

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk CCC: Part 1 of 2
McGeorge Bundy interviewed by Richard Rusk
circa 1985 March

The complete interview also includes Rusk DDD: Part 2.

RICHARD RUSK: Interview with Professor McGeorge Bundy, 1961-1966 Special Assistant to President for National Security Affairs, 1966-1969 President of Ford Foundation, 1970-present day history professor of New York University, by Richard Rusk.

Incidentally, I am aware that you have written a book called *The Strength of Government*. I brought forty pounds of books with me on this trip, but not yours. Were there any substantial references to my dad in that one?

BUNDY: I don't think there are any personal references in that particular essay, no.

RICHARD RUSK: Is there anything you have written that I should be familiar with that refers directly to my father?

BUNDY: There is, and I can get it for you, but not instantly. I did a lecture on the Kennedy years at the University of Virginia earlier this year and they are going to print that in a book about Kennedy reminiscences. I am not sure that your father didn't take part in that. I think he did.

RICHARD RUSK: Is that in connection with that [White Burkett] Miller Center down there?

BUNDY: Yes. That's coming out fairly soon and will be out in book form in time for you to have it. But if you would like, it I also have it in manuscript form. I will make a note to get you one.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Your first contact with my dad--

[break in recording]

BUNDY: When he was the head of the Rockefeller Foundation. I guess he came up there toward the end of the Truman term. I became a dean at Harvard in '53, and there are lots of ways in which the business of the dean of Harvard and the business of the president of the Rockefeller Foundation interconnect. Mainly, the dean thinking some money should be given to Harvard, and the president wanting to make up his mind. We did that on a number of occasions and he was always extremely fair and also careful. And he gave us a lot of grants, but never as many as I wanted. But that's the normal condition. I later discovered, when I was sitting on the other side of

the desk with the Ford Foundation, that any good university administrator thinks that the greatest kindness he can do to any philanthropoid is to persuade him to give all his money to that particular university administrator. Fortunately, your old man had been a dean himself, so he understood the feeling and he was charitable about it. Actually, the occasion on which I remember him the best is not that kind of a business negotiation but a--we had a conference at Harvard toward the end of the fifties which was a discussion of the ways and means of getting going on academic, intellectual, cultural, scientific exchanges with the Soviet Union. We had begun to get out of that very hard-boiled Cold War mentality that governed between about '47-'48 and '55-'56. And we had a meeting, and I rather think your old man presided, I am not sure. But I thought at the time, and I think still, that he did then an absolutely masterful job of summing up, both fairly and trenchantly, not leaving out his own judgments, but not imposing them on the discussion. And it made a very deep impression on me. His essential qualities of both judgment and fairness and his verbal, which is much more than merely verbal, but his skill in the oral summary of an argument, or an interlocking argument, or a discussion, or whatever it might be. I remember that not only for its own sake, because I remember being asked about your father when Senator Kennedy was thinking about who he should make Secretary of State, and he asked me about him and I told him that story.

RICHARD RUSK: And your report was more or less favorable?

BUNDY: Well, my report of that particular event was favorable.

RICHARD RUSK: I have read Warren Cohen's book and he makes some brief--

BUNDY: I haven't, so you are way ahead of me. I don't know what that says. My feeling about your father at the time was that he was obviously a fine and able and experienced and totally honorable man, that he had this particular skill, that he might be temperamentally a shade cautious, reticent--How will I put it?--temperamentally different from Senator Kennedy and that that might be a real problem of easy communication between them. Now I am not absolutely sure, and you should discount for this, how far which of those adjectives were really in my head in 1960 and which of them I am putting there because of some of the things that happened when the two of them were communicating later on. But I did have the feeling that Dean Rusk is a very careful fellow; he doesn't let his guard down. He can do exactly this kind of wonderful job of telling you what everybody else has said, but if you want to be sure just what he thinks, that's going to be a little harder, and that's not going to be the first card he plays.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me just suggest to you what I think the areas are where you can help me or at least that I am interested in: the introduction to my dad, which we've done, the initial contacts, your relationship with my father during the John Kennedy years, your relationship during the Lyndon Johnson years, his style of administration for both, and your critique for both. I have a few questions about specific policies during the six years you were there.

BUNDY: First, do you want to do the style or the particulars? If we do the particulars, they may jog me when we get to the generals. My mind, at least, is a little bit inductive rather than deductive. And so is your father's, incidentally. I think he would say, "Well look, talk about the cases and then let's see what they said."

RICHARD RUSK: All right. Then I wanted to talk a bit about Vietnam.

BUNDY: As a special case?

RICHARD RUSK: As a special case, and we can leave that for the end. Let me start with a general question, and I will pick out my specific policy questions as we go. Your relationship during the Kennedy years with my father: You both held positions of enormous responsibility. I am intrigued with the fact that there was no infighting among top level advisers.

