

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk LLL: Part 2 of 2
Walt Whitman Rostow interviewed by Richard Rusk
1985 January

The complete interview also includes Rusk KKK: Part 1.

RICHARD RUSK: How much do you think we're giving up with a telephone interview as opposed to my talking with you personally in Texas. Are we missing a great deal?

ROSTOW: No, not really.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Continue with your story about this soccer game.

ROSTOW: Well, we were at this Brazilian-Soviet soccer game, with Dyanmo against Brazilian team. There was a minor penalty and the Brazilian goaltender had the right to kick the ball out. I think at a prescribed distance from the goal, the four Soviets lined up. I don't know the game all that well. But, in any case, the Brazilian fellow kicked with all his might and the ball went very low, hit the knee of the Soviet player, and it bounced back in and scored a goal against Brazil. The Secretary of State of the United States said immediately, "Now he knows how a Secretary of State feels almost every day." (laughter) Did you ever hear that story before?

RICHARD RUSK: No, I never did. It's not the kind of thing that he would tell--

(interruption)

If you have a crowded schedule there or are beginning to run out of time, please call this off and we can continue this in some other form or at another time.

ROSTOW: Well, I think I've about run out of anecdotes, actually, but I'm prepared to answer any questions.

RICHARD RUSK: Fine. Relating to my dad's relationship with President Johnson, I understand that Lyndon Johnson could be quite a rough character to work for and even abusive to some of his staff. To your knowledge, was he ever that way with my father?

ROSTOW: Never. And, actually, never with me. He could be explosive. But the only time I ever saw him explosive was not at Mr. Rusk or at me or [Robert Strange] McNamara, but when he'd get word of a leak from the government. In this he was very much like Kennedy. The two Presidents I worked for took the view that when they took the oath of office, they knew they were in a system of divided powers and that Congress could make trouble. They took that as a fact of life. And they understood that the real powers of the United States in the world were a lot less than most folks thought. Dean Rusk used to say that when he went to bed at night he realized that half the countries in the world were in daylight, undoubtedly making trouble that would be

on the Secretary of State's desk in the morning. So all of that was part of the game. They took the view that the one thing they didn't sign on for was their own people leaking. They'd usually be inaccurate in trying to suck up to the press and show how smart they were. Those were the only times I remember seeing LBJ truly explosive. He treated his Secretary of State with total respect, and I'm sure he never exploded in any way. And I'll tell you something about Lyndon Johnson. His conduct of the business of government, in which he was as great a professional as we've ever had, was conducted with a precision and discipline and professionalism and order and quietness, which you would have to have lived through. It was almost as if the discipline of dealing with these problems in the way he thought proper in the national interest took so much out of him that he had to explode in some direction, in some way. And sometimes it would be just telling wonderful, colorful, humorous anecdotes. He was a very funny man: a delightful man. And sometime, no doubt, it led to some frustrations and explosions, but never, I think, with the Secretary of State, and it so happens never with me.

RICHARD RUSK: Lyndon Johnson and my dad both shared a common heritage in the sense that they were both Southerners. I think President Johnson felt that at times he was somewhat victimized by the Yankee press. Do you think my dad had that same problem? Did he ever feel that he was criticized because he was raised in the South?

ROSTOW: That's a good question. He, of course, had lived as part of the eastern establishment at the Rockefeller Foundation and so on. He, like me--I told Lyndon Johnson once--I guess we were at [Conrad] Adenauer's funeral and we were just having dinner before the funeral. President Johnson canceled a dinner that poor Ambassador George [Crews] McGhee had cooked up. He said, "You don't go to a big diplomatic dinner before a funeral." So we and a couple of secretaries had dinner. Afterwards I told him that he was misinterpreting in the establishment. I didn't bawl him out, but I said, "You know, I grew up up there. First of all, it's not very eastern because many of the figures that you regard as part of the eastern establishment came from the middle west or Texas and other places. And it isn't much of an establishment. And you have a lot of it down here, working with great respect and loyalty to you. And you overreact to it." And he said then something serious. He said, "That could be so." He said, "I understand what you're saying." And he said, "You know, you see something in Scottie [James Barrett] Reston's column or a *Times* editorial one day, and then it's echoed in the provincial papers and keeps rolling around the country. There's much more influence than you may think." And there's something in that too. But in any case, I don't remember Dean Rusk, in my presence, ever discussing this. We did talk about, though, the way the press changed on Vietnam and how we had this solid phalanx by the end of '67-'68. But reflectively, and I don't think with a chip on our shoulder, we discussed where these attitudes came from. Your father understood the nuances of this perhaps a little better than Lyndon Johnson.

