Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk KK: Part 2 of 2
Dean Rusk interviewed by Thomas J. Schoenbaum and Thomas W. Ganschow
circa 1985

The complete interview also includes Rusk HH: Part 1.

SCHOENBAUM: This is an interview with Dean Rusk with Tom Ganschow and Tom Schoenbaum, continuation of the China previous China tape.

DEAN RUSK: There are two small footnotes that I might put into the record here involving China. On one occasion, I was talking to a very high official of the government of the Republic of China, whom I would prefer not to name, and I asked him, "What about the troops and the armies of Taiwan? Do they want to go back to the mainland?" And he smiled and said, "Oh, yes, they want to go back. But as soon as they get ashore, they will melt away and go back to their own villages." During the Korean War, the Republic of China made a public offer of troops to participate in the struggle in Korea. At the time, I seem to remember a telegram saying that they had earmarked two divisions for Korea. But that these two divisions would have to be completely reequipped from shoes to helmets, fully rearmed with the most modern armaments, and would have to have two years of training before they went to Korea.

Some years after the Korean War, I was having a drink with a Chinese friend of mine who was a high official in the Chinese government at that time, and he told me that he was the one who had proposed this public offer within his own government, and that when he did so, everyone in his government was opposed to it including Chiang Kai-shek: Chiang Kai-shek on down. But they decided to make the public offer on my friend's categorical assurances that the offer would be rejected. I mention this because some of these matters were highly controversial at the time, but we in government knew that there was just nothing in it. In any event, we did not wish to complicate the Korean problem by letting it become merged in any way with the problem between the mainland and Formosa or Taiwan, so in any event, there was the offer. It was rejected. But there was nothing of substance in the offer itself.

GANSCHOW: Was there anybody in the government at that time, Professor Rusk, who seriously thought in terms of getting Taiwan involved in that thing?

DEAN RUSK: In Korea?

GANSCHOW: Yeah.

DEAN RUSK: Not really, well, [Douglas] MacArthur.

GANSCHOW: Yeah, MacArthur.

DEAN RUSK: MacArthur made his surprise visit to Taiwan.

GANSCHOW: Yes.

DEAN RUSK: And I'm sure that he played with the idea. But of course, MacArthur wanted us to open up general war against China after the Chinese volunteers, so-called volunteers, intervened in the Korean War. He wanted general war against China. But, Harry Truman's own military advisors told him that the only targets in China which could affect the situation in Korea would be the mass destruction of Chinese cities with nuclear weapons. Truman was not prepared to go down that path. And those of us, such as myself, who had had some experience in China, knew that we could remobilize several million men and do nothing more than capture and hold a few coastal cities along the coast of China. That we had--there was no possibility of imposing our will upon hundreds of millions of people in that country.

GANSCHOW: I'm going to pick up where we left off; and really, it is with the Korean War. Was there any sentiment in the State Department to officially recognize Communist China just prior to the outbreak of the Korean War? We hear about, you know, the fact that Taiwan was on that perimeter that we would not defend. And therefore, Dean [Gooderham] Acheson made that announcement--I don't know--January of 1950 that, you know, this was beyond our defense perimeter. But was there any one speaking out and saying, "Well, let's not go any further with Taiwan; let's really recognize mainland China?"

DEAN RUSK: Starting with that speech of Dean [Gooderham] Acheson's, I participated in the staff meetings with him on various drafts of that speech. But he was dissatisfied with all of them and finally he said, "Now look, we've put enough time in on this. I'm just gonna go home and jot down some notes, and go down there and make a speech." So the actual text of his speech had not been bedded by the experts. And so, when he talked about the perimeter of U.S. defense in the Pacific, he drew those lines where we had our own forces present. But then he added the comment that was largely overlooked at the time: as for those other areas, their defense would rest primarily upon the United Nations, which thus far has not been a weak reed upon which to rely. That was forgotten in the public discretion. But I have no doubt that that speech contributed to the feeling, both in North Korea, and in Moscow, that if the North Koreans moved, we would not move. I think that our move into Korea surprised them. I say that because when the first elements of those poor garrison forces in Japan, many of them raw recruits, were airlifted over to appear on the battlefield in central Korea, the other side just stopped for a period of about ten days, undoubtedly because they were having political consultations in Pyongyang, and in Moscow, and possibly Peking. Had the North Koreans at that point simply continued to advance, we would have been driven off the peninsula. That pause gave us a chance to get enough troops over there to at least hold that tiny perimeter around Pusan before the Allied forces moved north.