BUNDY: I don't think there was any personal infighting ever between your father and me. And he doesn't think so either because we talk about it every now and then. "What in the hell are these brats doing in government now, and don't they understand the rules?" And I am sure you can recognize the tone of voice. But there was institutional difficulty.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me back you up just a minute. You didn't have this infighting. Why was that the case? You obviously had to work on it.

BUNDY: Neither of us is really like that. Let me tell you the difficulties and why they are not personal in the sense of things about his and my relation to one another. Both the State Department and the White House were full of people in those years who were very ready to say, "Those guys in the Department!" or "Those amateurs in the White House!" And a great deal of that did go on. And I knew that we were not regarded as universally useful in the Department. And I knew and the Secretary knew that there were people on the White House staff who were vocally critical of the Department of State. And there was also a problem in the nature of the President. You know, I am sure, the famous story of Chip [Charles Eustis] Bohlen and JFK, when the President said to him on a social occasion, "Chip, what the hell is the matter with that goddamned department of yours?" and Boland said, "Well Mr. President, to be honest about it, you are."

RICHARD RUSK: I thought that was Dean Acheson.

BUNDY: No, it was Bohlen. And what he meant was that it is intrinsically a disorderly business to call up an assistant secretary or a deputy assistant secretary and set all the bells jangling the way a call from the President does, and that people got a mixed up notion of who was saying what to whom and there was a risk of that. Now, your father had as his model of the kind of public servant he would like to be: George Marshall.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you know George Marshall?

BUNDY: Yes indeed, but not well. I was captain at the end of the war, and he had about eighty-three stars on his shoulders.

RICHARD RUSK: Would that have been a good model for my dad to have had?

BUNDY: Well, he was a marvelous man, and I think in a broad sense, yes. But I think your

father understood a lot of General Marshall: the honesty, the selflessness, the unwillingness to fret about what people said about you. You might be very proud, and Marshall was, and you might burn inside if somebody was giving you what you thought was an unfair deal: press or anyplace else. But you never let that show. Your job was to help the President of the United States, even if you had to help him in spite of himself. You weren't supposed to show your feelings. You also weren't supposed to ever say anything that would give anybody a way of sticking a wedge between you and the guy you were working for. Now, that lead in your father's case, to a very great reticence. Part of that is natural. You know him well; you don't need for me to tell you.

RICHARD RUSK: That's one reason I am doing this book at age thirty-eight. I want to find out something about my dad.

BUNDY: You know that. That had the difficulty that sometimes the President couldn't tell what he thought, and he wasn't about to tell me, and he wasn't about to tell his own colleagues in the Department.

RICHARD RUSK: Are you referring to both Presidents here?

BUNDY: I am referring much more to Kennedy. I think there got to be a very direct relationship between LBJ and Dean Rusk: not much doubt.

RICHARD RUSK: But there were times when John Kennedy did not know what was in my father's mind?

BUNDY: I wouldn't be sure that he knew. Part of that is a very odd, peculiar, and specific characteristic of your father and of JFK: The one of them thought you could say anything on the telephone and the other one thought you had to assume the Russians were listening.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad once told me that he assumed from the day he took office that we had been penetrated to the highest levels of government.

BUNDY: That's right. I use to tell a really rather naughty story about him, totally mythical, which is that the Secretary decides that he has really got to talk to the President on a very serious matter and tell him the exact score as he understands it. So he goes to see him, and they are in the President's office, just the two of them. And the Secretary says to the President, "Mr. President there is something I really have to discuss with you, but I think we should do it in a slightly smaller meeting." (laughter) It's unfair and invented but--

RICHARD RUSK: I'm sure that made the rounds up there?

BUNDY: Unfortunately, not being as discreet as I should be, I said it to one or two other people. I didn't mean to be mean, I was just sort of being funny, and that is not a thing to do when you are the Special Assistant talking about the Secretary.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, those laughs in government are pretty important.

BUNDY: Well, they are pretty important, but that was one we could have done without. Anyway, I think one of the reasons that's funny is that there is a fragment of truth in it. Now, I am going to tell you a story out of order about the Cuban Missile Crisis, because this isn't always true with Dean Rusk. And it's particularly not true when he really decides that it is time to say what he thinks. The very climax of the missile crisis we were gnawing in a kind of frustrated, futile way on the bones of the following dilemma: Khrushchev has said to us, changing the bidding, hints around to it, but in three different ways: "How would you guys feel if I took my missiles out and you gave everybody a promise that you wouldn't invade Cuba and you lift your blockade?" And we sent back word that that's okay; that's interesting; that's promising, but time is short.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you talking about this trollop ploy?

BUNDY: No, the trollop ploy comes later. I am talking about something that is much more your father's own action. Then we get this Turkish missile letter and everybody goes up in smoke: "We should have got rid of those goddamn missiles." And the President acts as if he had given an order, which he never had.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. My dad cleared up that point.

