

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk KKKK: Part 2 of 2
Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas Schoenbaum
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The complete interview also includes Rusk JJJJ: Part 1.

DEAN RUSK: One of the ways to test an idea is to look at it from the reciprocal. Now, had the Soviet Union been the first to develop and use a nuclear weapon and they had made exactly the same proposal in the United Nations as did we in the [Bernard M.] Baruch plan before we in the United States had the so-called know-how with respect to this bomb, it's most unlikely that the Truman administration or the Congress at that time would have accepted any such proposal. So, although I regret that we couldn't get serious negotiations with the Russians or with the Baruch plan, nevertheless I don't have any sense of sanctimony on that point. Because, if you turn it around, we would have reacted more or less as they did.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, had we not gone through with the Trinity Test, had we stopped at the point that we had theoretically developed the bomb in terms of the theory of the thing and taken that case to the United Nations, would that alone have sufficed?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I don't believe that the theory would have done the job. Now, first when we exploded the--when we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, we gave away ninety-five percent of the secret right then, because we disclosed that it could be done. But I doubt that you would have gotten international action simply on the basis of the theoretical physics of the problem.

RICHARD RUSK: Would it have increased the chances for an international agreement on nuclear energy?

DEAN RUSK: You said before the Trinity explosion?

RICHARD RUSK: That's right.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, I doubt very much that much would have come out of that.

RICHARD RUSK: How hard did you have to lobby George Marshall on this particular matter? Was he in favor of something like the Baruch proposal?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think he, as a military man, understood what nuclear weapons were doing to war and the use of war for the settlement of disputes. You see, there's a difference between the fear of nuclear weapons and a complete respect for the destructive power of nuclear weapons. And I think it's important for everybody in a responsible position to have great respect for what nuclear weapons could do if they were unleashed.

SCHOENBAUM: What form did your approaches to Marshall take? Specifically, were you advocating, if you can remember--

DEAN RUSK: No. I don't remember in detail, but I always had access to Secretary Marshall. I could see him in his office at any time. Had he opposed the Baruch Plan it would not have gone to the United Nations, but he was in support of it.

SCHOENBAUM: It was basically the Baruch Plan that you were lobbying him for?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

SCHOENBAUM: And he accepted that over some opposition. Do you know where the opposition was coming from particularly? It couldn't have been [Dean Gooderham] Acheson obviously.

DEAN RUSK: No. I think it probably came from some elements in the Pentagon and some elements in the State Department. I forget now just which ones. But things like--you see, these are not all just black and white choices. They require on-balance judgments. On those, honest men and women can disagree.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you remember that one time--Or the essential difference between the group proposal and the Acheson-Lilienthal Report was that Bernard Baruch apparently insisted on stringent sanctions. He had the thought, "Well let's remove all fissionable material and transfer it to an international authority, but let's give the Security Council the ability to be tough if somebody violates this."

DEAN RUSK: And without a veto.

SCHOENBAUM: And without a veto, yeah.

DEAN RUSK: And that was something that the Russians wouldn't buy.

SCHOENBAUM: This is something you worked for as well? What was your position on the sanctions?

DEAN RUSK: Well, the sanctions problem was a difficult one. Also the verification problem. How could you verify that someone was not building these things? The Baruch plan was not easy and simple; it was complex and had many, many booby traps in it. I mean, a lot of questions would have had to have been worked out. But it seems to me it's very unlikely that the U.N. Security Council would have ever voted to have used nuclear weapons as a part of the sanctions under any such agreement.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you work on the design of the Baruch plan as well as its adoption at the U.N.?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. Although most of the work was done by Baruch and his own small staff, in terms of details. But I was involved in that.

SCHOENBAUM: And in presenting it to the Russians or starting--was it presented quietly to the Russians?

DEAN RUSK: I'm not sure whether it was presented to the Russians before we laid it before the U.N. You see, we and the British and the Canadians joined in making these proposals to the U.N. that came to be known as the Baruch Plan. And both Britain and Canada played important roles in devising the Baruch Plan.

