

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

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Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas J. Schoenbaum

circa 1985

RICHARD RUSK: Some critics have charged that our Vietnam policy was wrong from its inception, that the real mistake was made at the very beginnings of this policy in the late 1940s when we began to align ourselves with France. These critics say that Ho Chi Minh and his Vietnam movement, with a few representatives of Vietnamese nationalism--given their resistance to both the French and the Japanese--that Ho had for many years sought American refuge, that we collaborated with Ho in our common fight with Japan, etc., and that by choosing the side of the French, we chose the wrong party. As a general question, what are your views on that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it is true that during World War II we tried to encourage anyone who was willing to shoot at the Japanese. This included the Chinese communists, and included Ho Chi Minh. I personally, while I was in the China-Burma-India Theater under General [Joseph Warren] Stilwell, authorized the dropping of arms and American cigarettes to Ho Chi Minh and in what was then Indochina.

RICHARD RUSK: That was your personal authorization?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: You personally, not Stilwell?

DEAN RUSK: No, I personally authorized that, acting for General Stilwell.

SCHOENBAUM: At Ho Chi Minh's request?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we had contact through agents with him so that we could do that. I think one has to remember also that during World War II, Franklin (Delano) Roosevelt thought that the great colonial areas of Asia--India, Burma, Indochina, Indonesia--ought to come out of World War II as independent nations. But he was strongly opposed on that by Winston [Leonard Spencer] Churchill. Churchill had been the man who said, "I did not become His Majesty's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." Then along about January 1945, Franklin Roosevelt quit butting his head against Churchill on this--more or less lost interest in this subject. I say that because in 1944 various and sundry Frenchmen turned up in the CBI Theater asking to be parachuted into Indochina. We didn't know what American policy was on that so we sent a cable back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff asking for a statement of American policy towards Indochina. Months went by and nothing happened. We sent follow-up cables and we sent a staff officer back once or twice and couldn't get an answer. Finally around January of 1945, the answer came. It was Joint Chief of Staff paper headed, "American Policy Toward Indochina." The first page said, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the President for a statement of

U.S. policy on Indochina. The President's reply is contained in Annex One." I flipped over to Annex One and it said, "When asked by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on U.S. policy toward Indochina, the President replied, 'I don't want to hear any more about Indochina.'"

When Franklin Roosevelt dropped his own interest in it, then policy in the whole area moved to the British, because the British Chiefs of Staff were the agents for the Combined Chiefs of Staff for Southeast Asia. So that meant, in fact, that the policy moved into Mr. Churchill's hands. So at the end of the war, Lord Louis [Francis Albert Victor Nicholas) Mountbatten received the surrender of the Japanese forces in Indochina and the British went back to India, Burma, and Malaya; the Dutch went back to Indonesia; and the French went back to Indochina. So, history could have been rewritten if indeed those great areas had immediately been brought out of the war as independent nations.

Well, during the Truman Administration while we were building NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], a good deal of thought was given to whether or not we should have a NATO in the Pacific. And there was a good deal of interest in the Congress for something like a NATO in the Pacific. So at the staff level, we discussed what later came to be known as the SEATO Treaty [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization], and we, during the Truman years, rejected that idea.

RICHARD RUSK: When did the idea of a regional collective organization first come along?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it came along more or less parallel with the discussion of NATO: 1946-1947 along in there. But we rejected the idea of a SEATO Treaty during the Truman Administration because we thought it would be a mistake for the United States to go into Southeast Asia and ally itself with some and not all of the nations of the Southeast Asia and then have the presence or the relationship with the U.S. become a divisive factor within the region. We thought it would be better for us to wait until the entire region developed its own security consciousness and then we could stand in strong second line support for the region as a whole.

RICHARD RUSK: Were there other factors than that one that led you not to encourage an alliance?

DEAN RUSK: Well, during the Truman years we stayed offshore in alliances in the Pacific. We had alliances with Japan, with the Philippines, with Australia and New Zealand. We did not go into the mainland. It was not until the [Dwight David] Eisenhower Administration that they proceeded to develop the security treaty with South Korea, with the Republic of China on Taiwan and the Southeast Asia Treaty. Now when the Geneva Conference during the Eisenhower years divided Vietnam at the parallel, then apparently the attitudes in Washington changed and we concluded these--during the Eisenhower years--these additional security treaties out there. It was partly because of the Eisenhower Administration's concern about the possible directions of Chinese policy.

SCHOENBAUM: After the fall of China?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Getting back to your days in CBI, let's just deal specifically with your role and your work in that theater during those years. Were you aware of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services) mission to establish an espionage and intelligence network there? Were you aware of the so-called marching orders that a fellow named [Archimedes L.A.] Patti had from his boss, through the White House apparently, that the U.S. was not to get involved in encouraging the French to reassert their colonial power?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I was aware of the activities of OSS out in that theater because my job under General Stilwell kept me very close to OSS activities, and I knew some of the key people.

