Westmoreland's request? Is that the genesis of--

DEAN RUSK: Well, as I recall, that ad hoc committee was put together largely to consider Westmoreland's additional troop request. It was not a committee to look at the total policy with regard to the war.

RICHARD RUSK: Although he named Clifford to chair it.

DEAN RUSK: Well, that's right because we were talking about troop strength.

RICHARD RUSK: And at that time Clifford had not stepped forward as a pronounced opponent or a sort of a dove on Vietnam.

DEAN RUSK: No, but it was clear to Clifford straightaway, and also to me, that another 200,000 troops out there would not make any sense.

RICHARD RUSK: You showed up for the first meeting, the opening session of that task force, and you did not show up for the other sessions. Do you recall what your reasoning might have been there?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think it was clear to me straightaway that we were not going to go down the trail of sending another 200,000 troops out there. Since I knew what the outcome was going to be, I had a representative attend for me these other meetings.

RICHARD RUSK: I see.

DEAN RUSK: There just wasn't any point in my sitting through all that discussion.

RICHARD RUSK: From the point of view of your own personal time?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. I knew what the result was going to be, and also I had a pretty good idea that the President would come out the same way. So the meeting of this ad hoc group was not all that much of a big deal after the first meeting and I got the sense of the meeting.

RICHARD RUSK: I thought the initial set of recommendations from that task group was to, in fact, proceed with the bombing, and matter of fact, intensify the bombing of North Vietnam: send an additional 20,000 troops and conduct the necessary reserve call-ups and mobilizations here at home to make it possible to send the additional 186,000 troops at a different time.

DEAN RUSK: Well, yeah, but that was turned down. See, one thing that was of concern to us and of concern to people like Senator Richard [Brevard] Russell [Jr.] was whether or not we were keeping up anything like a strategic reserve among reserve and National Guard units that we might need if we had trouble in Europe, for example. I mean, your Fourth Marine Division was not called up, partly because it did not have its own organic air wing attached to it, but also because it was looked upon as a part of the strategic reserve. My own view was that the forces we had in Vietnam should be looked upon as a strategic reserve, that if we had real trouble in a place that was of obviously much higher priority, such as Europe, we'd move those forces from Vietnam to Europe. But there was some concern about calling down too much on our strategic reserve and leaving us without anything in case there was a major problem somewhere else.

RICHARD RUSK: You remember clearly in that first meeting of the task force that the sense of the group was that the request for 206,000 troops was excessive?

DEAN RUSK: Was not on. It just wasn't. And the--

RICHARD RUSK: Because the recommendation did not reflect that. The first set of recommendations did not reflect that.

DEAN RUSK: Well, whatever was said in any papers that came out of that first meeting, it was clear Clark Clifford and myself, and others had reached the conclusion that we weren't going to put another 200,000 men out there.

SCHOENBAUM: Why did they even appoint a task force then, if that seems to be the--It seems to me this is a new point, that according to what we're hearing now the task force wasn't all that important. And I think a lot of people consider it to be real important. Why was the task force appointed?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I suppose when you have a cable in front of you from Westmoreland saying 200,000 additional troops, that from the point of view of the President, he'd like to see his administration work out a common view toward a question of that sort. And it was not unusual to put together a group for that purpose. The fact that it was called an ad hoc group, or had a name, was relatively unimportant. The same people would have met anyhow.

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BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

RICHARD RUSK: Clark Clifford underwent a metamorphosis there and changed his view on Vietnam according to his interview with us, Pop, or with me, primarily due to two things: One was his trip to the Pacific rim countries in late 1967 that so much shook his confidence. And another one was his feeling that the war really was not being won. I take it that both you gentlemen were privy to the same set of facts, statistics, and briefings. Now why was it a guy like Clifford would come back from visiting those Pacific rim countries and feel as he did, that those countries were far less committed to defending South Vietnam and weren't really believers in this domino theory?

DEAN RUSK: Until Clark Clifford became Secretary of Defense, he'd been one of the super hawks in town.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right.