SCHOENBAUM: Would you go so far as to say that if Acheson had not made that speech or had made a tough declaration that--Do you think that the Korean War could have been--would not have been--

DEAN RUSK: I think that there's another element that was more eloquent. Back in 1947 or so, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wrote a paper on the strategic significance of Korea. In this paper they concluded that in the event of a general war they would not wish to station any American forces

on the Korean peninsula; therefore we should withdraw our forces from the Korean peninsula. Well, this view of the Joint Chiefs was opposed by the State Department, because we did not want to withdraw all of our forces from the Korean peninsula. But finally in 1949, President Truman sided with the Pentagon and ordered the last regimental combat team out of Korea. I have no doubt that--And a year later the North Koreans attacked. I have no doubt that that withdrawal of the last regiment from Korea was taken as a sign by the Russians that we were not fundamentally interested in Korea. As a matter of-fact, after the Korean War was over, an American businessman was sitting next to Mr. [Andrei Yasnuarievich] Vyshinsky, of the Soviet Union, at a dinner in New York. And this businessman turned to him and said, "Mr. Vyshinsky, why do you Russians continue to pretend that you think the United States is going to attack the Soviet Union? You know the American people have no interest in attacking the Soviet Union." Mr. Vyshinsky said, "Well, we don't know what to think of you Americans," or something like that. He said, "Look at Korea. You did everything you could to let us know you were not interested in Korea. Then when the North Koreans moved, you put your troops in there." He said, "We can't trust you Americans." So I think we played some part in inducing the North Koreans and the Russians to believe that if that move was made, that there would not be American resistance.

SCHOENBAUM: What was your specific part in any of these decisions, sir?

DEAN RUSK: Well I was very much involved with them because I was the Assistant Secretary of State in Far Eastern Affairs, and was eminently involved in all of the decisions that were made in connection with the North Korean invasion of South Korea. I was at that famous Blair House meeting with President Truman, and the Secretaries of State and Defense, and the Joint Chiefs, and others present when the original decision was made to intervene, in the first instance by air and naval forces, and then, two days later by ground forces, so--and then I met every week with the group of ambassadors representing all the countries that had troops in Korea: about 15 of them. And I was the chairman of that group. We met regularly throughout the Korean War. So, I was very much involved with it.

GANSCHOW: Does the Secretary of State, such as Acheson, come back from making a speech such as that and say to you, "What did you think of my speech?" And would you reply, "I'm a little shocked at that statement about the perimeters," or, you know, "I'm just wondering--".

SCHOENBAUM: What advice you were giving him--

GANSCHOW: Yeah.

DEAN RUSK: I think Dean Acheson took his advice ahead of time, and not afterwards. This is an interesting point, because this was a speech by the Secretary of State. I remember coming back from a press conference once and one of my senior colleagues was waiting for me there at the door of my office, and he referred to something that I had said at the press conference. And he said, "That's not our policy." I had to smile at him and say, "It is now."

GANSCHOW: Which brings up a question, and it really is going to be--it's a little off this, but you often hear--and [Edwin Oldfather] Reischauer used to write about this in his books. He

would complain that the United States does not have a long-term Asian policy. What I'm hearing you say, Professor Rusk, is that it's not that easy to develop a long-term policy towards any country without, in some way perhaps, couching the language so, or you may mislead people. You may in fact, induce people into doing things. If you look ten years down the road and write up a policy statement saying for the next ten years this is going to be our policy towards China, there may be statements put in there that inadvertently without you really realizing it, might lead to some problems down the road.

DEAN RUSK: Well this is an extraordinarily important point, and it's a point on which there is a considerable amount of misunderstanding among different kinds of people. In the first place, there can be no Asian policy, because there is no Asia. There's Japan, there's China, there are the Philippines, individual countries of Southeast Asia, and so forth. There are relatively few things which you can say in general about the countries of Asia to call it an Asian policy. [The] same thing is true of Latin America and Africa as far as I'm concerned.

But during the Eisenhower administration, they put together a very thick book called United States National Security Policy, and Eisenhower approved it. Well as soon as Kennedy became President, the policy planning staff, and one or two people on the White House staff, went to work to revise that for the Kennedy administration. They worked for months on it and came up with a similar very thick volume. But to their dismay, President Kennedy and I would not approve it. And we didn't because--for two reasons.

One is we did not know what this volume meant, Monday morning at nine o'clock, as far as specific problems were concerned. These generalizations do not really give guidance when a real problem comes up in the real world. And secondly, although we felt that these fellows had had a very useful exercise in preparing this book, that if we approved it they might go home and think, "Now we've got the policy," and go to sleep. Whereas policy thinking must be continuous and keep up to date with the course of events.

So I think it's very--My friend Henry Kissinger, in three articles in the New York Times a couple of years ago, complained that what we needed was a concept and a strategy for our foreign policy. Well I drafted a letter to the New York Times inviting Henry Kissinger to trot out his concept and let's take a look at it. But then he suddenly went into the hospital for a heart operation, and I decided not to heckle him under those circumstances.