BUNDY: Yeah, your father cleared that up and George [Wildman] Ball clears it up rather explicitly in print, in his book. And everybody now agrees that there was no such order. "But never mind we don't want the goddamn missiles there." Nobody wanted them there. Your father had explored it with the Turks in '61 and the Turks had said, "Jesus, we just paid for the goddamn things and we had to persuade the legislature to vote the money. We can't very well them tomorrow, so why don't you wait until you get this beautiful polaris you talk about and then we'll talk some more." So there we are in October 1962, not with our pants down, but with our missiles up, and we want them out of there. But how can we take them out and trade them out in response to a swap offer from Khrushchev? Are you gonna take the Turkish missiles away for American safety? No way. So first Bobby [Robert Francis Kennedy] invents, or at least makes clear to the President, the option--I think others have discussed it, but he's the one who pushes the so-called trollop play: answer the first message and say the second one should be discussed later.

RICHARD RUSK: Dad said that Llewellyn [E.] Thompson came up with that thing.

BUNDY: I think more than one guy came up with it.

RICHARD RUSK: Bobby Kennedy is the one that pushed it?

BUNDY: It's not all that hard to think of. Say to the guy, "We have a good deal. Let's not louse things up." Anyway, it gets thought of, and I think Bobby was the one who made a noise about it. Some of the minutes show that I suggested something like that. I don't remember. It doesn't matter. That happens. We are still left with, what are we really going to do about these stupid things. We all go into the Oval office. Has he told you this story?

RICHARD RUSK: I don't think so.

BUNDY: Seven or eight of us, a relatively small group, not the whole EXCOM [Executive Committee]: the people with the direct interest in what Bobby says to [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin. And in the Oval Office, Dean Rusk says, "Look, why don't we tell him that we can't possibly make a trade, that that's not the way these things are done, but that we are in fact going to take these things out of there, because we are, and we want to, and we ought to. We'll just tell him that if they'll just shut up, and if they'll get their stuff out of Cuba, they can be confident that the President of the United States wants those missiles out of Turkey and that will be done. But if they ever tell anybody that it's a trade, then all bets are off." That essentially is his proposal.

RICHARD RUSK: I never have run across that.

BUNDY: You know it's very important that it is his proposal, and I'm sure that he would have enjoyed a smaller meeting to make it in. But this one was small enough. The people who were there were the President; Secretary of State; the Under Secretary of State, George Ball; Secretary of Defense and his Deputy, [Robert Strange] McNamara and [Roswell] Gilpatrick ; Thompson, the Soviet expert; Ted [Theodore Chaikin] Sorensen; and me. I think that's the lot of us.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you remember what day of the crisis that was?

BUNDY: It was a Saturday, and it's about 6:30 or 7:00 pm.

RICHARD RUSK: That's not in the literature I don't think?

BUNDY: No, it's not. It's going to be. I am writing a book about it, about many things, but about that one in particular. Right now I have a chapter on Cuba. Let me get it right now, there were Rusk and Ball, McNamara and Gilpatrick, Thompson, Sorensen, Bundy, the President, and Bobby. Now there is nobody in there who is sort of a hard-boiled, "Goddamnit, you don't have the guts" kind of a hawk. There's nobody there who is going to say, "You are selling out the Alliance." The toughest guy in there was named Dean Rusk. So if he makes that proposal, he gives us all courage enough to agree with him. If he can say this is a good thing to do, we can all say yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Why do you say the toughest guy in there was Dean Rusk?

BUNDY: Well, I think there wouldn't have been anybody there who would have been more sensitive to the interest of Allies. That's the Secretary of State's business in part: don't sell out your friends; count the cost. He is also prepared for this because he has sent cables back and forth to the Ambassador in Turkey, [Raymond Arthur] Hare, asking during the crisis, "What if we take the missiles out of Turkey?" He said, "If you are going to make that bargain, you better make it in secret," in a cable back. So I think it was the right man in the right place, with the right advice, and the courage to give it. It took quite a lot of heat. That was a tense moment. And I can't give you that many examples where a logjam of indecision and frustration is broken by Dean Rusk, or by anybody else for that matter. There aren't that many moments where your hard

up against a deadline. But it's an illustration of the proposition that the rareness with which he spoke directly his own proposal to the President, doesn't mean he never did it. And there are lot of things they discussed one-on-one where I wouldn't necessarily have known about it, because he wasn't about to say, "The President and I were saying the other day--"

RICHARD RUSK: You're talking about John Kennedy?

BUNDY: He wouldn't drop names about what the President said to him: wouldn't do that with either of them.

RICHARD RUSK: There aren't any memos of conversations, nothing?

BUNDY: Not on one-on-ones. I mean, if he had them I've never seen them.

RICHARD RUSK: He went in there after office in 1969 and destroyed the works, all the records of phone calls.

BUNDY: That son-of-a-bitch! (laughter) Now that I am a historian!