RICHARD RUSK: Who were the key people that you dealt with?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I would have to scratch my head a little bit for names but one of them was this man who has been long-time head of the Smithsonian: [Sidney] Dillon Ripley (II). But OSS during the war had an extraordinary combination of blue bloods and thugs. They had some top people out of Wall Street in OSS in those days, and some extraordinarily able people, but also some fellows who knew how to do the dirty work. So it was really quite a lively and interesting activity.

SCHOENBAUM: You knew Ripley personally back then?

DEAN RUSK: Sure.

RICHARD RUSK: Archimedes L.A. Patti?

DEAN RUSK: I don't remember his name.

RICHARD RUSK: How about Abbot Low Moffatt?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I knew him.

RICHARD RUSK: Major Frank White?

DEAN RUSK: I don't remember him.

RICHARD RUSK: Team activity of the OSS in Indochina; I believe that was a fifty-man force of advisors we had initially used to train leaders in Vietnam?

DEAN RUSK: No, I am aware that we had agents and activities going on down there, but I didn't follow the details of it.

SCHOENBAUM: What was the purpose of their activities?

DEAN RUSK: Their purpose was to encourage anybody who was willing to shoot at the Japanese. General Stilwell's mission was an impossible mission in one sense. He had been sent out there to get the Chinese and the army in India to fight the Japanese as soon and as hard as

possible; and he was to do this without any significant American combat forces of his own. Well, it soon became clear to some of us, certainly to me, that Chiang Kai-shek was not going to commit such forces as he had against the Japanese because he was looking over his shoulder at the Chinese communists at the end of the war and he already was beginning to see [Douglas] MacArthur and [Chester William] Minitz coming across the Pacific. It was also clear that Churchill was not going to commit the army in India against the Japanese until after the defeat of [Adolph] Hitler because that was the only Imperial reserve that Churchill had left. Indeed, it was Indian divisions that held the Middle East there at critical points of World War II. So the very nature of Stilwell's mission led to frustration, irritation, impatience.

SCHOENBAUM: So, the OSS did work directly with Ho Chi Minh?

DEAN RUSK: Sure, sure.

SCHOENBAUM: Why didn't that combination carry over to after that time--

DEAN RUSK: There is one very good reason for it. During Mr. Truman's full term, beginning with the election of 1948, the French were back in Indochina and we were in the then position of the Marshall Plan, the construction of NATO. And Dean [Gooderham] Acheson himself was basically a North Atlantic man. He didn't give much of a damn about the little brown, yellow, black other peoples around the world; and he was so anxious to have full French cooperation in things like the Marshall Plan and in NATO that he did not want to press the French very hard on Indochina.

There is another reason too. We were disarmed; we did not have a single division or single group in the Air Force ready for combat. And so we, on the one side, tried to keep good relations with France; but also we tried to press them to reach a political settlement of the situation in Indochina. But we did not press them hard enough to cause the French to say, "Well we are leaving. It's your baby." Because we didn't want that baby; we didn't know what to do with it; and didn't have the resources to do anything with it anyhow.

SCHOENBAUM: Had you heard Ho Chi Minh's name at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Oh sure. I had never met him, but I knew about him.

RICHARD RUSK: I really want to focus in on your knowledge of the OSS activities or whatever dealings or relationships you might have had with them. Would you have been the man on Stilwell's staff to have known exactly what these contacts were?

DEAN RUSK: Well, not in detail. But I knew about them as a matter of policy. I am sure we kept General Stilwell informed; but he did not go into the details of that type of operation.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you have any dealings with William [Joseph] Donovan, head of the OSS?

DEAN RUSK: No, he might have come out for a visit or something, but he was back in Washington. But there are two or three other names there that were of key importance.

RICHARD RUSK: You weren't aware of any directives from the White House to these fellows that they were not to get involved in supporting France to reestablish--

DEAN RUSK: That doesn't surprise me at all to hear that that might have happened. Because you see, F.D.R. had, up until 1945, pretty strong ideas about the importance of independence for these great colonial areas of Asia. He sent special missions out to India during the war to talk to Indian nationalist leaders-- the Phillips mission and others--even when some of them were in jail. As a matter of fact, we had a single patch that we wore on our shoulder: the CBI patch. It showed the Star of India, the Sun of China, and the red and white stripes for the United States. And every American in that theater wore that same shoulder patch. The purpose of inventing that single shoulder patch was to have a symbol indicating to all and sundry that we were out there for the sole purpose of fighting the Japanese and we were not there for the purpose of restoring British rule in India. The British resented that; and that brought about some clashes between us and the British on things like war information policy, because we kept thirty feet away from the idea of restoring British rule in India. But, you see, again at the end of the war that part of the world fell under Churchill's policy direction. Mr. Roosevelt, in effect, resigned from the play.