DEAN RUSK: Lyndon Johnson would, quite occasionally, call in Clark Clifford simply as a friend to sit at certain policy discussions. And I believe Clark Clifford was for a number of these years the chairman of the intelligence corps of outsiders who took a look at intelligence operations. And Clark's influence was very much on the hawkish side. And then when he became Secretary of Defense, I think he got a full exposure to the seriousness of the problem and the effort that was going into it and the casualties. And he also had around him some people who had begun to have serious doubts about the war. Now, his visit to the Pacific rim countries, which apparently changed his mind about the domino theory, was more important to his change of mind than it was, I think, to the general situation. I myself never used the domino theory, either in public or in my own thinking because I could see what was happening on the ground in South Vietnam, in Laos, in Cambodia, in northeastern Thailand; men and arms coming across the northeastern frontier of Burma; saboteurs coming across the 38th parallel in Korea almost every week. So I didn't need a domino theory. Just look at what was happening on the ground and you realize that you're not going to have peace until that kind of activity either stopped or it won. Then you'd have peace. Peace of one kind one way, and peace of another kind another way. But, we don't really know yet what Vietnam might do. It has some problems of digestion at the present time, not only in South Vietnam, but very much in Cambodia and to some extent in Laos. When they get their control over those areas completely consolidated, then there still are questions as to whether or not they might start making moves of one kind or another on Thailand, for example.

RICHARD RUSK: Clifford, for example, found it a bit disconcerting that New Zealand had four hundred and fifty men over there as opposed to many thousands during World War II. Australia had about 8,200 men according to Townsend [Walter] Hoopes, as opposed to over 600,000 in World War II. Thailand's several--well, about 12,000 at one point; the South Korean's 48,000. Both of those forces were almost completely underwritten by American funding, I believe, and American support. Korea definitely made a sincere effort there, and honestly believed in what they were doing. But Clifford found these other factors persuasive and it began to shake his

confidence in the wisdom of our policy. You traveled around that same area of the world; you met with these same leaders, I presume. Were you discomforted by that?

DEAN RUSK: I was disappointed that the Philippines didn't put in a real combat force, but that they put in a kind of a service--

RICHARD RUSK: About 2,000 men, something like that.

DEAN RUSK: Two thousand men, but without a primary combat mission. But, when you think of Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, their forces were roughly comparable to their World War II forces, as were ours. We had not put anything like the forces into Vietnam that we'd used in World War II. Now we could always have used some more. One of the things that bothered me was that the British did not put in some forces because they had exactly the same obligation that we had under the Southeast Asia Treaty to take steps to meet the common danger if any of those that were covered by that treaty were subject to aggression. We knew that [Charles Andre Joseph Mario] de Gaulle would not. He told President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy in 1961 that there would never be another French soldier in Southeast Asia. And we also knew that Pakistan would not, because they looked upon the Southeast Asian Treaty, in their own minds, as being aimed at India. Even though John Foster Dulles went to great pains to make it clear to Pakistan that the Southeast Asia Treaty was aimed at communist countries and not at India, the signing of the Manila Pact was delayed for twenty-four hours while Pakistan sweated over that particular problem. But it would have helped us considerably politically if the British had put a force there and in effect, as they had in Korea. But they, for reasons of their own, did not do that.

RICHARD RUSK: Why was there such conflict within the administration over what the Tet offensive was all about? Some saw it as an American victory; Clifford saw it as further evidence that the war had deteriorated. He saw it as a defeat.

DEAN RUSK: Well, that's the first part of such judgments, derived from where you start: what your thinking is before you make such an estimate or a judgment. But, had our own home front been reasonably silent during this period, I still think that following the Tet offensive it's very likely that we could have arranged a political end to this war in the first half of 1968 because of the costs of the Tet offensive to the other side. But, that's not the way it worked out because they were leaning pretty heavily on the encouragement that they got from this country to continue the struggle.

SCHOENBAUM: Of course at that time, Eugene [Joseph] McCarthy was campaigning in New Hampshire and Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy was in the wings.

DEAN RUSK: Bobby Kennedy, and there were five or six senators who had become very vocal on the subject and--Well, if we had seen 50,000 people demonstrating around the headquarters in Hanoi demanding peace, we would have thought the war was over. And we probably would have been right. But they could see 50,000 people demonstrating around the Pentagon in Washington. So, if you were in Hanoi, what conclusion would you derive from that information, you see? And so, in any event, I think that had a lot to do with the way the whole affair came out.