But you see, you've got more than 160 nations in the world. It's a very contradictory world, so you can't make generalizations that fit all those situations. And sometimes if you have the appropriate policy with members of that community of that 160 nations, some of your policies will be, at least at the verbal level, contradictory because the situation is contradictory, the world is contradictory. And so I have, quite frankly, some real problems about generalizations. Where I do think that generalizations might be reasonably valid, would be to draw them on the basis of actions, attitudes, pricked out by our leaders in a series of cases over time. Try to draw those together and summarize what they seem to mean. But to use sweeping generalizations as purported guidelines for policy, I think, is almost fruitless and could be a little dangerous. So anyhow, I'm the--I'm a skeptic on this stuff. Dean Acheson once said the object of American foreign policy is to try to create a world situation in which this great experiment in liberty that

we call America can survive and flourish. As far as generalizations go, when you say something like that, you've said it all. But when you have to sit down to decide what these things mean, Monday morning at nine o'clock, then you've got to think of dozens and dozens of secondary and tertiary questions that are locked up in any important foreign policy decision. That's a very different kettle of fish.

GANSCHOW: Let me preface the next question with a little story myself. Is that all right, Tom?

SCHOENBAUM: Oh, of course.

GANSCHOW: During the Vietnam War, I was teaching in Taiwan, and there was an article in the paper one day from Madame Chiang Kai-shek saying something about the possibility of the United States using the atomic bomb to end that war in Vietnam. And I brought it up to my students, and, of course, they all favored it because the President's wife favored it: Madame Chiang Kai-shek. I was wondering, Professor Rusk, if there was any real consideration of using the atomic bomb in Korea, at least any things that you were involved in, any consultations or negotiations that you were involved in, to end that war.

DEAN RUSK: No. And there were several reasons for that. One is that there were no nuclear targets in North Vietnam. There was no concentrated industrial base or anything of that sort. Had we wanted to, say, eliminate Hanoi, we could have done that relatively easy with conventional weapons. Then there wouldn't have been any Hanoi there for [William] Ramsey Clark to visit. But, we were not in that in that war for the purpose of killing civilians, we were in it to keep the North Vietnamese from seizing South Vietnam. Secondly, at one point we had a military memorandum in front of us urging that we invade North Vietnam with ground forces; just go up and occupy the place.

GANSCHOW: That was [William Childs] Westmoreland's view, wasn't it?

DEAN RUSK: Well, at one point he toyed with that idea. But this military memorandum said that we do not believe that this would cause the Chinese to intervene. But if they should do so, that, of course, would mean nuclear war. Now in a military memorandum, this was just a piece of fine print, but for a President, that sentence just pops out of the page at him: just pops out of the page at him. And so, no, we did not give any serious thought to the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

SCHOENBAUM: Okay.

GANSCHOW: And in Korea, the same as the rest? Was there any serious consideration?

DEAN RUSK: There was only one discussion that I recall as far as Korea was concerned. We were wanting to knock out the dam across the Yalu River. And I think the Chief of Staff of our Air Force went over there personally and dropped the largest bomb we had on that dam, and it only made a sort of a mark on the dam, didn't knock it down at all, didn't crack it. So then the question came up as to whether we should knock that dam out with a nuclear weapon, and it was decided not to do so.

SCHOENBAUM: What about conventional bombing beyond the Yalu River. Did you know there's a lot of stories about that, and did you know that--Were you involved in helping make decisions about sending secret, you know, kind of bombing missions?

DEAN RUSK: In retrospect, one thing about Korea that I would now take a different view on: I think that we imposed too serious a limitation upon our own pilots about hot pursuit across the frontier there and that we should have let them follow some of these planes that were being a nuisance in Korea and knock them off on the ground. But as far as bombing targets in Manchuria systematically, that was not very attractive because between the 38th parallel and the frontier up there we were bombing every brick that was standing on top of another, everything that moved. We had complete air superiority. We were just bombing the heck out of North Korea, and they still were able to maintain 500,000 men at the front, because they'd bring up their supplies at night in bad weather and things of that sort. There were times when they would seem to pause while they were building up their supplies. But just to extend that area back into Manchuria, a much larger area would have had very little effect, in my judgment, on the war itself. So, we did not, in effect, open up general war against China.

GANSCHOW: This is a question that is right at the beginning of the Korean War and I'm asking this from a person who is a student of China. I have never been quite able to understand why we sent the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits after North Korea invaded South Korea. I--We didn't believe that China was involved in that, did we? We knew that the Soviet Union was involved--

DEAN RUSK: Well, we--no, but we weren't sure. I mean, in the days immediately after the North Korean attack, we had to take into account the possibility that this was a part of a more general communist move in Asia. And we did not know whether this attack in North Korea would soon be followed by an attack on Taiwan or, indeed, a move into Indochina. And so we tried to take certain steps to discourage any idea on the part of the communist side to broaden the war. And so we intruded the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits and we stepped up sharply our aid to the French in Indochina. But that was within the context of not really knowing whether this Korean affair was a problem limited to the Korean Peninsula or whether it would soon broaden into a much larger communist assault in Asia.

GANSCHOW: Do you regret that a little bit? I mean, do you think that that movement of our fleet into that Taiwan Strait caused a complete turnaround in the possibility of our maybe being able to work out some decent relationship with China in the early 1950s?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we'd had a very rough time with the Mao Tse-tung government when they first took over the mainland. I described that, some of that, on another tape and I don't think at that point we were so much concerned about under what circumstances relations with Peking could become normal as to what other mischief China might be up to.