RICHARD RUSK: Now here I am trying to write his story!

BUNDY: Well, going back then, we have an absolutely loyal, extremely hardworking, reticent, not taciturn, but cautious, careful, not withdrawn, but not all that forthcoming. One should not mess this up. There are very, very large numbers of matters where I would say ninety percent of the Secretary of State's business is to do a good job with an already agreed position, so that the problem is not, "What are we trying to say to the Germans?" the problem is how to say it persuasively and effectively to whoever it may be. And there is a lot of that.

RICHARD RUSK: Would John Kennedy dictate memos of conversation after he had his talks with my dad?

BUNDY: No way. There will be nothing of that kind.

RICHARD RUSK: No tapes?

BUNDY: There might be tapes. I wouldn't have thought that his major use of tapes would have been to record a one-on-one. I am trying to break loose the tapes of the Cuban Missile Crisis right now. Only one of them has been reduced to a typed script and cleared by the government: or one day, the first day of the Crisis. And your father actually appears very well in that.

RICHARD RUSK: Tapes of the EXCOM meeting?

BUNDY: There's one tape of an EXCOM meeting, and I don't know where in the hell it is. I thought it was around the desk here but I don't see it.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: You said there were instances when the President, in fact, did not know what was in my father's mind. Do you recall specifics there? Issues? Policies?

BUNDY: Well no, it's more a kind of--there was a period, and just an example that doesn't necessarily--[interrupted by a person entering room].

Thank you, Don. Mr. Rusk--Donald White [?]. Assistant and general finder of facts and references. Thanks a lot. We won't lose it. And it won't go out of the room. He watches me. I lose things. Thank you, Don.

You will find in the books, and the President saying, "You know, we can't seem to get an answer": a western answer to Khrushchev in the summer of '61 on the old Berlin business. And for some reason he sort of doesn't get on the horn and say, "Hey Dean, why don't we nudge these Brits and Frenchmen? We have to go faster." He says it to me. am I supposed to do, call the Secretary of State and say, "The President says that your department is slow?" I don't do that. I call somebody else and say, "How are you guys getting on? I'm getting a certain amount of heat on this." And maybe that's wrong, maybe your old man and I should have had a more direct relationship.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you ever confront him on his leadership style, his reticence?

BUNDY: No way. He is Secretary of State. No you would never do that. You know, these are all grown men. Have you read Gore Vidal's *Life of Lincoln*, a book about [Abraham] Lincoln? It's very interesting. And what you'll find is that Lincoln is making use of his cabinet as he finds them. They are much more difficult to deal with than Dean Rusk. This reticence thing is worth five cents of complaint compared to the ninety-five percent fact of absolute loyalty and disinterestedness.

RICHARD RUSK: You mentioned Berlin. You say you wanted some particular questions. Apparently John Kennedy was a more activist-oriented individual than my dad was.

BUNDY: Well, he is not a patient man. Your father is use to multilateral diplomacy. He assumes that if you are trying to deal with the British and French and the Germans, you begin with four different opinions.

RICHARD RUSK: In any event, the President was dissatisfied with the slowness of the Department's response.

BUNDY: That's in all the books. And that's true.

RICHARD RUSK: "What's the matter with that State Department, it's a bowl of jelly," and this kind of thing. Martin [Joseph] Hillenbrand tells an interesting story. He was working on the Berlin task force. And he said that reasonably shortly after the President made his charge to the Department, the State Department did send over the report on Berlin that was lost by the fellow who received it in the White House. Whoever it got to, this gentleman asked for another copy

and another copy came over from the Department. And that ended up being locked up in a fellow's safe who went off on vacation. Martin Hillenbrand wrote the memo to the President explaining the slowness of the Department's response, and he's not sure to this day whether or not John Kennedy ever got the memo. (laughter)

BUNDY: That is a marvelous story. I never heard that one: far from saying it could never have happened.

RICHARD RUSK: Conceivably it could have happened?

BUNDY: Yeah. That would take us into the question of when did we get organized. It could not have happened at the end of my time in the White House because we would have logged in, logged out, and known where it was, and I would have known where to go and whose brains to beat out and so forth. But, Martin is a very reliable guy and I'm not about to say that never happened. I don't believe that we are talking, however, essentially about documents all prepared and lost in the White House. There may be such a case. I think we are talking about a difficulty that's a little different.

I'll tell you another sense that I have. We used to get lots and lots of documents over from the Department that were the Department's suggestion for what the President should say to Vice Chancellor thus-and-such. There were too many of them in the President's life. They weren't something that came over with your father's real personal imprimatur. And the man who had given the brilliant summary, could give the brilliant summary of any dialogue, was simply too busy to fix up the stuff from the UR or the FE that was for a ceremonial occasion. And it wasn't all very good; no particular reason why. Every bureau should have a good presidential speech writer or even a very bright memorandum writer. And we had to polish all those up. And the President knew that we had to polish them, and it is an intrinsic difficulty. There are Secretaries of State who attend to everything that goes from the Department to the President, and not a goddamn thing goes to the President that isn't spun and polished the way they want it. Broadly speaking, that was the way Acheson treated Truman and the way [John Foster] Dulles treated [Dwight David] Eisenhower. It wasn't the way Rusk treated Kennedy. He let the bureaucratic product go its own way to a degree that I think may have been a mistake.

