

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk EEEE: Part 2 of 2

Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas J. Schoenbaum, and Louis Bruno Sohn
circa 1985

The complete interview also includes Rusk DDDD: Part 1.

DEAN RUSK: In those early days in the U.N. [United Nations] just after the war there was a special atmosphere. After all, we'd paid fifty million lives to draft that charter and get the U.N. started. There was a kind of commitment: a sense that somehow the human race was off on a fresh start. That was really quite exhilarating. And at least it caused a lot of people to do their best on the U.N. matters. Some of that has been lost over the years because of the aggregation of dissatisfaction with the U.N. on particular issues over the years, but there was a fine spirit in those early years.

SOHN: And there were some very good debates.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. And there was also some first-class leadership in those years: people like Paul-Henri Spaak of Belgium or Lester [Bowles] Pearson of Canada, two of the early presidents of the U.N. General Assembly. There was a quality about the leadership that, maybe, sometimes now appears to be lacking.

SOHN: Speaking about that, one of the presidents in a crucial point of time was [Herbert Vere] Evatt from Australia.

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

SOHN: And some people thought that he made the solution of the partisan question very difficult by appointing two committees--one composed of, you might say, friends of Israel and one composed of friends of the Arabs--working simultaneously and coming out with two different proposals rather than putting people together and trying to get one proposal. Have you any opinion on that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, Herbie Evatt was a very able person, but he was a man of unlimited ambition both in Australia and internationally. We had the feeling at that time that you are referring to that he was racing for the Nobel Peace Prize. (laughter) And when that gets into somebody's blood they can do things that just don't make any sense in terms of getting a real solution to the real problems. So if anything we looked upon him as an interference that would not get anywhere. But since he was then--I think he was then President of the U.N. General Assembly. As President of the General Assembly we had to be a little careful because we didn't want to alienate him or appear to slap the General Assembly in the face. But I'll tell you a little story that has to be off the record. You can turn that off.

[break in recording]

SOHN: One of the other issues of the U.N. that's kind of perennial must have been occupying you from time to time is how to improve the Security Council. Could you make something that would make it work better? Many proposals have been made, of course: changing the membership, changing the procedure, changing the voting, of course, is a perennial proposal by the developing countries. They think that everything would be solved if you just abolish the veto.

RICHARD RUSK: If you abolish what?

SOHN: The veto.

DEAN RUSK: Well, we did change the membership from eleven to fifteen to take into account the increasing numbers of members of the U.N. I'd be a little reluctant to see the Security Council become much larger, because then it would just be a smaller version of the U.N. General Assembly and perhaps wouldn't be able to do some of the jobs that it ought to be doing. The United States would have insisted on the veto, at least under Chapter 7 of the Charter. I myself do not believe that the United States Senate would have given advice and consent to the U.N. Charter without the veto, at least on Chapter 7. However, we have--with the full approval of our Senate; we have from time to time proposed that resolutions under Chapter 6 of the Charter, the peaceful methods of peaceful settlement, that that veto be removed under matters under Chapter 6. That might or might not help the situation. It sort of depends. Earlier I was strongly in support of this, but lately I'm not so sure. I remember on one occasion--well first, let me say that the abuse of the veto by the Soviet Union through the first years of the U.N. was in a sense a kind of a false charge to make against them. Because in those days we had sufficient vote in the Security Council to deny any resolution which we did not like by denying to the Soviet Union the number of votes required to pass it. So we didn't have to have a veto.

RICHARD RUSK: And that's a majority vote?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. And I remember on one occasion--

RICHARD RUSK: Is that right?

SOHN: Certainly.