GANSCHOW: I see, okay.

DEAN RUSK: And, but--

GANSCHOW: And it's easy to look back twenty years or so later and say--but at the time that was the concern. You were really more concerned with what China might do--

DEAN RUSK: Now, earlier you asked a question that I didn't specifically answer. You were courteous enough not to remind me of it. You asked about whether, in 1949, along in there, there was any serious thought in our government, or there were those in our government that thought we ought to recognize Peking. Well, this word consider is an ambiguous word. When you box the compass of a situation, of course you would look at the question of recognizing Peking. After all, the British had recognized them; a good many others had. You would look at it. But the circumstances were such, both in terms of the attitude of the communist government in China and our own situation back here, that when we thought of it we rejected it, at least for that period. Now as I told you on an earlier tape, when the British Ambassador, Oliver [Shewell] Franks came to tell me that Britain was recognizing Peking, we ended that conversation with the thought that our two policies would come back together again, depending upon the behavior of Peking. That if they behaved themselves and became a useful member of the community of nations, then American policy would move to Britain's policy; but if Peking acted up, acted badly, that British policy might come back to where we were. But--By the way, there's an interesting little tidbit in the book written by Churchill's doctor about Churchill: Lord, what's-his-name. But anyhow, in that book he--and this is the only place I've ever seen this--he said that, in connection with the Korean affair, that Churchill wanted Britain to break relations with Peking, but that the Foreign Office wouldn't let him do it. But anyhow, that just reminded me of this conversation that I had with Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador, about what the long-range situation might be.

SCHOENBAUM: Can I ask, what was the process of policy formulation? These policies, where did they begin and how did they well up? Obviously they were the President's decisions, most of them. But where did they have their origins? In your shop?

DEAN RUSK: Well, the people who spend a large part of twenty-four hours a day thinking about such matters are those in the Geographic Bureau in the State Department, who are responsible for our relations with that particular part of the world. But then, policy ideas can come from any direction. They can come from President Truman, as was true with the Point Four proposal. They can come from the Secretary of State, or from the Secretary of Defense, or from anywhere. So it is very hard to identify the exact source of an idea when ideas can come alive only through discussions and group process.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, but I get the idea that your, that the State Department, and the geographical desk responsible, were in those days, and perhaps even in the 1960s, a lot more of a cauldron work, these ideas and policy approaches, than is true today.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think that's true. When I was Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, I appointed Charlton Ogburn [Jr.], whose writings you may have seen, as the gadfly of that bureau. I told him that he was to look for new ideas, to challenge ongoing policy, to challenge the traditional interpretation of the facts in a given situation, just to be there as a genuine gadfly. But given the experience we had recently with all this McCarthyism business, you may be a little surprised to hear me say that I wrote a letter to the security office of the State Department saying

that I have appointed Charlton Ogburn to carry out this function. I want you to know that if his name comes to your attention because he is doing this, he is doing it at my request. Because I didn't want him to be teed-off on by people who objected to this search for weird ideas or challenging basic assumptions and so forth. But everybody ought to have that.

GANSCHOW: I'm going to ask you a very straightforward question. Do you think our intelligence failed us in the Korean War, at least before the Chinese Communists came in? Was there really a breakdown or a failure? I've talked to Jim [James Harold] Buck about this, too, because Jim was in Korea, involved in Korea at that time.

DEAN RUSK: Well, the North Korean attack, on a broad front, with the apparent unlimited objective of seizing South Korea, did, in fact, catch us by surprise. We had been reequipping and retraining the South Korean army. We had reached the battalion level of training and equipping, had not reached divisional level with all the artillery, and the divisional tanks, and things of that sort. No one in the intelligence community called me, as the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, to say, "Look, the North Koreans are about to attack." MacArthur's G-2 [Intelligence] was on leave at this point. On the night of the attack I was having dinner with my wife, with Joe [Joseph Wright] Alsop present at that dinner--just happened to be, as it turned out, by luck--and Frank Pace [Jr.], the Secretary of the Army, Justice Felix Frankfurter, and some others. It was at that dinner that I got the message from Ambassador [John J.] Muccio that the North Koreans had attacked. Now, after the attack occurred, some people in the intelligence community tried to thumb back through thousands of tidbits of information to bring out maybe six or seven items which seemed to point toward an attack. You know, to be able to say, "Oh, we warned you." Well that's just plain damn nonsense.

GANSCHOW: Can you describe the scene at that dinner when you--Did you tell the people present?

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

GANSCHOW: --scene?

DEAN RUSK: Well, as a matter of fact there wasn't much of a scene. Matter of fact, neither Frank Pace nor I told them why he and I were leaving to go back to our offices. But my wife, who remained behind, tells me that the dinner table conversation then turned to all sorts of speculations as to why we were being called back to our offices. And, of course, Joe Alsop, being a great columnist could hardly contain himself.