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

RICHARD RUSK: Leslie [Howard] Gelb, in his book *Our Own Worst Enemy*, tells of a seven-man task force that Lyndon Johnson formed to study foreign policy and the problems we were having.

BUNDY: Oh, the [Ben Walter] Heinemen thing?

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. And you were one of the seven members of that group?

BUNDY: That's right.

RICHARD RUSK: And I wonder if you could explain, number one, what that was; number two, why it got started; number three, why the thing was more or less disregarded. Just sketch it out for me.

BUNDY: That document is probably still very tightly classified. And I haven't looked at it since we wrote it, so I don't remember what it had in it. It doesn't have much to do with your old man, I'll tell you that, whatever Les Gelb may say about it.

RICHARD RUSK: According to Gelb's summary, it didn't mention my father, even by name. It was indirectly critical of his role--

BUNDY: It was indirectly critical of departmental roles. It was not personal in any way. It was wrestling with the age-old problem that the President has always had and solves in one imperfect fashion or another: departments and their leadership, and the President and his relation to them, and the fact that major departments, both domestic and foreign, have interlocking responsibilities with other major departments, domestic and foreign. The departmental interests and the President's interests are not a priori identical. All phenomena with which Dean Rusk, himself, is intimately familiar, which he understood as well as anyone else in Washington--and there were views which I can't reconstruct. If you asked me the three major recommendations as to how you might get that going better, I couldn't give them to you. Because this is the kind of committee we were, I'm sure this was an effort to connect Lyndon Johnson, as the kind of man he was, a very complicated man--which makes your father and all of us look like simple cases--it was designed so that if he really paid attention he could do this. And probably, if it was critical of anyone, I would bet in implicit terms it was more criticism of [Walt Whitman] Rostow than Rusk. That's my guess. But it wasn't intended as a criticism of anybody.

RICHARD RUSK: It must have been done rather quietly because my dad didn't have any recollection of the group's studies.

BUNDY: I think he probably did actually come to the group maybe once.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh really?

BUNDY: I would guess so. It would have been only manners. But we were under wraps, and we might have made do with somebody out of the government who knew how he would think, and he might have been galled by that. We were a back room enterprise. This was typical of Gelb. I don't believe he knows what's in that report. He's going on somebody's hearsay, I would guess. It was very tightly held and nothing ever came of it. McNamara was on that committee.

RICHARD RUSK: Was he?

BUNDY: Yeah, I think so. There were people the President trusted who were no longer doing

any work for him, so you might as well get them to do something useful.

RICHARD RUSK: If you could comment ever so briefly on Lyndon Johnson's tenure and your relationship with my father with that change of administration,

[interruption]

RICHARD RUSK: Things obviously must have changed.

BUNDY: Things changed. They don't change all that much, in the sense that there continues to be a kind of business that only the White House staff can do. We're just going to know better than the guys in the Department, not the Secretary but the guys who have to do the drill work, what's on the President's mind, what kind of stuff he will like and what he doesn't like. That is what we do for a living, and they do a lot of other things for a living. The relationship, however, between the Secretary and the President was easier. A simple part of it is to say they both were southerners. There was no reason for the President to think that Dean Rusk was ivy-league Kennedy-type any more than there is any reason for him to think that the rest of us were; except that we were, in the way he saw it. He had a real respect for people who had to go and be on the congressional firing line. Cabinet offices do that. That was something he understood. He knew that Rusk did it very damn well and that's something he respected. That was a part of the way he saw Washington working, much more than Kennedy did. The Senate had been a kind of a way station for Kennedy. It had been the life for Johnson. He admired the fact that Rusk could take punishment. He wasn't worried about reticence because he knew that he could ask him if he needed to know. Anyway, he was that way himself. Telling people the truth, in Lyndon Johnson's view, was kind of a waste of a very valuable substance unless you were very careful about who you told. He could blarney you for hour on end, but to tell you what he really thought was something he would do only if he had to so you could understand what the hell he wanted. Rusk was reticent for totally different reasons. This information didn't belong to him; it belonged to the United States of America. He was its custodian, and the point at which it should be let out was when it was in national interest. And he had gotten, as I said earlier, I think this rather mistaken view of Marshall. Marshall's subordinates were never in doubt about what he wanted. And you did find that sometimes, but not with the Rusk-Johnson relationship. It started strong and got stronger. And oddly enough the Rusk- Bundy relationship got better too.