RICHARD RUSK: If I may, I'd like to ask you about the Tuesday lunches. First, are the notes of those lunches available anywhere at this time?

ROSTOW: Some of them are now open because of this Westmoreland-CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] thing. CBS subpoenaed the library, which was a delight to the library. They were told to turn in anything that might conceivably bear in any way on the subject matter of the case. They interpreted this broadly and dumped on Washington for clearance an enormous

amount of documents, including a lot of the Tom [W. Thomas] Johnson's notes.

RICHARD RUSK: Did those notes include the dialog of those discussions or mostly decisions and opinions made?

ROSTOW: I thumbed through them. There was a bit more of the dialog, but basically it's pretty spare. There may be something in there.

RICHARD RUSK: What was my dad's performance like at these Tuesday luncheons? Was he as reticent there as he sometimes was with larger gatherings of advisers?

ROSTOW: No. President Johnson encouraged openness. People did feel comfortable chatting with one another and arguing. It was very much a family affair. I don't believe, in my time at least, there ever was any leak out of the Tuesday lunch. And there was that sense of confidence about it. So I think it was much easier.

RICHARD RUSK: He was a full participant, speaking about the most intimate matters?

ROSTOW: Oh, very much. Not at all like these cabinet level meetings, the NSC [National Security Council], where there might be fifteen or twenty people around the table and people sitting along the wall. It was just a lousy place to have a serious discussion with the President on a sensitive, complex issue. That's what Eisenhower finally came to recognize. And until I did this book, *The Diffusion of Power*, I hadn't realized that Eisenhower, in his memoirs, recommended exactly what [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy had done: that we disband the machinery and get a trusted man with a small staff.

RICHARD RUSK: On page 359 of your *Diffusion of Power* you make the statement that my dad would occasionally see Lyndon Johnson alone right after these Tuesday lunches, primarily to discuss appointments. I presume you knew specifically that that is what they were discussing. Did they ever discuss policy in detail?

ROSTOW: I'm sure they did. The only reason I would know is sometimes, when I was making up the agenda, he would say, "Tell the President that I want to talk to him after the meeting. I have something to add."

RICHARD RUSK: So even with the much smaller and more intimate gathering of the Tuesday lunch he still would have things on his mind that he would share only with the President?

ROSTOW: Exactly. Certainly. Absolutely.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. I have a number of questions. I'm trying to think what we should ask next. You talked very favorably about a lot of my dad's better qualities. Every human being has certain failings or weaknesses in either their character or their performance. Every man makes mistakes. In the case of Dean Rusk, as a general question, what were his mistakes in government? What particular aspects of his role as Secretary, or of him as a person, may have complicated his job and made his job a little more difficult?

(pause)

ROSTOW: I'm perfectly prepared, Rich, to answer that question. You know, I--

(pause)

--Damned if I know. I was tempted to say that he--No, I think he had the respect--I was going to talk about the media and the press, but he had the respect of those people. Aside from Vietnam, he had a very good press on the whole. But the Vietnam thing had nothing to do with any personality. It was a kind of a riptide in that segment of U.S. opinion, the media and so on, that moved. And this was beyond his capacity or the President's capacity to alter. Well, I'll tell you one thing where we differed. I'll take his point of view and my point of view. It's an issue the historians know. I felt in Vietnam that--to take something from of the Napoleonic wars: This guy got up in Parliament and said, "The first duty of a war cabinet is to win the war." I felt that we should take more decisive military action.