SCHOENBAUM: Did he get in touch with you shortly thereafter and try to press you? Or I guess everybody knew--

DEAN RUSK: By the end of the evening it had been announced. This was public knowledge. But when we first looked at this attack we felt that, whatever the situation, the first step was to take it to the United Nations Security Council. And so, Dean Acheson called President Truman, who happened to be in Independence, and asked the President's permission to ask for a special meeting of the U.N. Security Council. And we called Ernest [A.] Gross, who was then representative on duty in New York, and he started the procedures up there. Meanwhile, Harry Truman flew back to Washington on that Sunday--this was on a Saturday night--flew back to Washington on the Sunday, and our meeting at Blair House and things went on from there.

By the way, I'm not sure I put into these tapes anywhere, the U.N. involvement in Korea was, in a sense, accidental because the Soviet delegation had previously walked out of the U.N. Security Council over the issue of the Chinese seat. And so when the crucial U.N. Security Council resolutions were passed, first calling upon the North Koreans to withdraw, and then calling upon members of the U.N. to assist South Korea, the Soviet Ambassador did not come back into the Security Council to veto those resolutions. Well, many years later I asked a very high Russian official why the Soviet delegate at the U.N. did not come back in to veto those resolutions on Korea--that in our own situation, if our Ambassador had not, on his own initiative with or without instructions, gone back in, we probably would have fired the Ambassador. And he said he'd look into it. A few months later I saw him again and he said he'd looked into it and that Joseph Stalin personally had telephoned their Ambassador at the United Nations and told him not to go back into the Security Council because of this Korean affair. That the Chinese issue apparently was more important to Stalin than probably his expectations that there would be no American action taken. I don't think you'll find that anywhere except on this tape.

GANSCHOW: Now, what about the Chinese involvement? Let me ask you that same question. Do you think our intelligence failed with the Chinese involvement?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there have been--as you know Tom, the message we had, through Indian representatives, from Peking that they would not stand by if we continued to press toward the Chinese frontier. But when that was transmitted to us, the Indian representative who turned it over to us expressed doubt about its seriousness: whether or not the Chinese would, in fact, move. Now I, myself, along with General MacArthur, made a judgment that the Chinese would probably not come in. And I made a mistake on that. But--

SCHOENBAUM: Did you develop that in consultation with General MacArthur or you mean--

DEAN RUSK: No, no. He took the same view. He did not think they would come in. He added the point, at the Wake Island meeting with President Truman, that if they did come in this would lead to the greatest slaughter in military history because he'd mow them down as they crossed the Yalu.

GANSCHOW: He wished he'd never said that, didn't he?

DEAN RUSK: Anyhow, that was a point where we misjudged the situation. Now, had we really thought that the Chinese might come in, I think we would have posed some northern limits upon MacArthur’s forces as they moved into North Korea in order not to bring them too close to the

Chinese frontier, hoping to fend off or avoid any kind of Chinese participation. But MacArthur sent his forces indeed to the Yalu. Some of them looked down and saw the Yalu in front of them. And when he did so, he sent his forces north in divided columns and through that rough terrain of North Korea. These forces were not in position to give each other mutual support, and so the Chinese and the remnants of the North Korean forces were able to attack these forces piecemeal and send them scurrying back south with a very severe defeat. Had MacArthur moved his forces as a solid force, unified force, to the north, we might be sitting at the narrow neck of North Korea today. But--

SCHOENBAUM: He had total control of that situation as deployment of forces was.

DEAN RUSK: Well, when he moved his forces north in this scattered way, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington had serious misgivings about the deployment of his forces because of the possibility, at least, of the Chinese entry. But the Joint Chiefs had just had their fingers burned with the Inchon landing. The Joint Chiefs had opposed that, and MacArthur had proceeded with it and made a brilliant success out of it. And so the Joint Chiefs were a little hesitant about questioning General MacArthur's deployments. They did so just in time to be too late after these forces had gone very far into the north and the Chinese had, in fact, intervened. The Joint Chiefs, two or three days before, sent out a message questioning MacArthur about his deployment, to which he probably paid no attention.

SCHOENBAUM: Could I ask if you could explain--and this may have been just feeling on your part, or were there some specific reasons why you felt the Chinese would not come into that war?

DEAN RUSK: Well, here, we had not at least been given evidences of the major massing of Chinese forces in Manchuria. There was some movement of Chinese forces to the north that we could detect, but we didn't have the impression that they were poised there for a major assault, maybe more air reconnaissance. See, we didn't have U-2 planes in those days. Maybe more surreptitious air reconnaissance might have revealed more. But also this was pretty early in the regime of the People's Republic and they were in the middle of trying to consolidate their own hold on mainland China. And so we thought that on balance they would not come in. But we were wrong. I don't recall that any major element of the intelligence community said a week before, "You'd better watch out. The Chinese are coming into this thing."

SCHOENBAUM: That's what I was going to ask, if there was anybody arguing the other side of that.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah.