SCHOENBAUM: And with respect to Indochina, Churchill left it to the French. His policy was--

DEAN RUSK: Yes, he left it for the French to go back to Indochina, for the Dutch to go back to Indonesia, the British to India, Burma, Malaya. Now when Mr. Truman became president under the tragedy of Roosevelt's death, he was so much involved in winding up the postwar problems with regard to Germany and in completing the war against Japan, that I don't think he himself paid much attention to this matter. He didn't pick up Roosevelt's earlier policy and heckle Mr. Churchill on it, that sort of thing. It was not until [Richard Clement) Attlee became Prime Minister in England that the British themselves moved to an independent India, Burma, Malaya and things like that. It took a little while longer for the Dutch and the French to work their way out of Indonesia and Indochina.

No, I knew about this because OSS had a small liaison group with us in the main headquarters in Delhi; they had a small group down at Ceylon at the headquarters of the Southeast Asia command under Lord Louis Mountbatten, and they had a headquarters over in Assam. So I visited those installations and talked to the people. We kept in close touch from a policy point of view.

SCHOENBAUM: Were you aware of the OSS high estimates of Ho Chi Minh and his Vietnam movement? Did you ever see the OSS--

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I was aware that they thought he was a good person to bet on to get on with the war against Japan. But one has to take into full account the interest which Dean Acheson, his

period in the Truman Administration, had in close working relationships with the French in Europe--Marshall Plan, NATO.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you aware at the time that it happened that Ho Chi Minh, from late 1945 to the end of 1946, repeatedly cabled the American government and the White House asking for American recognition, often expressing his request in terms of the principles of the Atlantic Charter, type of thing? Were you aware of it In CBI? Were you aware of it during the Truman years or later?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I wasn't particularly aware of the political side of it during my CBI service because basically our approach and what we thought about him was that he was a fellow who was willing to shoot at the Japanese. I don't recall myself those immediate postwar messages from Ho Chi Minh because I was Assistant Secretary for United Nations Affairs and I was Deputy Undersecretary for a period before I became Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you become aware of them during the Kennedy and Johnson years?

DEAN RUSK: In a general kind of way. I didn't research the detailed record.

RICHARD RUSK: You didn't read the cables then? You weren't aware of the fact that for a year and a half Ho Chi Minh--

DEAN RUSK: He had made some overtures to us, but that was at a time when our relations with the French seemed to be paramount to Dean Acheson. First, when during the Eisenhower Administration we concluded the Southeast Asia Treaty, that treaty became a part of the supreme law of the land and there was a direct linkage between how we reacted under that treaty and what capitols in other parts of the world might think we might do if other treaties became involved like the Rio Pact in the Western Hemisphere, NATO in Europe. But it was a part of the supreme law of the land. On the day before Kennedy's inauguration he met with President Eisenhower. Present there were the then sitting Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, myself, Bob [Robert Strange] McNamara; Clark [McAdams] Clifford was on our side along with Kennedy. And this was a kind of turnover of responsibility meeting. The only specific advice which President Eisenhower gave to President Kennedy at that meeting was to put American troops into Laos. Laos at that point was where the major action was. The North Vietnamese were throwing troops in there, Soviet airlift flying them supplies, that sort of thing. Eisenhower said to Kennedy, "You should put troops into Laos, with others if possible, alone if necessary." So, as soon as we took office we immediately gave a lot of thought to Laos, but despite all of the memoranda and paperwork and pullings and haulings on the subject, the more we looked at Laos the less inviting it was to put American troops in there.

RICHARD RUSK: We have got your answer to that verbatim in the very first tape. Who specifically, if you recall, were the experts on Indochina and Vietnam within the Department, say from the years 1943 to 1952? Do you remember who the key guys were?

DEAN RUSK: No, I would have to check the records on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you get good intelligence and good estimates as to what the complexities of that situation in Indochina were at the time that all this happened? I know from everything that's been said that these other considerations outside of Indochina entered heavily into it, in American policy. But how about within Indochina itself? Did you really scope out to your satisfaction the nature of--

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think we had a pretty good understanding of what was happening in Indochina. As a matter of fact, some of us including myself, realized that the French would eventually have to get out of Indochina; there would have to be the independence of India, Burma and so forth; and that the Dutch would have to get out of Indonesia. I was one of the midwives in Indonesian independence in the sense that I worked closely with Secretary [George Catlett] Marshall on that problem. And one of the critical points in it came when Marshall said to, I think the Prime Minister of The Netherlands that "You can't stay in Indonesia. If you made an effort to do so by yourselves it would bleed you white and you still would have to get out. And there is no one prepared to help you stay in." And that military judgment made by Secretary Marshall made a real impression on the Dutch. They had no way of doing it. They couldn't do it. There were islands of a hundred million population, that sort of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: And anti-colonialism was the thrust behind our policy towards Indochina back in 1945-46--

DEAN RUSK: Yes, reinforced by this very practical consideration that the Dutch didn't have the muscle to stay. That they simply did not have the power; but France might have. But you see in France during this period, there were no French governments that were strong enough internally in France to get rid of Indochina. French governments could fall. And just as it later took a Charles [Andre Joseph Mario] de Gaulle to get rid of Algeria, there was not that kind of figure in France at that time who could do what had to be done in Indochina.