SCHOENBAUM: It sounds like there was a dichotomy, though, that the military people always envisioned a military triumph, while the people in Washington, including yourself, were thinking in terms of a political type settlement. Did you have a feeling that the military, that Westmoreland was looking for a military solution?

DEAN RUSK: Well, Lyndon Johnson used to say that McNamara was his right arm, to do what had to be done from a military point of view, and that I was his left arm, trying to find a way to bring this thing to a conclusion by political means, by negotiations or otherwise, you see. And so we were on both paths along the way. And I think you would expect the military to take that attitude toward their own part of it.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah. Who suggested the change that Clifford talks about: from the, "I want to talk to you tonight about the war in Vietnam" to "I want to talk about peace in Vietnam"? Do you remember how that developed?

DEAN RUSK: When you have a group like that, even a small group, that sort of thing comes out of group discussion and it's very hard to pin that kind of a change in phraseology to a specific individual. Now it may be that there was such an individual, but I don't remember. It came out as a group. That speech of the end of March 1968 was the speech in which Lyndon Johnson announced he would not run again. And the way he said it left it open for people to suppose that it was because of Vietnam. But in my own mind there were other reasons that were much more fundamental, because he had talked to me a year before that and told me he would not run again for health reasons. He talked about [Thomas] Woodrow Wilson, [Dwight David] Eisenhower, and [Robert] Anthony Eden, and [Winston Leonard Spencer] Churchill and John Foster Dulles carrying heavy responsibility while they were sick. And he said, "I'm just not going to do that either to the government or to my own family." And I proceeded in that final year on the basis he was not going to run again. And his later health record shows that he was right in making that judgment. And I'm sure that Lady Bird strongly advised him not to run again. And he listened to her on things like that.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, during that meeting on March 28 you had a speech draft that you folks sat down to review. I think the purpose of the meeting was to go in there and work on the draft of the President's speech, polish it up. And yet it turned out to be quite a fundamentally different speech: fundamentally different from the original draft. Did you have a hand in drawing up that first draft? Were you involved in that?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I did. We worked on that speech. And when we got the "final draft" put together, I took off to New Zealand. And in that draft there was no reference to LBJ's not running again. And while I was in an airplane, halfway across the Pacific, a White House staff person called me on the airplane telephone and said the President wanted me to know that there would be an additional final paragraph on that speech. And I knew what that meant: that he did not want me to land in New Zealand caught by surprise by his announcement.

SCHOENBAUM: He knew that you would know what he meant?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, he knew that I would know what he meant because of our earlier conversation.

RICHARD RUSK: In Townsend Hoopes' account of that meeting, Hoopes has Clifford more or less dominating the conversation at one point, and having had my own interview with him I can certainly see how that could happen. Clifford did a lot of talking, apparently, at that meeting. Was that your recollection as well?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I would usually--had relatively few words that he suggested that I usually did--But Clark Clifford has always been very much involved in Democratic party politics. That was true back in the Truman administration; it was true during the sixties. And I think that he saw a political disaster for the Democrats coming down the trail as a result of Vietnam; and I think that was very much in his mind. I don't fault him for that, because that's part of a problem that a President has to think about, of course. [Of course, when he came to bear direct official responsibilities as Secretary of Defense, he might have shifted his position away from the attitude that he took as a private citizen.] But, I took seriously the tradition that the Secretary of State should stay out of party politics. And my relations with the Congress were very much on a bipartisan basis. And so that was not as high in my mind as the international and foreign policy aspects.

SCHOENBAUM: I'm reminded of that meeting between [George Catlett] Marshall and Clifford during the Palestine crisis. That's an interesting meeting where Clifford played that same role. Marshall was Secretary of State and Clifford was the politician and was concerned about the political implications of the recognition of Israel. Was it almost that way?