RICHARD RUSK: Was the Baruch Plan a heavy involvement of yours, Pop, in the same sense as the Japanese Peace Treaty and the other things that really took your time later on? Were you fully involved in it?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I was heavily involved, but there are a lot of other things in which I was involved. When I was Assistant Secretary for U.N. Affairs and later Far Eastern Affairs, it was my practice once a month to get out one of those long yellow legal pads and simply make a list of the things that I thought I was supposed to be concerned with: One item per line. And usually these lists would run from 80 to 100 items at any given time. And then when I would make a new list, I would throw the old list away. Well once I, by accident, ran across one of these lists that I had made a year before that I had put in a bottom drawer or something. And it was fascinating to see what had happened to that list of issues over a period of a year. Some of the things had simply melted away, disappeared. There were new items to be added; some problems had gotten better, some had gotten worse. And I remember reflecting that there was very little correlation between those that got better and those that got worse on the one side and whether the United States had done anything about it. So it was kind of a sobering and moderating reflection.

SCHOENBAUM: On the Baruch Plan, you stuck with it, didn't you? You pushed it; you were pushing for the Baruch Plan or something like it after many people became disillusioned--

DEAN RUSK: Well as far as Washington was concerned I did. But the actual negotiations were handled by Mr. Baruch up in New York at the U.N. But as soon as it became clear that the Russians would not play along those lines, we more or less went through the motions of the-- continued to go through the motions at the U.N., but we didn't really have any expectation that any such plan could come into being.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you working with the scientific community at all in these nuclear matters?

DEAN RUSK: Not particularly in those days.

SCHOENBAUM: Well, you make a proposal like the Baruch Proposal and was there any hope or idea that, "Well, the Russians may not like that one, but let them come back with one and let's see if we can negotiate"?

DEAN RUSK: Well, they didn't come back with any kind of systematic plan on their own. They just, I think, were not going to have any of it until they got the bomb; then they would be willing to discuss it maybe.

RICHARD RUSK: Given the hindsight of forty years it seems clearly that this was one of the chances where things could have possibly been worked out differently. People have referred to it as a lost opportunity. Were you impressed at the time that this was indeed a major opportunity? When the proposals were not accepted, did you think that we had really lost a chance to stop a nuclear arms race before it started?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, but at the same time there were things going on outside of the U.N., that is outside of the Baruch plan, that struck a very negative note. We were having great difficulty with the Russians about occupation of Germany and the handling of the occupation of Germany. We were dealing with the first case before the U.N. Security Council: the attempt by the Russians to keep their forces in Azerbaijan, the northwest province of Iran. And so there were things in the general atmosphere that militated against real agreement with the Soviets on the Baruch Plan. And the distrust on both sides was running pretty high in those days.

SCHOENBAUM: But there was still some hope, wasn't there, that--

DEAN RUSK: We would have gone ahead with it, I think, if the Russians had been willing to. But we had kept in very close touch with congressional leaders on the Baruch Plan. And we had pretty good reason to believe that if the Russians surprised us by accepting the plan that we could put it through here in this country.

RICHARD RUSK: Could get congressional support, huh?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. But, you see, also that was a time when the Macmillan Act was being devised in our Congress, which took a very nationalist and super-secret approach to nuclear matters.

RICHARD RUSK: Can you identify the Macmillan Act, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. It was an act which in effect broke up our cooperation with the British and the Canadians, which had been very much a factor in the Manhattan Project, and put the bomb on a very national and highly restricted basis. And I think it set up the Atomic Energy Commission and did various things on a national basis. So there were a good many winds blowing outside around the Baruch Plan which did not help to foster agreement.

SCHOENBAUM: One more area that the United Nations was involved in at that time was in the area of economic affairs and trade. That was the time when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was negotiated that was, as I recall, not under the auspices of the U.N. But the expectation was that the U.N. would approve a world trade organization as a specialized agency in the United Nations and incorporate the GATT [General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade] principles. Did you have anything to do with the formulation of the World Trade Organization? As you remember, that was a major disappointment where the U.N. did not negate a world trade

organization, and that created some postwar economic problems, at least in some quarters. Were you involved in that?

DEAN RUSK: In those days we were not, shall I say, enthusiastic about a world trade organization; because we thought in such an organization the cards would be stacked against us. We had come out of the war as the only major power undamaged physically by the war itself, with a very strong economy. We were paying over forty percent of the U.N. budget, on an estimate of relative capacity to pay in those days; and we rather thought that in a world trade organization of that sort that we would be looked upon as the one who would do all the providing, all the giving, and the rest of them would do all the taking. So we didn't particularly like the idea of that kind of a world trade organization with any teeth in it.