SCHOENBAUM: When you were Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, what dealings did you specifically have with Indochina? It was obviously not a paramount area of the world. We were concerned with other things at that time: important things like Korea. But what dealings did you have?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we worked pretty hard with the French during that period trying to press them to move ahead on the political side of extricating themselves from Indochina. For example, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos were what was at one time called associated states with France. And we tried to increase their international status; we sent our own representative to those three associated states; we provided them with aid of one sort or another.

SCHOENBAUM: Who did you meet with at that time? Did you hold meetings with French officials? Were there discussions?

DEAN RUSK: Shortly after I became Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs came the outbreak of the Korean War. When that first happened--I think I might have said this before--we had no way of knowing whether this was simply something limited to Korea or whether there

was a general communist movement in Asia. So President Truman intruded the Sixth Fleet between Taiwan and the Mainland and we stepped up our aid to the French in Indochina.

RICHARD RUSK: About ten million dollars worth of military aid. Was that the first instance of substantial American aid to the French in Indochina?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I have no doubt that in the early stages of the Marshall Plan that some of the aid we gave to France for the rebuilding of Europe, in fact, trickled off in support of their effort in Indochina. That was somewhat of a troublesome thing for us, because in our minds that was not the purpose of the Marshall Plan. But then we did step up our aid to the French at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War, hopefully as a kind of warning to the Chinese that if there were to be this general communist movement in Asia that we would be very much concerned about any kind of move of theirs into Southeast Asia.

RICHARD RUSK: I take it that you were convinced by events that were happening elsewhere, Korea, China, Russian moves in Eastern Europe, etc., so that what happened in Indochina was not a case where you fought your argument, lost, and signed on as a good soldier. You were generally convinced that our subsequent policy there had to be because of these things happening in other--

DEAN RUSK: Well, I felt, myself, that Roosevelt's instincts in World War II were right: that these great areas in Asia had to be independent; that colonialism was gone as far as Asia was concerned. And the question was just how and when to move along on that, given the Churchillian policy right at the end of World War II when they were more or less in charge of what was happening out there. But, on the other hand, I also understood why Dean Acheson was very keen about us maintaining a working relationship with France on non-Asian matters, on European matters.

RICHARD RUSK: Can you remember at what point--I assume it would have been in the late 1940s or perhaps 1950s--that you more or less shifted from one view to the other in terms of our actual policy? Was it a definitive point or was it a gradual process that you and the Department shifted over from FDR's concern for anti-colonialism towards the need to support France?

DEAN RUSK: Well, after all I had a boss named Dean Acheson, so it was clear that there were some limits on what we could do about pressing. Now, we got the Indonesian problem solved while Marshall was Secretary of State; but Dean Acheson was not, in effect, going to break relations with weak governments of France over Indochina. He was going to put sufficient restraints on our attitudes there so that we could continue to work closely with France on European matters.

RICHARD RUSK: You could show us some blue sky as far as Dean Acheson is concerned. He's gone. He's not present. And we would be really interested in exactly, if you could possibly reconstruct it for us, at what point and in response to what external event did you really adopt that position. Again, were you being a good soldier or were you genuinely persuaded by things happening elsewhere that our position toward aiding the French--

DEAN RUSK: Well, it is a little hard to answer that question. George Marshall once was asked when he was Secretary of State, somebody asked him, "Mr. Secretary, what is your personal view of this matter. " He said, "Personal view? I don't have personal views on matters of public policy; (laughter) my views now are the views of the Secretary of State, and I reached those views by the constitutional process."

RICHARD RUSK: You've never been in doubt?

SCHOENBAUM: You never thought that this was a mistake? Before you went to sleep at night you never--

DEAN RUSK: I did not think that, whatever our cooperation with France was with the Marshall Plan and NATO, that the French could stay in Indochina. I never had the view that they could stay. But the issue came to a head during the Eisenhower Administration when the question arose as to whether the United States should in any way intervene in Indochina to assist the French. And there were sharp differences of view within the Eisenhower Administration on that point.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you oppose--did you specifically oppose.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I was in private life then. But it was interesting that you could almost plot the temperature in Washington on this point by looking at where John Foster Dulles was. When he was in town, there was a strong inclination to do something to help the French in Indochina as an anti-communist kind of thing. But when he was away on a trip or something, then the attitude in Washington moved negatively toward this idea. Eisenhower made the final decision that we would not intervene any troops to assist the French in Indochina; and I think that was the right decision.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you have any input to that decision?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. I was with the Rockefeller Foundation then. I didn't get involved with it.

RICHARD RUSK: Between July of 1950, when Truman made his commitment of ten million dollars worth of aid to the French, and to the end of the Truman administration, were there any other significant steps taken by the U.S. government to support the French in Indochina?