DEAN RUSK: I don't think Clark Clifford on his tape described one meeting I had with him during the Truman administration. We changed our position up at the United Nations on the Palestine question. We started going for a trusteeship at one period. We were very anxious to get some time in which to work out a solution that both sides could live with. But, the President and Secretary Marshall were both out of town, and Clark Clifford was in charge, in effect, in the White House. And when this change occurred, it just raised hell, particularly in the Jewish community. But, it really was a shock. So, Clark Clifford called me and Chip [Charles Eustis] Bohlen, who was then the counselor of the State Department, over to the White House. And it was clear that he was looking for somebody to hang on this matter. Well, Chip Bohlen, who was senior to me in rank at the moment, handed to Clark Clifford an outgoing first copy of a green telegram where Marshall had written both at the top and the bottom, "Approved by the president. GCM." And that calmed Clark Clifford down pretty quickly. See, I think I said on tape before that on the Palestine matter that Harry Truman was kind of schizophrenic. He really wanted a Jewish homeland in Palestine, but he also wanted a solution that both sides could live with and not just lead to a series of wars out there. And so these two dominant thoughts in his mind led him to give instructions from time to time which appeared to be contradictory.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, on this March 28th meeting: You guys started out with a draft. You talked about it a great deal. You talked about some of the major issues of the war and what directions to take. And it was your suggestion, according to Clark Clifford and Townsend

Hoopes, that a second draft be prepared. The implication being that the President would have two drafts from which to make his choice. Do you recall that?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think it's very likely that that happened. That's what happens usually on these things. I suppose that it was Harry [C.] McPherson [Jr.] that brought over to that meeting the text of the first draft, although we might have had it in advance of the meeting because he worked very closely with LBJ in drafting speeches in those days. But--

RICHARD RUSK: You did work on the preparation of that first draft that that meeting considered? The March 28th?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, the meeting looked at the first draft, yeah. But then we concocted some major changes in it.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. But did you participate in the construction of that first draft prior to that meeting?

DEAN RUSK: I don't recall. It's very likely that I did. It's possible.

SCHOENBAUM: What about McNamara's role. McNamara, of course, resigned and there was a ceremony which LBJ attended in March, and he noticeably broke up emotionally at that meeting. Things must have been weighing very heavily on him. He was a participant in this, too. What was his role?

DEAN RUSK: To begin with, McNamara wore himself to a frazzle. He was just dead tired and psychologically exhausted, and that sort of thing, by the spring of '68. But he, somewhere along the way, had--and LBJ told me this--had told LBJ that he, McNamara, would like to be president of the World Bank someday. And it just happened that the presidency of the World Bank came open and it was not going to be open again for several years. And I don't know to what extent LBJ talked freshly to McNamara about it, but he suddenly moved to nominate McNamara for the presidency of the World Bank. Then we had a farewell ceremony for Bob McNamara, and at that ceremony he cried. He was deeply moved. He was a man of great compassion and feelings, and the warmth of that goodbye, I think, sort of got to him. You see, he'd get to his own office around seven o'clock every morning and just work prodigiously, and just wore himself out.

SCHOENBAUM: He wasn't working any harder than you were working. I know that.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I'd get to the office a little later, but I'd probably stay in my office a little later in the evening. But in that final year there, I myself was bone tired.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, sure you were.

DEAN RUSK: I was living on aspirin, scotch, and guts that final year.

RICHARD RUSK: You and Bob McNamara came through that same period of history together. You both came through the second World War, both shared many of the same assumptions

regarding Vietnam. Why is it that he underwent this conversion, more or less, in office, and you did not? Did you ever discuss that with him, or did you ever speculate on why it was that he changed his mind?

DEAN RUSK: No. I don't recall Bob McNamara telling me that he thought that we could not achieve our goal in Vietnam. Perhaps my memory is faulty, but--

RICHARD RUSK: Either in group conversation or in private?

DEAN RUSK: Or in private. I don't recall his saying that to me in so many words.

SCHOENBAUM: The goal being a political settlement, though, not military victory?

DEAN RUSK: No, the goal being to prevent the North Vietnamese from overrunning South Vietnam by force. That was what the whole effort was about. So that whatever was in Bob's mind, if he felt that, and I gather that in later years he did say that he felt that, I don't remember his saying that to me at the time. Whether he said it to the President at some point, I don't know. I just don't know. One never knows that kind of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: Any idea why Bob McNamara changed his mind and you did not? What were the things that went wrong for him in that war that--

DEAN RUSK: Well, I had been heavily involved in some of these other situations where things looked pretty gloomy at times and we'd come through. And so I wasn't quite as ready to lose hope and give up as perhaps people who had not had that same experience would have had. And maybe to that extent I was a victim, as I said earlier, of my own past experience. Well, we have to call this off now and go to lunch.

END OF SIDE 2