DEAN RUSK: It depends on whether it's a procedural or a--if it's a substantive question then all five members of the Security Council have to vote for or abstain. Now I once chided Mr. [Andrei] Gromyko back in those years about using so many vetoes. And he said, "There will come a time, Mr. Rusk, when you Americans will want the veto as much as we Russians." And he was right. You see, in the old days we didn't have to use the veto; we could defeat the motion anyhow. But these days there are times when, from our own point of view, we have to use the veto. But I don't see why we need a veto on Chapter 6 of the Charter. But I really don't believe we're going to get any significant amendment of the Charter on such matters because each permanent member of the Security Council would have to agree to a Charter amendment. So I think it's an interesting speculative and theoretical issue to talk about, but I can't see much change in the Charter as it now stands.

SOHN: How about the General Assembly? Are you satisfied how it works or is it working as you expected?

DEAN RUSK: We did not expect in 1945 that there would be such a proliferation of small members. You see, we knew that we could look forward to the process of decolonization. That seemed to be very clear to us. But we thought there would be a West African federation, an East African federation, a West Indies Federation. But those things didn't come about and so we broke up into tiny, tiny pieces. Lately we've been taking into the United Nations new members with the population of Athens, Georgia: forty-five or fifty thousand people with the same vote in the United Nations General Assembly as the United States has. My guess is that had those who drafted the Charter anticipated the explosion of small states as members of the U.N. that we might well have had a bicameral General Assembly: something like a Senate and something like a House of Representatives. But that's over the dam. For a time the United States raised the question of associate membership where some of these smaller states could take part in debate but they wouldn't pay dues and wouldn't have a vote. They'd have a forum in which they could make their wishes known. But by that time the smaller states wouldn't agree to that. After all, we started out with Luxembourg and Iceland. So to deny the Seychelles Islands on the grounds that they were too small looked discriminatory. So I'm afraid we've lost that battle and so we'll have to deal with an assembly on a one-nation-one-vote basis, even though now ten percent of the world's population and less than one percent of the contributions to the U.N. can cast two-thirds of the votes in the General Assembly if they all voted together.

SOHN: But isn't this really a kind of--I know this is an objection we often make on the subject, but isn't it really not true in a sense that really what happens in the United Nations you vote by blocks. And the block of the developing countries which also includes India and China has a two billion majority in the United Nations over just a few hundred millions of Americans or a few hundred millions of Russians.

DEAN RUSK: Well, you know, during the sixties, Louis, we made a study conducted by one of my former colleagues in the old office of U.N. Affairs in the Truman administration of weighted voting.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall his name. Pop?

DEAN RUSK: I'll get his name. A study of weighted voting. And he and his group put together about fifteen different formulae for weighting voting based on population or size or economy and this, that, and the other. And we ran those through a computer. We ran those fifteen different formulae for weighting through a large number of votes actually cast in the U.N. General Assembly, and somewhat to our surprise we found that weighted voting wouldn't have made any difference to us. On those issues where we were in a minority, and up to that point we had seldom been in a minority, weighting would not have made any difference. [David W.] Wainhouse was his name.

SOHN: Wainhouse?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. Wainhouse. But anyhow I don't think we're going to get weighted voting because the smaller countries simply will not permit any such change to occur. Now we did try to balance this off to a degree as far as budgetary matters were concerned. To the astonishment of some of our present-day senator Senate gave advice and consent to a charter of the United Nations which permits the U.N. Assembly by a two-thirds vote to adopt a budget, and by a two-thirds vote to assess any portion of that budget to individual members, creating a legal obligation upon members to do so--to pay those bills: An extraordinary grant of financial power to the U.N. General Assembly. Well, as the membership of the U.N. enlarged with these smaller countries, the principal contributors caucused on the budget and decided how we would go and what we would permit and what we would not permit, and the solid block of major contributors usually determined the action of the General Assembly on the budget. I don't know whether--

SOHN: It's not true anymore. There have been at least two cases recently

DEAN RUSK: They don't caucus anymore?

SOHN: They might be caucusing still, but these two cases which the General Assembly overruled: Both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted some thing and the General Assembly overruled them.