SCHOENBAUM: Was there any other warning besides the--What is that, [K.M.] Pannikar? Was it Pannikar--

DEAN RUSK: Yes, Pannikar, from India.

SCHOENBAUM: Were there any other warnings from Chou En-lai or from some other sources?

DEAN RUSK: I think that you might be able to read public broadcasts from that time and distill out of it something in the nature of a warning.

SCHOENBAUM: But at least that was the main--

DEAN RUSK: I don't recall any precise message or any specific thing that would have given clear warning of the attack.

GANSCHOW: In terms of the MacArthur-Truman so-called controversy, did you get embroiled in that at all, or did you try to stay away from it?

DEAN RUSK: No, I was very much involved with it. Partly because Dean Acheson, as Secretary of State, was very much involved with it. And I was, after all, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. When General MacArthur acted on several occasions apparently to defy his instructions from Washington and to inject himself into the political situation into the-- in the United States through his letter to Speaker [Joseph William] Martin [Jr.] of the House of Representatives and others, this became a very serious issue, and was very disturbing to a number of our allies, although they remained pretty quiet about it in terms of any official communications to us. But it was Dean Acheson who strongly recommended to President Truman that he take plenty of time to think this out, that firing MacArthur would raise all sorts of hell, and that Truman ought to think about it and be sure that he knew what he was doing. Well, Truman finally made the decision, I'm convinced, on the basis of--at least ninety-five percent of his decision was made on the issue of the position of the President as Commander-in-Chief with respect to an American General. During these discussions for example, then Secretary of Defense, George [Catlett] Marshall--I remember him saying to the President, "Mr. President, General MacArthur is an American General on active duty. You are entitled to have the recommendation of your own Joint Chiefs of Staff on this matter. I would ask them for one." And Truman asked the Joint Chiefs for a recommendation and they recommended unanimously that MacArthur be relieved.

But I remember it was Harry Truman made the decision about 10:30 one night over at Blair House. General Omar [Nelson] Bradley and I were with him at the time. He finally made the decision to go ahead and relieve MacArthur. The idea was, at the time, to send a message to Frank Pace, Secretary of the Army who was then in Japan and Korea, and have Frank Pace deliver this message to General MacArthur personally. But somehow, the communications got screwed up and MacArthur first heard about this from on the radio. But following that decision it was my job--by that time it was getting close to midnight--to call the ambassadors of the countries who had troops in Korea to inform them. And there were some very interesting reactions over the phone from these sleepy ambassadors.

SCHOENBAUM: Can you describe them briefly?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it ranged all the way from the New Zealand Ambassador remark, "Well the little man did it, didn't he?" all the way around to Ambassador [Carlos P.] Romulo's of the Philippines anger because he was a great MacArthur fan and he was very angry about this. But it

was accepted by our allies as--for what it was--basically a constitutional issue. And on the constitutional issue, the President didn't have any real problem in Congress. Congress, itself, believes in the civilian control of the military. Now, there was a big hearing in the Congress about the relief of MacArthur: made big headlines and lasted several days. But Truman didn't have any problems with the Congress on this.

SCHOENBAUM: I'm interested in the decision. You say it was made at 10:30 one night in the Blair House? A momentous decision like that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I'm not sure that this is not on some other tape somewhere. But on the afternoon of that day, a reporter from The Chicago Tribune in Washington told us that he'd had a report from his home office that General MacArthur had suggested to The Chicago Tribune that they save some space on their front page for a major story the next day: no indication of what it was about. Well, this raised the possibility that MacArthur, himself, was going to resign and give Harry Truman a blast, you see. So Omar Bradley and I went over to Blair House to tell the President about this report that we'd had. And I think that was the little fuse that lighted his taking action that night, because he, again, was very much concerned about the Presidency. He--I think I remember his words at one point: he said, "There are a million Americans that could be President as well as I can. But goddammit, I'm President and I'm not going to turn this office over to my successor with its prerogatives impaired by an American General." Now that was basically his attitude. Now one thing he did add to his administration at that time which has dropped out of sight: He said, "General MacArthur has not been home since World War II. He has not received the hero's welcome to which he is entitled, which the American people will want to give him. I don't want anyone in my administration to interfere with the kind of welcome he's going to get when he comes home." Harry Truman said, "There'll be all hell to pay for a few weeks and then it'll blow over, so don't try to get in his way." And that's exactly what happened.

GANSCHOW: Truman was rather remarkable in that regard.

DEAN RUSK: Quite a person.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you--when you say this was a fuse that was lit under him, did you--did he discuss this?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think that was probably what caused him to decide that night rather than wait until the next day. I think he had pretty well decided that he had to relieve MacArthur anyhow.

GANSCHOW: Did he ask you for your recommendation: "Say what do you think?" or anything?

DEAN RUSK: Not that night. He did earlier.

GANSCHOW: What was your recommendation?

DEAN RUSK: I think my recommendation was that he would have to relieve MacArthur on

constitutional grounds. We just can't have American generals refusing to obey the orders of their Commander-in-Chief on specific points like that.