RICHARD RUSK: Much earlier than we did?

ROSTOW: Earlier than we did. Not to bomb them back to the stone age, but to block the trails on the ground with a couple of U.S. divisions. The logistics were okay, and actually we had some intelligence estimates as to what the Chinese and Russians did. And the Chinese, of course, were out to lunch, but the Russians wouldn't have done anything. They regarded Vietnam as gravy for them. In any case, Dean Rusk took the view that he was amazed that we did what we did without evoking a Russian and a Chinese response. And I have a feeling, which I cannot vouch for, that perhaps the shock of the Chinese entry into the Korean War--

RICHARD RUSK: Good point. Good point. You're the first one that made that point for me, and I haven't thought of that.

ROSTOW: The people who lived through that--you see, this is one of the problems with history, that people remember things and they may not be exactly analogous. I took the view that that part of China which abutted on North Vietnam was not Manchuria, it was the boondocks. Secondly, that what I was advocating was not marching up to the Chinese frontier, or indeed to the Red River delta, but cutting the Laos trails, roughly at seventeenth parallel. I also was willing to go in to have an (unintelligible) landing as far north as Vinh, which was a hell of a long way from Hanoi. It was just to hold that territory as hostage until they got the hell out of Cambodia or Laos in South Vietnam. In any case, I was for that more decisive action and I expressed this in a meeting in April '67. It was the only time I expressed the public opinion in the presence of the cabinet and colleagues, that we ought to do it because I didn't think the American people could live with more of the same, and that this was a hell of a dangerous, costly, painful thing to do to the southeast Asians and to ourselves and the world, to fight this protracted war and not bite the bullet: not to ask unconditional surrender, not to bomb (unintelligible), not to knock down the dikes, but to do the decisive thing. Because that war couldn't have lasted if it didn't have the infiltration barbs from the north. And that is the biggest thing on which we differed. And it's strange. He knew I took a different view. And his view was the following: If we gave that advice

and we were wrong, we could leave office and the President would be left with the consequences of our error in judgment.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, I remember you writing about this in your book.

ROSTOW: I accepted that. The American people elected Lyndon Johnson, not me, to make that decision in a nuclear age. And Dean was a man who, from the time he took the oath of the Secretary of State to the time he left and beyond, defined his job as conducting foreign policy in ways that protected vital U.S. interests without getting us into a nuclear war. I'll come back to that, because that was the first assignment he gave me. So he was more anxious about that than I was, not that I thought that moving into the Laos corridor--but the Laos corridor was about the optimum place to go. No one lived there, really. You could bomb and shoot the place up with minimum ancillary damage to civilians. So we differed on that. And I think that is a question that historians will ask of both Dean Rusk and Lyndon Johnson.

RICHARD RUSK: He may have conceded the point with some of his remarks here in Georgia in more recent years. And that is, that perhaps we should have moved more decisively earlier. He calls it "putting in a stack of blue chips right at the beginning." Maybe he is conceding that point to you, I don't know.

ROSTOW: Incidentally, Lyndon Johnson changed his mind just before he died.

RICHARD RUSK: He did?

ROSTOW: I didn't put this in my book because it was only one comment. I now know he said the same thing to others. No, no. That's right. He died after I published my book. I've never said this to anybody, except my wife. What he did was call me up once. And I even remember when it was. It was toward the end of December '72. There was some article in *Time* written by somebody whom he knew who said he was a dying man. And he said, "Well you know, I think I may have a couple of years." And then he said, "I don't really feel I'm dying right now," that sort of thing. Then he said, "You know, I've been thinking about this. Perhaps I was wrong not to use military power more decisively." And I think what triggered it in his mind was that he was terribly worried, so was Dean Rusk, about bombing Haiphong and maybe hitting the Russian ships, generating a 'remember the Maine' psychology and starting a big war with nuclear weapons. And I think it was Nixon's success in bombing Hanoi and getting away with it, and forcing Hanoi back to the table, then his success in mining the harbors. And I think it was that that really made him focus on it. Because in his book *Vantage Point*, as you know, he says historians will argue that he used too much or too little force. But he ended his life saying, "I used too little."