SCHOENBAUM: Wasn't there the idea that tariffs should come down? That one of the causes of the depression and World War II was--

DEAN RUSK: Well, we thought those things ought to be handled more or less in the GATT techniques and in the, on occasion, bilateral trade treaties. So that effort had started during Cordell Hull's period in the early thirties. And we've always been very suspicious of multilateral economic organizations because we were the fat boy in the canoe and it would be natural for all the others to turn on the fat boy to come up with all the resources.

SCHOENBAUM: We participated in the GATT, though--

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes.

SCHOENBAUM: In '47. Were you involved in that participation?

DEAN RUSK: No. That was in the hands of, I think, Willard [L.] Thorp, who was our Assistant Secretary of Economic Affairs. Let me say as a general matter that as far as I'm concerned economics has been a dismal science. And wherever possible I would delegate economic matters to somebody else. I was fortunate when I was Secretary to have George [Wildman] Ball. Then there was Tony [Anthony M.] Soloman, who is now head of the New York Federal Reserve. And there was, what's-his-name, [W. Michael] Blumenthal, who was Carter's Secretary of the Treasury.

SCHOENBAUM: I know who you mean.

DEAN RUSK: You can substitute that name in there if you will. So I had some very strong economic people right alongside with me and I delegated economic matters to them very extensively.

RICHARD RUSK: Why was economics your personal dismal science? Obviously you didn't take the same degree of interest in that as you did other matters.

DEAN RUSK: I think part of it is that at a pretty early stage I became, in effect, turned off by the enormous gaps between economic theory on the one side and how the world actually works

on the other. I remember doing an economics paper for my economics don at Oxford one week. And he took up a section of it and was very critical of it and suggested how I might change it, and I said, "But it doesn't work that way." And he became rather angry. He said, "That doesn't make any difference. We're studying economic theory." Economic theory to me--others will object to this--is an intellectual construct based upon certain assumptions such as the economic man. Well, actual living, breathing human beings do not make their decisions solely on the basis of economic advantage. All sorts of other things go into it. And so I've always been skeptical of the difference between economic theory and the real world. Now I remember once we had an important trade bill before Congress and I remember talking to a senator who said, "Look, tell your friends in the State Department not to come down here talking about such things as the comparative advantage in international trade. These senators and congressmen are dealing with people who are trying to make a living and you've got to think about and deal with their specific practical problems. Such generalizations as the comparative advantage of trade won't mean a damn thing to them." And there's a good deal of truth in that.

RICHARD RUSK: I guess [Arthur Meier] Schlesinger [Jr.] in *A Thousand Days* made the comment that not only was economics your dismal science, but that you lacked sufficient understanding of economics. Of course Schlesinger was never a fan of yours and he criticized you freely.

DEAN RUSK: He himself was not an economist.

RICHARD RUSK: Looking back on your eight years, do you think that you were hampered at all? Do you think your performance on the job was hampered by what may have been a lack of full understanding of economics as alleged by Arthur Schlesinger?

DEAN RUSK: I understood what the economists were talking about, and there were times when I had to make some economic judgments. For example, when Kennedy first took office we were facing the renewal of the Trade Agreements Act. And we knew that we were in for a real fight just to get a one year's renewal. Well I thought that if we were going to have a fight, we might as well have a fight about something worthwhile, and I favored going for a five-year Trade Extension Act which in fact opened the way for the Kennedy round of trade negotiations.

RICHARD RUSK: Was that your idea?

DEAN RUSK: I was strongly in support of it. I can't say that I came up with the idea. But there were others in the administration, including, at the beginning, my friend George Ball, who were very reluctant to take on a five-year program on the grounds that it would be too difficult to get through the Congress and so forth. But President Kennedy decided that if we were going to have a fight anyhow we might as well have a fight about something worthwhile. And so he agreed to go for the five-year extension. We got it from the Congress with a good vote. And that opened the way for the Kennedy round of trade negotiations. But, in terms of political economy, I was very much involved and occasionally had to take positions on economic matters that were of that category, of that nature, although I did not consider myself an accomplished economist.