GANSCHOW: Was there any animosity or personal animosity that you remember from MacArthur or his staff towards you personally for anything you may have added?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think his G-2, General [Charles] Willoughby, made some snipes at me.

GANSCHOW: Publicly or privately?

DEAN RUSK: I think maybe in a book he wrote, I'm not sure. I think this came actually as a result of the Wake Island meeting. But, no, I was relatively little fish in a situation where a President was relieving what [William Raymond] Manchester called "the American Caesar": General MacArthur.

GANSCHOW: Which I thought was a rather nice title, didn't you? I mean, I don't know about Manchester as an overall--

DEAN RUSK: Well, General MacArthur was an extraordinarily able man. He was a brilliant man. He could be very convincing when he set out to do something. But I personally believe that he was not well-served by his own staff because they tended to egg him on in those very aspects of his personality which he should have curbed. He could be quite arrogant at times. But it's hard to fault MacArthur for his handling of the occupation of Japan. He did a brilliant job there. But he wasn't really interested in Korea, and he wasn't interested in the islands to the south, so he didn't do a very good job on those. But those places were his Siberia where he would send officers that he wanted to get rid of.

GANSCHOW: I guess you wouldn't be surprised, Professor Rusk--I mean, over the years I can't tell you how many people have said to me, "They should have let MacArthur do what he wanted to do and then we wouldn't have this problem in China today. We wouldn't have these problems in Asia today." My view is we would still be there fighting the war if we had gone into China.

DEAN RUSK: Well, it's an interesting little footnote here: You talk about our intelligence in regard the outbreak of the Korean War. John Foster Dulles was over there at the time, and he came back to Washington and told us that it was--that this attack which had occurred on Saturday night, Washington time, was not really accepted by MacArthur's headquarters as a serious attack, as distinct from a border incident, until the following Tuesday. I mean there -- you know--MacArthur's headquarters didn't take it seriously until Tuesday!

SCHOENBAUM: MacArthur was in Japan at the time.

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

GANSCHOW: Once the Chinese came in, or that moment you learned that the Chinese came in, were you absolutely shocked at that? Were you just--

DEAN RUSK: No, no. I didn't shock easily.

GANSCHOW: I guess you don't stay Secretary of State or--

DEAN RUSK: I'd just seen so many things happen in the world that --No, I wasn't shocked so much. I was disappointed; I was concerned. But no, not shocked, because you mustn't shock easily when you're in jobs like that.

SCHOENBAUM: Say, for purposes of the tape, that Dean Acheson, in his memoir Present at the Creation, gives Dean Rusk the majority share of the credit for the decision not to withdraw the American forces from the peninsula. There were discussions, and that was one of the options seriously considered. And he gives Dean Rusk the majority of the credit for convincing the President to hold fi rm.

DEAN RUSK: Well, see, an off-Korean onslaught drove U.S. forces, and then a few Allied forces were beginning to trickle in, down into a small perimeter around the port of Pusan at the very south. Things looked pretty grim. And General MacArthur, himself, started discussing seriously with Washington the business of evacuating the Korean peninsula. I remember in the meeting with President Truman, Dean Acheson said, "Mr. President, they cannot do that to the United States." Well this was an idea that was characteristic of Truman himself, and so Truman decided that we were not going to withdraw. And I suppose that in the discussions we had with Dean Acheson ahead of that meeting that I took the same kind of view that Dean Acheson had expressed to President Truman. But I'd been in grim situations before. In March 1942, Hitler's armies were smashing at the gates of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad; [Erwin] Rommel was rushing across Asia. The intelligence people at that time were telling FDR that the Russians would be knocked out of the war in the next six to eight weeks. The Japanese had just destroyed the heart of our fleet at Pearl Harbor, and they were rushing through Asia, and no one saw any way to stop them. In March 1942, three months after Pearl Harbor, things looked very hairy indeed, and so I just--My own view was that we just should do our best not to let this happen.

SCHOENBAUM: Was there any thought given to direct negotiations with the Chinese immediately after the invasion, do you remember? That is to say, even though we don't recognize--

DEAN RUSK: I'd have to check back to see when these talks were held: first in Prague, maybe, and later in Warsaw.

GANSCHOW: That's right.

DEAN RUSK: When they began because--you might want to check on that, Tom. I just forget the dates on that. But we had very few direct conversations with the Chinese at this period.

GANSCHOW: How about the--were you involved at all with the Mutual Defense Assistance Act with, towards Taiwan, with Taiwan at that time. That act was passed in 1950, somewhat in response, I guess, to the Korean War and to the Chinese involvement. Were you involved in that?

DEAN RUSK: I'm sure I was. I may even have testified, either before one of the policy committees or before the appropriations committees on the subject.

GANSCHOW: But that, of course, in a sense that--from now on we are going to give our support to Taiwan and we're not going to monkey any more with the possible--there's no doubt that the Korean War was a crossroads in our relationship.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think the entry of the Chinese in large numbers into the Korean War postponed any possibility of normal relations for some years.