DEAN RUSK: We continued to provide aid to the French; and whatever the purpose of that aid, the effect of it was to allow the French to put somewhat more resources into Indochina. But we also pressed the French pretty hard and Dean Acheson was agreeable to this--

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DEAN RUSK: During the Truman Administration when we were providing substantial aid to France under the Marshall Plan and other respects, some of which undoubtedly went to help their position in Indochina--During the latter part of the Truman Administration we pressed the French pretty hard to move ahead on political solutions to the situation in Indochina. They developed the three countries there as associated states, so they had a kind of international status. We had relationships with them. I'm not sure in Vietnam whether we openly recognized their independence. I don't think we quite perhaps came to that point. But again we did not want to press the French so hard as to either cause a collapse of the French Government in Paris or to cause the French just to turn to whole thing over to us, because we didn't want that baby on our hands at that time.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you recommend or was there any contingency planning for what would happen after the French--You said you didn't think the French could possibly stay. What did you think, in your own mind, would happen at that point?

DEAN RUSK: We thought there would evolve three independent nations out there: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. But then it was during this period that Ho Chi Minh began talking about his right to have control over all of what used to be Indochina, including Laos and Cambodia. Those who look upon Ho Chi Minh as a nationalist sometimes forget that.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you aware of his claims to all of that territory at the time that he made them or--

DEAN RUSK: No. When he made them, we heard them, so we were aware of it. But when people call Ho Chi Minh a nationalist, so he was; but so was Adolph Hitler. Ho Chi Minh wanted Laos, and the Laotians are not Vietnamese; he wanted Cambodia, and the Cambodians are not Vietnamese. So, sure, he was a nationalist; but he was a nationalist with an appetite. And we were looking toward the emergence out there of three independent nations: Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. But things changed significantly when the Southeast Asia Treaty became a part of the law of the land.

SCHOENBAUM: That's interesting. But the NATO Treaty and the Southeast Asia Treaty-- Legally they say things that are very vague about the obligations of the United States to come to the aid of threatened states. They say something to the effect-- that shall do all necessary things, or shall take whatever action is necessary--

DEAN RUSK: There is one significant difference between the North Atlantic Treaty and the Rio Pact, on the one side, and these later treaties, on the other. In the NATO Treaty, it states that the parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all. And in NATO if such an armed attack occurs each of them will take such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Now this idea of an attack against a NATO ally being an attack against the United States raises some troublesome constitutional issues in the Congress, for example. Because an attack directly against the United States would involve major powers that would move to the President of the United States in that situation. And so--

SCHOENBAUM: Were you involved in the drafting of that language?

DEAN RUSK: In NATO? No, but I was very much aware of the discussion on that point, so that the Southeast Asia Treaty said that each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the Treaty area against any of those [parties] protected by the Treaty would endanger its own peace and safety and agrees that it will, in that event, "act to meet the common danger " in accordance with its constitutional processes. So the obligation of the SEATO Treaty was that each one of us would act to meet the common danger.

SCHOENBAUM: Yes. Of course that doesn't mean necessarily military action--

SCHOENBAUM: No, but it doesn't mean doing nothing.

RICHARD RUSK: This is jumping ahead to a period that I think we can best cover later; but it wasn't until 1966 that you first started invoking the SEATO Treaty as a means of expanding our commitment.

DEAN RUSK: The issue there on that point is very simple. We did not want to formally invoke the SEATO Treaty because we did not want to give France and the United Kingdom a veto in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. But actually the SEATO Treaty was at the heart of our policy during that period.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, this is obviously a real tangled and confusing period in our foreign relations: Indochina in the late 1940s and early fifties. I think all accounts suggest that you guys really were aware of a lot of the complexities. Could you personally see your way through the tangle of that period whereby support of the French would not necessarily lock us into commitments that we later made? That we would, in fact, be able to encourage the French to move towards independence of Indochina and do the kinds of things that we really did want to do, but were prevented by developments elsewhere?

DEAN RUSK: Given the situation that Churchill allowed to be re-established in Asia at the end of the war, and given the inability of the successive French governments during that period to go ahead and do what Attlee had done in India and Burma and places like that, I have always had in the back of my mind the idea that both in law and diplomacy there is a substantial difference between rape and seduction. We did not feel that we were in a position for force the French hand by simply demanding publicly that they get out of Indochina; but we did believe that this could occur by stages, and these stages not too far separated from each other. So, we kept pressing the French to go down that trail, to take one step after another. The creation of the associated states in Indochina was one important step, and we were quite sure that the outcome of it would be independence for those three associated states.

SCHOENBAUM: And this happened when you were Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. You personally were involved in pushing this project through?

DEAN RUSK: I must say that within the State Department there were some very sharp controversies over this kind of thing; because the European Bureau in the State Department was

all in favor of supporting France because they were very much involved with France in Europe, you see.

SCHOENBAUM: And they had Acheson more on their side than you had Acheson on your side.

DEAN RUSK: Indeed they did. So I had to use a little seduction myself in the Department. But the facts on the ground were moving toward independence for these three countries.