RICHARD RUSK: Tell me about that.

BUNDY: I remember your old man saying to me, not long after the funeral, which had been a very wearing and tough process for everybody and we all worked damn hard--

RICHARD RUSK: Out of Texas?

BUNDY: No, Kennedy's funeral. And we were still picking up the pieces. And he said something to me about how he thought I had been doing just fine. He really wanted me to know that I had been doing just fine. I was naturally delighted that he thought that, but it occurred to me that he had never said it before. I figured out that he must have been a little surprised. It must have struck him that, "Well this guy is really working for the U.S. government. He is not just a

Kennedy kid." And I thought I had been doing that all along. Now, I don't want to make too much of that. I don't think he would have said to anybody, "That fellow Bundy is just on one of the President's hangers," beforehand. Even if he thought it, he wouldn't have said it. I don't think he thought it on a full-time basis. But there was a change which reflected his confidence that he was dealing with a team player, which he might not have thought before.

RICHARD RUSK: Walt Rostow said in his book that Dean Rusk was "first among equals" in his degree of influence over Lyndon Johnson. And he is referring to you, Robert McNamara, and my father. I know that's constitutionally the case, but is that in fact the way it worked out?

BUNDY: No. This is a very interesting point. The people, I think, mix up a lot when they go back and talk about the White House staff in the Kennedy years. The President's National Security Adviser, as they now call him, usually nowadays has cabinet rank. I was with, but after, Deputy Under Secretaries in protocol terms. It never bothered me one little bit. It meant you got a slightly more interesting seat at dinner because you didn't always sit next to whatever stuffed pot the cabinet officer would have to sit next to. And you didn't always sit next to the same person, which was constantly happening to the poor bastards in the cabinet, (laughter) It gave you kind of wiggle room in dealing with other people in the government that weren't cabinet rank. And what the hell, you couldn't get paid much more anyway because the White House staff is disgracefully underpaid. But operationally it meant you didn't sit at the cabinet table; you didn't go to the cabinet meetings most of the time. You did sit at the main table in the National Security Council, but they're not the main meetings. I was never in any doubt that I was a presidential staff officer and that's a different thing. It is true that as you stay in an office like that five years, you make your way in terms of having the personal confidence of the President and then another President. You know, people do think that you're important in the sense that if you agree with something that will help, or that if you are willing to, you can put it in front of the President. You have access and you know what he thinks, and so forth. But it's not the same as the Secretary of State. We never sent a message on anything more important than Mrs. [Jacqueline Bouvier] Kennedy's schedule in New Delhi that wasn't cleared by, or seen by, or let go by the Secretary of State before it went out. The missile crisis, yes. The President may dictate the message himself.

RICHARD RUSK: Going all the way back through the Kennedy years, was Lucius [Durham] Battle--

BUNDY: In the whole period, no back channel. Battle knew everything we said to anybody and never used the CIA [Central Information Agency] for diplomatic or political messages: none of the things that [Henry Alfred] Kissinger later did. I don't believe Rostow did either. It just wasn't the way it was done.

RICHARD RUSK: That's a good point to make.

BUNDY: And he knew that. Let me give you an example where we never really knew for sure where the Secretary was: That's the multilateral force, which isn't the most important thing that happened in the Kennedy years or the Johnson years either.--If I were to call up Dean this minute and say, "I am trying to give your son an example of something where it wasn't that clear what

you thought. How would the MLF [multilateral force] be?" And he would say, "Well, you know I decided. I am guessing. George made the running on that. I knew George was making the running. I thought it was right to have a running, and it would be wrong for me to be in the pack." And that wouldn't be the dumbest thing in the world to have decided. But he never said that.

RICHARD RUSK: He would delegate that mess to specific people.

BUNDY: There were three or four of them who believed passionately in the multilateral force. And he wasn't holding them back, but neither was he driving them on.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. Let me raise a big question that's in my mind. It's perhaps because I am the son of one these fellows who got involved in this Vietnam decision making. You were involved as well as some others. It deals with this command decision making. What happens to a man like my father, or yourself, or Robert McNamara, or any of them: very humane men with the best of instincts, the best of intentions? You get involved in decisions that cost men's lives: human suffering and everything that war entails. It's a cumulative thing. My question is, how does that affect people like my father? Obviously there are questions of health, psychology, and all of that. Specifically, and the more important question is, how does that affect the decision making process? I suppose it would vary from individual to individual. I am sure it is a factor. And I am also convinced that no one anywhere has said or quoted anything about it. It's never in anyone's memoirs. They can't write about it. I've never seen a university or scholarly study about this type of thing. You were there.