RICHARD RUSK: On budgetary matters?

SOHN: On the budgetary matters.

DEAN RUSK: Well the little countries will have to--

RICHARD RUSK: The caucusing countries would be whom, Pop? The major contributors financially would be Western Europe, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Japan?

DEAN RUSK: Japan. And now the two Germanys and others. But I think the smallest countries had better be careful because they cannot force national legislatures to appropriate funds. So there is a point beyond which national legislatures will simply refuse to live up to this theoretically legal obligation. I think I've put on tape already the story about the budget deadlock in 1964--

SCHOENBAUM: Yes, you did.

DEAN RUSK: I did that? Okay.

SOHN: Now I have one more question that goes back to the beginning, but it's going to be a very current one. You remember in 1945 there were two views about an international organization: One, that it should be a universal organization of everybody. And there was a very strong group, called Union Now group, Clarence [Kirshman] Streit and others, who said, "This doesn't make sense. What we need in order to maintain world peace is a strong union of all free nations: Mostly Europeans, but Latin Americans by agreement that they would be free in

principle even if they aren't; and whoever else, maybe India and a few others that are relatively free." But mostly it was U.S. and Europe. At that time the European empire was representing a large part of the world. And people still came back and said, "Let's forget about the United Nations. Let's strengthen the Atlantic Alliance really into an international institution that would be dealing not only with military matters but with everything else as well, like the United Nations is doing. You ought to be doing that way and now we have enough both of democratic countries and other parts of the world to make it more representative." Which might improve it because one original objection to the whole idea was that it was going to be a white man's United Nations and we're going to keep out everybody else that we don't consider equal.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I know Clarence Streit. I have a high regard for his concerns and his motivations. But I cannot see, quite frankly in the foreseeable future, the United States entering a larger authority, like Union Now or world government, and in effect delegating to such bodies major portions of governmental responsibility. I generally have a view that we're not ready for such organizations because we haven't learned to govern ourselves in each nation very well yet. We need to make some improvements in that. I am in favor of inching in toward this matter of international authority by specific steps. For example, if push comes to shove, the World Health Organization can issue directives to its signatories in the interest of controlling epidemics without the consent of those particular countries. Again, in certain situations the International Civil Aviation Organization can issue certain regulations in the interest of safety of life in the air.

RICHARD RUSK: Do they have this authority now?

DEAN RUSK: They have the authority. It's very rarely, if ever, used. But the authority, technically, is there. Now I wouldn't mind our accepting international decision-making in particular fields where international action is A) of vital importance, and B) where surging tides of politics are not likely to distort the occasion. I'd like to see us test that out by more activity along those lines. For example, I think in certain matters affecting food production that the FAO [Food and Agricultural Organization] might have certain authority in that field because a lot of things simply need to be done which simply aren't being done and people need to be nudged or pressed or even ordered to do things in their own behalf. And I recognize that Louis Sohn has written brilliantly on a rather different approach to these matters and I respect that, but I was just asked to give my views.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you think, looking at the specialized agencies in particular: the FAO, IMO [International Maritime Organization], the World Health Organization, and these other organizations, these specialized agencies--Do you think that they have not evolved properly? That they have not become as strong as they were intended? That they, in short, have not been well-run organizations?

DEAN RUSK: Well, to begin with, with these international organizations which have to recruit their personnel on a basis of geographical distribution, you have to admit that the chances are that at best they will run themselves with, say, 75 percent efficiency. You're trying to pull together people who either have had no experience at all or who bring in their very different cultural approaches to questions of administration. And so you have to admit some slippage just in that factor alone. Then in more recent years some of these specialized organizations have

allowed political questions to come in to distort their functions. I personally feel that they ought to look at their own charters and concentrate on the assigned tasks given to them in their own organic acts and not get into political questions which ought to be left to the General Assembly and the U.N. Security Council. I'm thinking about the Arab assault on Israel and things of that sort that pop up. And we had that problem with the Chinese seat for a time, where perhaps we were not being the wisest of members. But on the whole I would think that the specialized agencies are an indispensable family of organizations. And even though there's some slippage and there's some sloppy management and there's too much bureaucracy and things of that sort, if they were to disappear today we'd have to create them again tomorrow. I'm disturbed, for example, in the contrast between the large numbers of bureaucrats in that FAO establishment in Rome--

RICHARD RUSK: What is the FAO?