RICHARD RUSK: I'd like to return to Vietnam after this next question. But to return again to your evaluation of my dad's performance in office. His critics have suggested that he showed, perhaps, too much loyalty to the President, that he was too good a soldier, that he did not exercise real leadership in foreign affairs, and that perhaps he did not fully share his thoughts with colleagues. Perhaps he was overly concerned with the secrecy of his privileged relationship with the President. Are these people on base at all? How do you see this?

ROSTOW: No. I don't for a minute think that. You've got to remember about how the Constitution is written. I know Dean Rusk never forgot for one moment how the Constitution is written. The Constitution is written that the President is the executive officer in foreign affairs and the Secretary of State is a very exalted person, but he is a hired hand like all of us. The only other fellow who's elected is the Vice President, and that's his standby. He had something which I think I learned in the job and I appreciated very much when he spoke of it. He understood very well the difference between advice and responsibility. And as the President's responsible officer, he revered the office of the Presidency. And I think he came to the warmest kind of personal commitment to the two men he served, aside from his total commitment to the office. Given the kinds of issues that arise in which he could be totally candid, there's no way to marry these two jobs together. No really serious Secretary of State could do it and serve the President properly. The President has to feel and he needs desperately a man he can call any moment of the day and night and ask, "What the hell do we do about this?" And the Secretary of State has to be prepared to advise and be knowledgeable, and know what the latest cable is and the latest intelligence.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me ask the question more directly. You had many dealings with him and you worked with him. What was he like to work with? Did you know enough of what was in his mind that you could work with him? Was he at all secretive with you?

ROSTOW: Wot for one moment do I think that he'd tell me everything that went on between him and the President. I wouldn't have asked it. But I knew two things: One, I knew enough about what the policy of the United States was and what he wanted me to do to do what I had to do. Also, I remember after this period, when he wanted George McGhee over there and I worked in the White House. President Kennedy said, "I'm re-organizing, and at last you have a job that we talked about." I said, "Does Dean Rusk want me?" He said, "Well, call him up and ask him." I said, "I did call him up. I want to be sure you want me over there because, "I repeated what I'd told both Dean Rusk and John Kennedy before they took office. I said, "You don't have to worry about me. I can go back and teach and I wish you all well. I don't need to be in government. So, if you want me over there, fine. If not, I'll either stay here or I'll go home." And he said, "No, no." I said, "I don't know whether our notions of what a policy planner should do are identical." He said, "Well I want you to tell me what you think. I trust you and I want you to make the job what you think it should be, and if I have any differences on it I'll tell you." And that's exactly the way it was. Exactly like that. And then he gave me a lot of latitude and he knew what I was doing. We had one very amusing, not difference, but discussion. ICAP, The Inter-American Committee on the Alliance for Progress, of which I became the U.S. member: Every person on that committee had a right to take a position different from that of his government. We discussed this amusing constitutional detail and he said, "Now, Walt you understand you can do this: take what positions you think are right. That doesn't mean the U.S. government's going to hack you and take the same position, but you have a right to take whatever you want." I said, "Yes sir." In fact I did once take a position different from the U.S. government. I informed him well in advance. And so he gave me a lot of latitude and I had great fun with the job. I don't think there ever was a job I enjoyed more. And I found him just an admirable boss and colleague.

RICHARD RUSK: A good boss? Uh, huh. Warren Cohen, of Michigan State University, wrote a book about my father called Dean Rusk, published in 1980. That's been the only biography so

far. Have you read that?