SCHOENBAUM: And you tried to push that along with French officials and--

DEAN RUSK: Well, I tried to push it along within the Department. Of course, when you meet with French officials you are tied to the policy that has been adopted by the Secretary of State and the President and you just can't go off on your own and talk with foreign officials.

RICHARD RUSK: [Warren I.] Cohen assessed in his book that you yourself became a convert because of the events happening elsewhere.

DEAN RUSK: Well, he is not a psychiatrist and did not lay me out on a couch on such matters. But the truth is that I was an officer of the United States Government, and I had an obligation to try to carry out the policies that I was instructed to carry out by the Secretary of State and the President.

RICHARD RUSK: This whole business of Vietnam in the beginning was very much a part of the conflict within the Department itself between the Europeanists and so called moralists or internationalists--

DEAN RUSK: The situation on the ground was the decisive thing and there were differences within the Department about how to deal with them, how to move. You see, my Bureau, the Far Eastern Bureau, didn't have any real responsibility for our relations with France. So in that sort of thing I had a free ride because I didn't have to pick up the broken china if things went sour in our relations with France.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you have relations then with Ho Chi Minh or any of the people who were opposing France?

DEAN RUSK: I don't recall that I, myself, had personal talks with any of the Vietnamese, the Laotians, or the Cambodians during that period. We had people who did have such contacts; but I was not one of them.

RICHARD RUSK: In view of the tangled beginnings of our commitments in Southeast Asia, did those beginnings ever cause you to question the validity of our later commitments during the Kennedy or Johnson years? Obviously SEATO was made the law of the land and we had a certain obligation to sign on, but further than that.

DEAN RUSK: I think I may have mentioned earlier that I thought we went into the Southeast Asia Treaty pretty casually. There was no real public debate on the matter, far-reaching public debate, as there had been about NATO. Even in the Senate they gave it pretty casual attention. I reviewed the Congressional Record on the floor discussion in the Senate on the occasion of the adoption of the Southeast Asia Treaty, and it was really quite casual in character. So it was adopted, I think, without fully realizing the importance of the commitment that was being made. You see, that was the time when Mr. Dulles and others were talking about massive retaliation, bigger bang for a buck; we were trying to get more of a posture out of sharp reductions in our defense budget and things like that. So, I think, the impression was unfortunately left that this was a commitment that was being made on the cheap; that it really wasn't going to cost us anything. There was not a serious consideration of the gravity of the commitment at the time of the adoption of the SEATO Treaty, but it became a part of the law of the land; and when it did so, it was inevitably linked to the question as to how other capitals would think we would react under other mutual security treaties. It was immediately linked to the whole question of collective security in the world.

If I could continue on the beginnings of the Kennedy Administration for a moment, I say the more we looked at Laos the less inviting it came to be to put American troops in there. We thought, for example, that the Laotians are a people who were civilized in their own way and peaceful--that the Laotians weren't very much interested in killing each other when on ly Laotian forces were on the battlefield in that internal struggle in Laos. A few explosions made a very large battle; there were very few casualties. I remember one report where the two Laotian sides left the battlefield and went to a water festival together for ten days and then went back to the battlefield. It was only when the North Vietnamese forces came in there, sort of shock battalions, that there was any serious fighting.

So we thought that the thing to do was to do our best to get everybody out of Laos: ourselves, the French, the North Vietnamese, everybody; and let the Laotians manage or mismanage their own affairs. There was strongly the view on our side that at least the Laotians would not kill each other and that that might set up a kind of island of peace there in Southeast Asia which would be a substantial contribution toward peace in the entire area. So we went to the Laos Conference in Geneva and achieved the Laos Accords of 1962. In getting those Accords we made some concessions compared to the Eisenhower Administration which were fairly far-reaching. We accepted a neutralist as Prime Minister of Laos. His name had been put forward by the Russians. He was not our candidate, allegedly, during the Eisenhower years. We accepted a coalition government made up of the right wingers, the neutralists, and the communists. We accepted an International Control Commission. And so, the Laos Agreement, think, was a good agreement. But the trouble was we did not get any performance by the North Vietnamese.

SCHOENBAUM: What was your specific role in that? How did the negotiating ideas develop for that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I spent some time at the opening of the Laos Conference myself, and Mr. [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko was there, and the Chinese Communists were there. Chen Yi was then the Chinese Foreign Minister; he was there. I remember we had a reception for all the delegates at this Conference, and I remembered that John Foster Dulles had refused to shake

hands with Chou En-lai at a reception like that. So I went up to Chen Yi at this reception and put out my hand to greet him; and he looked at me and looked at my hand and backed away and chatted with his colleagues for a few moments. Then he finally shook my hand and we chatted for a few minutes. (laughter)

But, we never got any performance on the Laos Accords from North Vietnam. They did not permit the Coalition Government to operate in the communist-held areas of Laos; they did not permit the International Control Commission to come into the communist held areas of Laos; they continued to use Laos as an infiltration route into South Vietnam, which was forbidden by these Accords. So President Kennedy was deeply disillusioned by the failure to get any performance on the part of the North Vietnamese with the Laos Accords.