DEAN RUSK: Food and Agricultural Organization. There's a sharp contrast between the large numbers of bureaucrats there in Rome and people they have out in the field helping people grow more food. There's that kind of--Well the international organizations are a haven for the bureaucratic approach by and large. But even so, the U.N. Environmental Program, for example in Kenya, has done some very good things, sort of leading the effort to protect the human environment. And the World Health Organization has done some very good things, including the elimination of smallpox from the face of the human race: gone, this great killer of mankind. I don't see how we could get along without the Telecommunications Union because they're the ones who allocate radio and television frequencies to avoid chaos on the airways. So, you know, you just have to do these things. We could do them better, but given the way people are around the world, I'm not sure that they're going to be much more efficient.

SOHN: Isn't it really a function of education? I mean, if you go to one of the Seychelles or any other one of those countries, luckily they have fifty or one hundred qualified people to run their own government. And then you ask them to nominate one or two people to the United Nations because they're entitled to and everybody is supposed to be represented.

DEAN RUSK: Yes. This is a real problem as far as the Third World is concerned. When the great Belgian Congo, this vast area in the heart of Africa, became independent, I think they had something like twelve university graduates in the entire country among the Congolese. When Indonesia, a country of more than a hundred million, became independent, they had something like seventy-five university graduates in the entire country. Now it's hard for us to understand the shortage of trained manpower that these third world countries usually have. They started almost from nothing. Now the British, as colonial masters, did leave behind in most places pretty well-established and trained civil service and usually some educational institutions including a university or two. And they left behind a good deal for their former colonists to build on. But the Dutch, the Belgians, the Portuguese, and so forth, the French, did not do that. So I think we need to do all that we can to help them train their own people. The Rockefeller Foundation, during the fifties, established a training program for mid-level diplomats of the Third World. This was handled by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and that international school in Geneva. We then set up with the World Bank a training program for midlevel financial officers of these Third World countries. That was so successful the International Bank has continued that

ever since with its own resources. But trying to find people--We had to establish a little center for economists in Latin America to train them about how to apply for grants and aid. They just didn't even know how to frame a proposal. So we need to be respectful of some of the problems that they face and do what we can to help them repair it [sic]. You see, if you look out across all of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, it would be very difficult to find a single university that would be qualified to be a member of the American Association of Universities, the fifty-five or so elite universities in this country. Now for historical reasons you can understand why that is true. But if that continues to be true, say, twenty years from now, it's a great misfortune. So some, including the Rockefeller Foundation, have tried to build up specific universities here and there across this third world to help them do more of this job at home rather than having to send all their people away for training.

SOHN: One more. I know I said this about the last question, but maybe one more last question. The present problem of the United Nations is the double split: one between what we call east and west, which means really capitalist and communist countries, and the second one between north and south, which means between developed and developing countries. I know that the United States has concentrated tremendous effort on trying to deal with the first one and in all our negotiations we always give priority to trying to solve problems between east and west, or if not solve it to try to prevent them from deteriorating. On the other hand, between north and south we are doing very little. The United Nations have been now trying for five years to start negotiations between north and the south about what they call new economic order, but in fact it simply means improvement of the current order.

SCHOENBAUM: Improvement of what?

RICHARD RUSK: Current order.