BUNDY: Well, it's a very, very important question. And you may well be right that you don't have a great deal written about it. I happen to be reading this damn novel of Vidal's, which is a very carefully researched novel. And he has little vignettes at intervals where Lincoln is struck grey by casualty reports. Now that's fiction, but I suspect it's also fact. I recall the major Lincoln histories, the sense that this is a man who goes around pardoning soldiers, driving the Secretary of War crazy because he doesn't really see why eighteen-year-old deserters have done anything but what he would likely have done. Lyndon Johnson really watched over casualty reports. I'm not your best witness on this because I left the government in early 1966, and the U.S. casualty list, and indeed the casualty list overall of the Vietnam war, was still low at that point. So I don't have the kind of direct exposure to how it was in '67, '68, and '69 and thereafter. But I did see enough of Johnson going down on visits in and out, and enough of the rest to know that, yes, of course, that's on their minds. It's very tough, even if you think of it in relatively abstract terms.

RICHARD RUSK: Do fellows do that as a means of dealing with that problem?

BUNDY: That can happen. You can get so that it's just a statistic. I don't think that happened to any of these men that we are talking about. But you know, if you've been through World War II you know that war is a dirty business and a bloody business. People get killed and they get hurt, and you dish out destruction. Armed combat is like that: Nobody is going to make it tidy or gallant or full of medieval chivalry. It wasn't then and it isn't now. What you are dealing with is the necessity for balancing costs and they don't measure very well. You are talking about what's going to happen to twenty million South Vietnamese, what has happened.

RICHARD RUSK: That's the way my dad would respond to it. I have asked him that question and he answers it in two ways: one is duty; the other is, "Sure we're taking enormous casualties there, but we're looking at the far greater potential casualties of a more widely escalated conflict--World War III."

BUNDY: All of those. You would find differences from one to another of us that we don't have time to explore as to when and how it would have been better to put a ceiling on it. That was my own view, even at the time, that we shouldn't write an open check in any way. And the President just didn't agree. It was really a basic difference between the President and an adviser, no matter who the adviser is, or how senior--whether he's first or second among unequals--the President was going to do this, and he was in the end going to do it his way, and he did. I don't intend sitting in judgment on him, trying to make any excuses for any of the rest of it. But I'd think you'd find that a great deal of Dean Rusk's view of this is really not very interesting to him, whether it was done exactly right or not. He was interested in whether he gave the best and most honest advice he could, and he did. I think he may have lost sleep over the sheer fatigue and the bone-weariness of that, and the intractability of the goddamn problem. You know I'm in the habit of saying if the United States had been composed entirely of citizens like Dean Rusk and Lyndon Johnson, we would have fought and won that war with relatively marginal trouble. It was people who didn't think the way they, whose sincerity and integrity and passion I'm not questioning, did. But there is a certain surprise in both of them: the goddamn country doesn't seem to be the country they grew up in at the moment in truth. And I myself certainly never predicted that the free speech movement in Berkeley would turn into the condition of the American campus in 1968. And I think a part of that is due to an accurate perception that Lyndon Johnson is an incompletely candid President.

RICHARD RUSK: That was another of your major differences with the conduct? I have a question about that too.

BUNDY: Yes it was.

RICHARD RUSK: Getting back to this: The reason I raise this question about the combat decision making is I'm trying to figure out why it was that my dad locked on so tight and so firmly to that policy once we got going with it. There were a great many issues at stake there. And, if anything, the post- Vietnam War behavior of the Vietnamese in Asia have certain circumstances.

BUNDY: Certainly suggests that we weren't all wrong as to what would happen.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. And a lot of us 1960s campus radicals have had to do some serious rethinking about some of this. But nevertheless--and incidentally, my dad's view today is precisely what it was back in the sixties. And the only questions he has had has been on tactical issues like gradualism, and that type of thing.

BUNDY: And also whether we didn't fundamentally underestimate the imbalance between Hanoi and Saigon. I've heard him say that.

RICHARD RUSK: That's true. I'm wondering if this business of casualties helped lock him in?

BUNDY: No, I doubt that.

RICHARD RUSK: And I don't mean in a vain sense. I mean in the sense that "by golly there are some good men getting killed out there and we're going to have to make this thing work."