Now the Russians and the British were cochairmen of those Geneva Conferences. And we tried to get the help of the Russians to get some performance by Hanoi on those Laos Accords, but the Russians wouldn't help at all. It was our judgment that they were not going to put very much pressure on Hanoi because they did not want to push Hanoi into the arms of China.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you talk to Gromyko personally about that?

DEAN RUSK: I am sure I did, but I don't remember the exact timing of it.

RICHARD RUSK: Can I go back to one earlier question? Do you recall as Secretary of State in 1962-68 ever going back to the events of the late 1940s and the early 1950s in Indochina and reexamining--

DEAN RUSK: I read up on them considerably, yes. But doing that--

RICHARD RUSK: and actively debating and discussing within the policymaking--

DEAN RUSK: but to go back and review those events would not repeal the Southeast Asia Treaty.

RICHARD RUSK: All right. So with the SEATO Treaty and the Geneva Accords--And at that point you felt that we were pretty much locked into our commitment to Southeast Asia?

DEAN RUSK: The law of the land said that we would act to meet the common danger.

SCHOENBAUM: Were you disappointed then when later on the Germans, and the British, and the French started questioning our actions in Vietnam and they were not --they seemed to be of the feeling that the U.S. would and should take care of its obligations in Europe but that the war in Vietnam was draining--

DEAN RUSK: I told my colleagues, the NATO Foreign Ministers, at one meeting on this point that they must not expect the United States to be a virgin in the Atlantic and a whore in the Pacific; (laughter) that we had the same treaty commitment that we had in Southeast Asia as we did in NATO. After all, the United States is a two-ocean country and we have got interests in the

Pacific which they did not share, for which they have no responsibility. Now in Kennedy's first meeting with President de Gaulle, which was in 1961, maybe '62, de Gaulle told Kennedy that there would never be another French soldier in Southeast Asia. Now in effect he resigned from the SEATO Treaty. But he stayed within the framework of the Treaty; and then they participated in the meetings of the foreign ministers of SEATO; and often they were very troublesome about a Southeast Asia communique from the foreign minister's meetings, about what it would say.

SCHOENBAUM: Were you present at the meetings between Kennedy and de Gaulle in Paris?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

SCHOENBAUM: How did de Gaulle treat Kennedy on that? Of course, de Gaulle was a World War II generation leader and Kennedy a younger leader. What was the atmosphere?

DEAN RUSK: Well, they treated each other with great courtesy and friendliness. I have no doubt that de Gaulle, since he was the only surviving member of the big four of World War II, looked upon all the rest of us, including Kennedy, as just a bunch of boys, new boys who had come to town. And he took sort of an Olympian view in all of his conversations; but he always did with everybody. But the British had the same obligation under the Southeast Asia Treaty as we did, and practically did not lift a finger to take steps to meet the common danger. And I was concerned about that because I thought that that kind of erosion of these mutual security treaties could not help but have its effect upon NATO.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, was Vietnam a case where superpower and global considerations took too much precedence over the local situation there--your critics have said this--and it was probably a case where both superpowers were guilty of doing it. We tend to exaggerate the global implications of things at the expense of the local issue.

DEAN RUSK: Well, the local issue was, I think, inevitably entwined with these larger issues. For example, although President de Gaulle criticized us severely over Vietnam, had we done nothing under the Southeast Asia Treaty, he might well have been the first one in Europe to shrug his shoulders and say, "You see, you cannot rely upon the Americans." And we had in our minds something else that was very important there while Kennedy was deciding to build up American forces in Vietnam. We had just come through the very severe and dangerous Berlin crisis of 1961-62. Then we had the Cuban missile crisis on our hands, and very fresh in our minds was the question, "What would have happened had [Nikita Sergeevich] Khrushchev not believed Kennedy during the Berlin crisis of 1961-62 or during the Cuban missile crisis?" There could very easily have been a general war. You see, in that Vienna Summit meeting between Khrushchev and Kennedy in 1961, Khrushchev set out to try to intimidate this new, young President of the United States. In a very brutal kind of fashion, he threw an ultimatum at Kennedy on Berlin. He told Kennedy what he was going to do, and he said, "If the western powers intervene in this in any way to prevent what I am going to do, there will be war." He used the word "war." Normally diplomats don't use the word "war." They talk about the "gravest possible circumstances" or something like that--

SCHOENBAUM: This was in Russian, he was speaking through an interpreter?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. And Kennedy, at one point, had to look at him and say, "Well, Mr. Chairman, there is going to be war; it is going to be a very cold winter." The reputation of the United States for fidelity to its security treaties, I think, is a major pillar of peace in the world. Had Khrushchev not believed Kennedy over Berlin or over the missiles in Cuba, it shivers your spine to imagine what might have happened.

SCHOENBAUM: Was this ultimatum--This was the first time that this had been given?