SOHN: Of current economic order rather than the new order in the real sense. That's not a great revolution, but they want a little change here, a little change there, bank fund, GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade], etc. Over the last few years we simply refused to do anything about it. We meet in a kind of committee from time to time or in the General Assembly we have a debate for a few weeks about how to start these negotiations, and then you wait for a start and it just doesn't happen. What can be done about it?

DEAN RUSK: Well there are some real problems and some polemical problems in this north-south relationship. For example, I think we have to be careful about accepting any obligation to deal with the poverty of the Third World simply through transfer payments, particularly transfer payments at the consumer level. The numbers are simply beyond our reach. If we tried to lift the standard of living in the Third World by ten dollars per capita this year, which is trivial compared to the needs of the individual that would require the developed countries to raise thirty billion dollars. And then that will be gone and then next year it's more than thirty billion dollars. That is not possible, either politically or fiscally. Then there's another element in dealing with this Third World group. When you have a caucus of the African countries or the Afro-Asian countries, there's something about the sociology of group actions that causes the extreme voices to carry the day. The moderate and conservative voices don't speak up. So that you get the extreme positions endorsed by these large groups and these are positions which many of the

members of these caucuses themselves do not agree with. And so you get that kind of a problem. Then if these Third World countries want to achieve realistic gains, they've got to take a realistic view of the world situation. For example, the United States has the capacity to generate enormous capital in the private sector. We have very powerful capital formation processes. Now we can export fifteen to twenty-five billions of capital every year through private channels. We cannot do that through government channels. So if a Third World country wants capital from the United States, they have to get it largely through private channels. Now they've pressed to get that capital through official channels, meaning government or international organizations sending this money out. Well official channels means that it goes through government channels at the receiving end and at least some of it goes off to numbered Swiss bank accounts. We simply cannot, ourselves, meet the capital needs of the developing countries through public money, through tax money. We can go a long way through private channels. However, to get it through private channels these Third World countries have got to ensure that there is a reasonably secure climate for investment. They've got to attract that private capital in competition with every other demand upon private capital, and so many of them find that necessity uncomfortable. Now there's been some moderation in the attitude, I think, Louis, in the attitude of the Third World countries on these issues in the last ten years or so. They're beginning to be more realistic about it. The President of Mexico before he was President, who was thought to be running for Secretary General of the U.N., I forget his name at the moment. But anyhow, in his public speeches he would say some of the wildest things about the new economic order. He was sort of campaigning to be U.N. Secretary General. But while he was doing that, Mexico remained a very favorable place for private investment. So there's a difference between the rhetorical level and the practical level on a good many of these things.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, if I can conclude with a question of a more general nature like I usually do: you started out as a boy believing in the League of Nations and you've always believed and fought for the United Nations. I believe some things have happened in the last twenty to thirty years that have caused you to become a bit discouraged about the United Nations and its possibilities. We've touched upon some of those things in this interview. Can you elaborate at any greater length about the reasons for your discouragement?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think we ourselves ought to have our principal delegates to the United Nations, people who understand that diplomats are expected to persuade. Now I can, I think, name two of our recent representatives up there, Senator [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan and Jeane [Duane Jordan] Kirkpatrick who, instead of working hard to try to persuade, simply box these people's ears. And you don't get very far that way. Even my good friend Adlai [Ewing] Stevenson [III], who was known as a liberal and very much interested in the Third World, and so forth, gave relatively little of his time to working with the delegates from the Third World at the United Nations. He would work with the larger countries, but he was very much interested in what was going on in New York City and his social life was pretty active. So he didn't cultivate them like a John Foster Dulles did or an [Anna] Eleanor Roosevelt did. You've got to work it, and that means--