BUNDY: As long as they're there, we're going to back them up. But that's a very widespread feeling. That's one reason Congress never turned against the war in operational until it was over. And then they turned 180 degrees. And you know, Nixon has a new book about Vietnam called *No More Vietnams*. And he is still arguing the same way that Kissinger did in his memoirs, that the real crime was not to stay with the guys in Saigon: not with troops, but with money and with a willingness to throw the Air Force back in if we had to, and that that's what lost South Vietnam. I don't believe that. I think South Vietnam--I don't say they couldn't have prolonged the agony. In the end, one was an extremely strong fighting society and the other was not. There's a rigidity that does set in if you're hammered and hammered and hammered. And if you want to see your father in the mode of stonewall, I think you could look at the hearings [James William] Fulbright called in '66. There it is: Dean Rusk endlessly, patiently saying, "But Senator, you ought to carry that message to Hanoi. We've talked to them on every wire." I was reading about this somewhere else not very long ago or reading some remarks of mine maybe or rereading something, I can't remember what it is. But every time people said, "Why don't you negotiate?" Dean Rusk knew better than anyone in the country that every reasonable attempt to open negotiations had run up against a real stone wall from Hanoi. And those records are really on his side of the argument. There wasn't any compromise available. And the people who talked as if, "If you guys would stop bombing, you could get a real negotiation"--And I've talked to three Vietcong sympathizers in Paris, and they tell me that--You know chasing down those leads was my brother's business when he was your father's Assistant Secretary. That's how to plow a thousand dry holes. You do get a little short of patience with people who tell you that if you just were a little more sensitive and responsive and flexible, you could make a satisfactory peace. The peace of conquest was the only one those guys ever wanted, and that's pretty clear now. And he had to take all that flack. And he took it with a lot more dignity and patience than I would have.

RICHARD RUSK: I was awfully proud. I watched him at Cornell those two days. And even the kids who couldn't stand that war came around afterwards and said, "Hey, your dad gave one hell of a performance there." It's one of the great "what if's" of this period and I'm not terribly concerned with the answer, but it is the question of what John Kennedy might have done. I am intrigued by a December 3, 1963, date at which time some American advisers were to be withdrawn.

BUNDY: Yeah, that's a bargain between Kennedy and [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] that I was against at the time.

RICHARD RUSK: Richard Russell?

BUNDY: Yeah, who was saying, "We gotta see some light at the end of the tunnel here, and you gotta show us, Mr. President. And what can you tell me about what you think there are gonna be fewer advisers?" And they agreed to go and say, "There are going to be a thousand fewer in December." I don't know the answer to that, and I've never tried to say that I do. I don't think he knew himself. Why would he? Presidents don't decide a year ahead of time. He was certainly not going to quit before the election. He thought that there would have a hideous backlash.

RICHARD RUSK: And yet the implication that he would continue that conflict for another year because of the election, with men in combat roles over there, that's not--

BUNDY: There are not that many in combat roles.

RICHARD RUSK: That's not John Kennedy either, is it?

BUNDY: Well it's not combat. We don't have organized combat units; we have advisers. And the casualty rate is really not a decisive factor in '64, I think. I think that question is really ahead of us. And I just spent twenty years saying I don't know the answer, and I think I'll stick to that. It happens to be true.

RICHARD RUSK: That's fine. You were there at that meeting. Do recall what my dad's input might have been?

BUNDY: You mean the one about a thousand troops?

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, potentially being withdrawn on December 3.

BUNDY: No, I couldn't answer that. My sort of vague, internal recollection of it is that it's primarily a Kennedy-McNamara arrangement.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. You don't recall what my dad's--

BUNDY: He wouldn't have been strongly one way or the other. That would, in his view, have been something for Bob to say. There's a treaty you know, not signed and published, but there was a very clear-cut Rusk-McNamara operating principle which was that they would never have any differences that were visible to anybody else. And that's very, very important. Rusk had been in the State Department in a time when there was real bad blood between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense: Acheson and Johnson. And he knew how destructive that was. He wasn't going to have that on his watch. Furthermore, he'd been a uniformed officer. He'd been rather brassy in World War II for the guys of our generation, (unintelligible) not all that much, (unintelligible) got to be the Lt. Colonel.

RICHARD RUSK: What was your World War II experience?

BUNDY: I went all the way from Private to Captain, mainly as a staff officer working for the Navy in the amphibious business. And then eventually we ran out of water in Europe and I transhipped to the infantry, but by then the war was almost over.

RICHARD RUSK: This question of candor is a big one. And for me it's the fundamental question: the problem of the Vietnam War. Certainly if we lost it at any time, I think we lost it when President Johnson, for whatever reasons, was not entirely candid about some major decisions that were made in the spring of 1965. As you recall, there were some pre-election statements to the effect that American boys would not fight Asian boys in Asian land wars and--

BUNDY: It isn't quite that way, but it sounded that way.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, whatever it was--

BUNDY: --objected to those statements at the time, yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: I know people have said those remarks were taken out of context and everything.

BUNDY: That's the impression.

RICHARD RUSK: The impression was allowed to fly. There weren't any clarifiers. That was the impression that we had from LBJ going into the election. February of '65, marines land at Da Nang, rolling thunder gets going there a little later.

BUNDY: I think Da Nang is a little later, but it doesn't matter.

RICHARD RUSK: In the spring of '65 we start to move with ground forces. And your brother, William [Putnam] Bundy, in his manuscript, which I went through, said that the inability or the unwillingness of the President to really state those policy changes in a decisive, candid fashion "cast a shadow on his advisers." He's suggesting that people in government at the senior levels were uncomfortable with that. Was it an issue at the time?

BUNDY: Oh yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: Was it an issue with my dad? And do you--

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