DEAN RUSK: No, there had been a similar kind of ultimatum presented to Eisenhower. We had had several crises over Berlin before that. But I remember that Alec Douglas-Home and I had to follow up the Vienna Conference with further talks with the Russians about Berlin. De Gaulle would not participate in any way in such talks. The Germans agreed that the talks should take place; but they were a little nervous about what might happen. But Alec Douglas -Home and I decided that we would talk just as long and just a repetitively as Mr. Gromyko on this matter. We didn't see any possibility of a solution which would be agreed to by both sides, but we just decided to talk, and talk, and talk. Well, at the beginning Mr. Gromyko sort of adopted the language that Khrushchev had used in Vienna: "there would be war." I remember saying to him, "Now "Mr. Gromyko, if you want war, you can have it in five minutes; all you have to do is start it. But if you don't want war, then we had better talk about this further." And we finally talked the fever out of it.

SCHOENBAUM: Was Martin [J.] Hillenbrand--Did he--

DEAN RUSK: I think he might have been present during some of these talks. He was head of our Berlin Task Force for a while during that period and was one of our top people in the field.

RICHARD RUSK: Getting back to 1946, I am obsessed with the tragedy of how close we came to avoiding what later happened. You have been quoted elsewhere as saying that FDR and Truman possibly could have pursued their anti-colonial policy but didn't; if they had done so, history might have been different. We did pursue anti-colonialism with respect to the Dutch in Indonesia and that was in 1946. How close did we come to following that policy across the board and perhaps treated Indochina from an anti-colonial view? Was it a close thing?

DEAN RUSK: Given the weakness of governments in France, had we been as rough with France as we had been with the Dutch, we might well have brought about a fall of successive French governments. We didn't see a government in France which had the standing or the power to do what many of us thought had to be done. And again, that was the period when we needed France for other purposes. That interlinkage is very important.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you write any memoranda or anything which would still be around which sets out your views?

DEAN RUSK: There should be some memoranda of mine in the Foreign Relations of the United States during that period. But bear in mind that as far as the public was concerned, I was an

officer of the Truman administration, and I had an obligation to follow the policy the Secretary of State laid out for us.

SCHOENBAUM: Within the Department, there was give and take.

RICHARD RUSK: But we still haven't resolved and this is thirty years later; and I am your son trying to write your story and explain to my generation why we did certain things in Asia. And I still--if you can let me know--I still need to know to what extent you personally believed--in view of your commitments to world peace, to a world view of things, the role of the United Nations, the rights of the brown and yellow and etc. types of people--to what extent did you sign on with the later policy of aid to the French because of your own personal assessment of what was going on there versus to what extent were you following the dictates and wishes of fellows like Dean Acheson?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I would not have frozen France out of the Marshall Plan because of Indochina. That wouldn't have made sense in terms of the overall picture and the overall interests of the United States. I was in favor, as a matter of fact I think I recommended, a step-up of aid to Indochina at the time of the Korean outbreak hoping to dissuade China from moving in that direction if they had any such ideas about doing so. But, it was clear to me all the way through, whatever our particular policy was, that the countries of Indochina would emerge as independent nations. I had no doubt about that at any stage. The question was when, and how, and under what circumstances.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you and the Truman Administration take steps to try to keep the Cold War out of Indochina back during the late 1940s and early 1950s; try to keep these superpower considerations and global considerations out of that particular local conflict?

DEAN RUSK: Well that would be a rather artificial thing to do because Indochina was a part of the world scene. I mean, it couldn't be separated out and treated wholly separately as if it had no connection with anything else. Those relationships were there.

When Kennedy decided not to put troops into Laos, I remember very clearly that he said to us, "Now, if we have to make a fight for Southeast Asia, we will have to do it in Vietnam because there the lines of communication are very different." A million people had moved from North Vietnam to South Vietnam to escape the Hanoi regime at the time of the division of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference; and it appeared that the South Vietnamese would be serious about keeping Hanoi from overrunning South Vietnam. And so Kennedy, affected in part by the disillusionment with the performance on the Laos Accords, thought that we would have to take action in Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: You know the amazing thing is that during the Truman years there was great progress--

DEAN RUSK: Well, I have always looked upon Truman as a great president, but there was one matter on which I would criticize him. He did not fight strongly enough to prevent the almost total demobilization of the United States after V-J [Victory over Japan] Day. We paid a terrible

price for that in the ensuing years. That weakness of ours, I think, tempted Joseph [Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili] Stalin to embark upon that series of adventures which, in fact, started the Cold War. I mean the Cold War was started when we were disarmed. It was not until 1950 that we began to build up our armed forces in any significant way.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you oppose that at the time. Did you fire off some memos or hold some meetings or anything? You had pretty close access to President Truman--

DEAN RUSK: Well, you could spit in the river if you wanted to in those days; and there were those who did, and I expressed misgivings about it. But there was just a national sense of getting the boys home. We had troops rioting in the Philippines to get home earlier than the plan had provided for.

END OF SIDE 2