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

DEAN RUSK: --that we have somebody there in that position who understands the very purposes of diplomacy. Now I think it's also true that given the present membership of the U.N. that we're going to get resolutions out of the General Assembly from time to time that annoy the hell out of us. Because that swarming majority of small countries, reinforced at times by China, India, the Soviet Union, can pass some resolutions that we find very disagreeable. Well those resolutions in the main are recommendations. They're not binding; they're not authoritative in a general sense. It's a little strong to say they are not authoritative; they carry some authority. But we ought to live with that. Now I haven't seen, Louis, the voting situation in the last General Assembly. But up through my time we were with the majority an overwhelming percentage of the time. It was only rarely that we found ourselves voting in a minority in the U.N. General Assembly. But that apparently has changed. Well one small example that I mention with some reluctance: You may remember that when Pat [Patrick Henry] Moynihan was our representative up there, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution saying that Zionism was a form of racism. Well, that was passed by a fairly slender majority. Well, I called for the country-by-country voting on that resolution. There is no way that we cannot have defeated that resolution with the kind of normal effort that one would expect from our own delegation up there and from our own representation in foreign capitals on that issue. Now I must say, I came away with the feeling that maybe Pat Moynihan wanted the issue rather than to defeat the resolution. Well, we can't take that approach up there and be successful. We've got to try to do our best to work with the majority and help build a majority in resolutions that make sense. And then we can avoid some of these resolutions that don't make sense.

SOHN: One point you just made at the last session of the General Assembly-- I did make some research on that. Most of the resolutions, about two-thirds of them, were adopted as usual by consensus: everybody agreed; no vote. The remaining ones, however, I think was about more than ninety--no, it was over one hundred, 113 or something like that. Out of those the United States was on the dissenting side eighty-one times and very often in a minority of one, two or three.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. Yeah. Well somehow we ought to try to avoid such situations where we can. I haven't looked at those particular resolutions to see what might have been done. Now there's one weakness, I think, in the United States at the U.N. When NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] was born, Senator Arthur [Hendrick] Vandenberg went to special pains to try to make clear to everybody that NATO was not to be a substitute for the United Nations, that as far as U.S. general world policy was concerned the United Nations came first. But there has been an inclination within NATO over the years to take the U.N. lightly. I think I may have put on an earlier tape my reference to the legislative assembly building in New Delhi; the big, round building which was built there in the thirties. And the old British colonel blimp-types used to refer to that as the monkey house. Well, there are too many people in NATO who look upon the U.N. as the monkey house. I'm not sure that the U.N. members ever caucus at the U.N. They usually have some discussion in the NATO Council before a U.N. meeting.

RICHARD RUSK: Repeat that last sentence, pop.

DEAN RUSK: I'm not sure that--the Africans caucus, the Latin Americans caucus--I'm not sure that the NATO members caucus at the U.N. They have some discussion of U.N. matters in the NATO Council in Brussels before each General Assembly. But if you put the NATO countries together and their influence in different parts of the third world, you can have a very positive and constructive situation in the U.N. But NATO tends to brush the U.N. aside. And I think that's a misfortune.

RICHARD RUSK: That's always been the problem. And I'm wondering if because of the nature of modern problems today and their global nature. By this we're talking about hunger, famine, overpopulation, threat of general war and nuclear war, destruction of the environment, and their psychology. Are these types of problems and events themselves going to force the nation-states of this planet to take the United Nations or at least international organization more seriously? Is it leading us in this direction?

DEAN RUSK: Well I personally think that that is a compelling idea, whether or not nations in fact do that. Because, in our own case, I can't see that we shall solve a number of our own national problems without a considerable amount of international effort, whether it's the energy problem, or population explosion, or the environmental issues, or whatever there might be. And so I think this is a must, but that is no guarantee that nations will. So we have to keep working at it. If I could make one small self-serving statement. As I look back over it, I don't think that there has been an administration since my time that has taken the United Nations as seriously as I think they should. And I regret that. Maybe a change of administrations will repair that. But I think during the sixties we did take the U.N. with very considerable seriousness on a great many issues well.

SOHN: Very good. Thank you.

RICHARD RUSK: It's been excellent.

SCHOENBAUM: Thank you.

END OF SIDE 2