SCHOENBAUM: What sort of pressures were being put, if you can remember, put on you or put on the State Department during those years in the "China Lobby" from Walter [Henry] Judd, Senator [William Fife] Knowland? Were they--

DEAN RUSK: Well the China Lobby was very active. And it had some distinguished Americans on it. You mentioned two of them: there was Henry Luce--

SCHOENBAUM: Clare Chennault was also, wasn't she?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

SCHOENBAUM: I mean Clare--

DEAN RUSK: Clare Boothe [Brokaw Luce] was for a while and then Anna--

SCHOENBAUM: Anna [Chan] Chennault, I'm sorry.

DEAN RUSK: But they claimed a million members. I was always very skeptical of that. I doubt that they had any such membership. But, nevertheless, they were a very active group there in Washingon D.C. and they made some impact on our Congress. And so they had to be taken into account. Senator Knowland became known as the Ambassador from Taiwan, he was so caught up in this and so insistent upon it. Walter Judd was one of the most eloquent in this group. I always liked Walter Judd, personally, and we got along personally very well, although there were times when he would go beyond my reach in terms of policy. But he'd had experience in China. He was a missionary out there for a while and he was an important member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. So one had to take those views into account and be able to respond to them.

SCHOENBAUM: Was Alexander Wiley also--

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

GANSCHOW: I know both of those because--

DEAN RUSK: Also Senator [Howard Alexander] Smith from New Jersey was very active.

Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies

Alexander Smith of New Jersey was very active in this group.

GANSCHOW: Were they--did they ever--do they come and actually say, "I'd like to see you. I'd like to talk to you about it at all."

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes. Or if they had a chance they would give me hell on this in congressional hearings. And all that helped to add to my statement that I've never lived through a dull moment.

GANSCHOW: I've asked you this question before one time, Professor Rusk. I'm going to ask it because it should be on the tape. About this time, you talked about China as a Soviet or Slavic Manchuqua. And, would you explain the circumstances of that statement and what you meant by the statement. And I know I have asked you this before, but have you ever had second thoughts about saying that?

DEAN RUSK: Well that speech needs to be thought of in a somewhat different context. Mao Tse-tung's government was just blasting us continually in the most stringent terms; we were their enemy number one. And this particular speech was simply a reaction of mine to retaliate for that kind of language for a bit. Now, I knew that China was not a Soviet Manchuqua, but it might stir them up a little if I said so. And so that was really a polemic speech rather than a constructive representation of policy.

GANSCHOW: Because I think some historians have misinterpreted that, just as they misinterpreted a comment made by Roosevelt during the Yalta talks in which Roosevelt was joking about something and somebody just--I can't remember the exact any more--but somebody just latched on to that and made it a very serious thing, when people who were there say that this was actually just a joke of Roosevelt's.

DEAN RUSK: Just like many people picked up some of Kennedy's wisecracks and took them seriously.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, okay. Well it's good to have it on the tape it seems to me.

DEAN RUSK: But, you see, I'd, before that, become aware of the strong sense of Chinese-ness of the Chinese: their sense of pride, their sense of the Middle Kingdom in relation to which the rest of us were barbarians. I did think, at the time, that a taunt of that sort might make a little difference in their attitudes toward the Soviet Union. But--any of that--that is not a speech which I would recommend that people take seriously.

SCHOENBAUM: In their attitude toward the Soviet Union, you mean--

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, it might cause the Chinese to be a little more--a little less cooperative toward the Soviet Union.

SCHOENBAUM: And that was the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split? Do you take credit for that?

DEAN RUSK: I wouldn't attach that much importance to my speech. But it was in that direction.

SCHOENBAUM: Oh, I see. That's interesting. I'm glad you explained that, because I really have, myself perhaps, misinterpreted what you meant at that time. In the context--putting it into context really helped me understand it. Thank you.

GANSCHOW: Could I ask you also, if you can just simply remember, did you see communism at that time as a monolithic system run out of the Soviet Union? I mean, wasn't that--I mean, I'm not saying that would be an unusual view. I think that was the general view of most people. But did you feel that also, that communism was sort of engineered by Stalin?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was a period there just after the war when the tactics of world communism seemed to be directed from Moscow. The theory of the Russian Communist Party was that they were the older brother of all the other communist parties in the world. But then things began to happen: Yugoslavia defected from the Soviet bloc. And then it wasn't long before it was clear that the Chinese were not taking orders in detail from Moscow. But the Soviet view of this matter was something that we had to take into account. Their relations with the communist parties of western Europe, for a long time were very solid. Then, as you know, some of the parties in western Europe began to break away. But I think one could see some signs of Chinese independence from Moscow before the end of the Truman administration. Then these became more and more evident during the fifties and sixties.

SCHOENBAUM: Well the decision to intervene in Korea, was that at all masterminded from Moscow?

DEAN RUSK: It is very clear that they were in on that decision because they gave it massive support politically and sent in a lot of arms and intelligence fellows. They also had a good many observers.

END OF SIDE 2