SCHOENBAUM: Just a last question on conventional armaments and your work in connection with the commission on conventional disarmaments: This was a secondary thing to nuclear weapons, but under the auspices of the U.N. there were supposed to be some plans of regulation of conventional arms where there.

DEAN RUSK: The charter itself provides for that.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah. Did you work on any of--what was your--

DEAN RUSK: Well we did. But there was one very important limiting factor that, in effect, took away a good deal of the steam behind any such idea. That is, that we were disarmed. We had come down to the position after V-J day where we had, as I have indicated on several tapes before, no single division in our Army, no group in our Air Force, considered ready for combat. The Soviets had very, very large forces still in existence. And it was unreasonable to think that we could get them to cut down their forces to bring them into any kind of equality with our own at a time when we were relatively disarmed. And so there was not a great deal of steam behind the idea of arms limitation in the conventional field in those days. No, we had already done it ourselves.

SCHOENBAUM: The Russians were proposing a one-third across-the-board cut by everybody. That means they go down by one-third, but they started from a much higher base.

DEAN RUSK: That's right. That's right. So later, when people came forward with the idea that if we just go ahead and start disarming maybe the Russians will follow by example--well, we had experience with that back in those days just after V-J day when we were relatively disarmed and we didn't get much response from them by way of example.

RICHARD RUSK: Did we ever try to tie our demobilization towards universal, more across-the-board cutbacks in military forces?

DEAN RUSK: No. No, because this demobilization came about through surging domestic forces that were trying to wind up the war, get our boys back home, and there were just no bargaining chips involved there. There was no way to translate that into something that others must do. When I was a NATO foreign minister, in the late sixties, the NATO foreign ministers did come forward with the idea of reducing sharply the conventional forces that were glaring at each other across that dividing line through central Europe. We felt that war on any large scale between the Warsaw Pact countries and NATO countries was simply the war that must not happen and that there was no need for us to maintain forces on such a scale when we could do the same thing by forces of much smaller size. Well we knew at the time that these discussions, which later came to be known as the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks, the MBFR talks, that they would be difficult because the Soviet Union clearly would believe that it needed substantial forces in eastern Europe to assure the loyalty of the eastern European countries to the Warsaw Pact and to the Soviet Union, and that the forces that they considered necessary for their own purposes in eastern Europe could not help but be a threat to NATO if they all suddenly faced west and started marching. And so we knew that it would be very difficult to get the Russians to make sharp reductions in their conventional forces in eastern Europe. I think we still

ought to try because it doesn't make any sense for NATO and Warsaw Pact countries to have such forces all lined up there glaring at each other.

SCHOENBAUM: I'm about at the end. But this has to do with Berlin. There is an interesting memorandum in the Foreign Relations series, Volume 3, 1949, p. 694: The Jessup-Malik conversations of March 15-May 4, 1949. Jessup starts out by saying that, "Mr. Malik greeted me in the delegates' lounge at Lake Success this afternoon and said that he saw that I was going to be roving." This is about Berlin. "And he suggested he knew a good place to which to rove. I asked him where that was and he said, 'Moscow.' I said I was very glad to have his invitation. Following the indication which Mr. Rusk had given me, I then said that I wondered whether there was anything new in Premier Stalin's reply to the newspaper questions regarding the Berlin issue." That had to do with lifting the blockade?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, well--

SCHOENBAUM: Did you recognize something in Stalin's, uh--

DEAN RUSK: When Joseph Stalin imposed the blockade, we and the British, Canadians, French, resorted to a very dramatic airlift to keep the people of West Berlin alive until we could find some way to lift the blockade. Actually the use of military force was not an attractive alternative because we didn't have the military forces at that time. But the airlift went on for several months: brilliant job done by the fellows flying the airlift through terrible weather and takeoff and landing every thirty seconds or so. But Joseph Stalin make a long speech, or long replies to press questions--I forget which--in Moscow. And when we put that under a microscope in the State Department, we noticed that he had made no reference to the currency question: the relation between the West and East marks. And that had been one of the issues on which he claimed he had imposed the blockade to begin with. So we suggested to Philip Jessup that he go up very informally to Soviet Ambassador Jacob Malik at the U.N. and ask him whether there was any significance to this omission of a reference to the currency question. So Jessup went into the delegates' lounge there and saw Jacob Malik up at the bar having a drink. And Jessup went up alongside of him and they chatted a bit and then Jessup said, "Oh, by the way, I noticed that Mr. Stalin made no reference to the currency question in his speech the other day. Is there any significance to that?" And Malik said, "I don't know, but I'll find out." Well then about ten days later Malik came up alongside Jessup at the bar where Jessup had been drinking for ten days. And he said, "You asked me whether there was any significance to the omission of a reference to the currency question in Mr. Stalin's speech on Berlin, and I can tell you that the answer is yes." And Jessup said, "Well that's very interesting. What was the significance?" And Malik said, "I don't know, but I'll find out." And then step by step, there in the most public of all places, in the delegates' lounge at the United Nations, they had these very secret talks which eventually lead to the lifting of the blockade.

RICHARD RUSK: Who was it that brought that omission in Stalin's remarks to your attention?

DEAN RUSK: I forget.

RICHARD RUSK: Someone at the Department?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But then I was very much involved in devising Jessup's approach to the matter. The same thing happened with the windup of the Korean War in a sense. George [Frost] Kennan had some very private talks in New York with Jacob Malik on the basis of winding up the Korean War on the basis of the status quo ante. And they had several talks. And then Malik himself was the first one who made those talks public in the sense of proposing public talks on the Korean matter out in Asia. But that lead to the Panmunjom talks which wound up the Korean War. So one has to be always alert to reading between the lines, to looking at omissions, because the Russians will very often hint at something that they don't just come right out and say. And so one has to watch it very carefully and analyze it and probe them occasionally to see what might be involved.

SCHOENBAUM: Why do they hint around? Is it that they don't want to feel as if they are making the first move? They want to--

DEAN RUSK: Well they are reluctant to appear in the role that General de Gaulle used to describe as the "demandeur." They don't like to be the asker; the proposer. They would rather somebody else would come up with something and then they can whack away at that. And that's a gambit in diplomacy which both de Gaulle and the Russians took very seriously. De Gaulle never wanted to ask for anything. Well, as a matter of fact, the Indians used to take that attitude on our aid to India, including food aid for India. They never wanted us to ask, they wanted us to volunteer, to offer. And that's a problem that one has to keep in mind when you're working in diplomacy.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you want to elaborate on the strategy you worked out with Jessup as a last point just to complete that thought, for ending the blockade?

DEAN RUSK: I forget the detailed terms in which it occurred. One would have to look that up. But, of course, when Jessup got that kind of response from Malik, then the wheels in Washington went into high gear and we gave a lot of attention to the basis on which the blockade might be lifted. But I think Joseph Stalin had reached the point where he had extracted from the Berlin blockade all that he could and the propoganda values were moving heavily against him right around the world. These debates in the U.N. and other aspects of it, I suspect, made it clear to him that there was no more profit for him in trying to maintain the Berlin blockade.

SCHOENBAUM: Why didn't he just move in troops and take over Berlin at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Well, in the immediate postwar period I think he had to be aware of the fact that we had pulled out of Saxony and Thuringia, pulled our forces back in order to comply with the agreements as to where the forces would be at the end of the war and those agreements included an American presence in West Berlin and access to the city. But I don't know. I think that any Russian leader will have to take into account that the response of the United States to a seizure of West Berlin is wholly unpredictable. They just cannot know what those damn fool Americans might do if they were to do it, and that is just too dangerous. We went through that exercise in the early sixties over the Berlin crisis. You see, if a military man looks at a map, our position to West Berlin is untenable, surrounded there with Russian and East German divisions a hundred

miles inside of East Germany. And it looks like it's easy for the picking. And they have to pause and remember, though, that the United States is there and that therefore it is not vulnerable because they can't possibly know what our response might be if they were to seize West Berlin. That was tested on a number of occasions. Sometimes the test was with me personally, both with [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko and with [Nikita Sergeevich] Khrushchev.

RICHARD RUSK: We talked about Khrushchev's remarks over Berlin.

DEAN RUSK: That you can't use. (laughter) That was down to the bone-cutting or the nut-cutting stage.

RICHARD RUSK: Did Gromyko try the same thing with you?

DEAN RUSK: No. He didn't go that far. But there were times when--

RICHARD RUSK: There were these private and personal tests with you personally as well as officially--

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