ROSTOW: Warren Cohen? It was in that Secretary of State series?

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. Did you read that?

ROSTOW: I thumbed through it. But it's just--all his judgments are colored by terribly conventional, so-called liberal democratic clichés. He judges Dean Rusk good if he conforms to them and bad if he doesn't. It's a very shallow analysis.

RICHARD RUSK: You didn't think it was a good job, huh?

ROSTOW: No, I didn't. I thought it was a shallow job.

RICHARD RUSK: I have a question about the Tet Offensive and the aftermath of Tet. Do you have any idea exactly what role my dad played in persuading Lyndon Johnson to not totally disengage, but at least not send Westmoreland the additional 206,000 troops that he requested.

ROSTOW: No, I don't know what he said to the President about that. I do know that the story, as told by Lyndon Johnson, of your father's role in sort of developing the peace formula is absolutely accurate, and the picture that, let's say, Clark Clifford has drawn in his articles Foreign Affairs is inaccurate.

RICHARD RUSK: Now, this is Lyndon Johnson's, *The Vantage Point*, description of my dad's role in the peace process?

ROSTOW: Yes. That's one of the most remarkable chapters ever written by a President. I was there when Johnson wrote it. I didn't draft it or anything like that, but the scrupulousness, the whole thing laid out day by day and all the documents: It's a marvelous account of the sequence of events and your father's raising of the question. Here is the background. We came to know, toward the end of November 1967, that the North Vietnamese felt they'd been losing ground and they were going to make a maximum effort to win the war, or redress the balance, or whatever. It was somewhat in the mood, as [Earle Gilmore] Wheeler said before the Ardennes Offensive or the Battle of Gettysburg for that matter, a really desperate but maximum effort. And we prepared for that. If you read carefully the intelligence that they were giving to their cadres, and we had a lot of it, they said that "We will not defeat the Americans, but we will negotiate a red carpet withdrawal. We'll form a coalition government and we'll let them march out with the bands playing. And then, when they're out we'll take over from the coalition government and unite the country." And it was terribly explicit; and they had some notion of negotiation. President Johnson, as you may know, flew ten thousand men out there and made effort. And on the 21st of December 1967, he told the Australian cabinet that this was coming. He was asked by foreign minister Holt of Australia whether we should have a bombing hold and try for negotiation. He said, "Not now. They've been set back. They're going to make a maximum effort. We're going to have a dark winter with kamikaze tactics." You know, these phrases are so much in my mind I can quote them. And then he said, "When we set them back, there may be a chance for negotiation." He said, "I don't think they'll settle before the election." But he had this

whole sequence. I had it in my mind. And he and I had talked about it. And I'd always figured that because they defined the offensive as a two-phase offensive that the time would be made, because that's when the weather changed and the ground got wet, and so on. And I thought we'd make the offer. But nevertheless, that was the picture in our minds from early December. It was so vivid that when Gene [Eugene Murphy] Locke, who was the Deputy Ambassador in Saigon, was coming through town, I told him, "Look, we all know this offensive is coming, and there's this stuff about negotiations. Would you be good enough, when you get back, to right away pull together all your best intelligence officers and tell the President, (a) what you now think is the shape of the offensive, the latest intelligence, (b) what you think are the chances of a serious negotiation afterwards if they are set back." And indeed we got that cable. And I sent it to CIA and they made comments, and I sent it up to the President. Now, all this is background to the notion that, like 'damn Yankee,' we never separated our image of that offensive from the notion of post-offensive negotiation. And that is the way the President and I looked at it, and I assume the way Dean Rusk looked at it. The question was when and what the formula would be. And then--You want to read the President's account very carefully--what happened was that there was a "fog of war" over. We knew that they'd failed. We didn't know how much damage they'd done, but as we moved through February and into March every day would bring us more heartening information. By early March we had even began to get types of signals through the diplomatic network from Hanoi--You must understand we were never out of touch with Hanoi, one route or another, throughout this whole period--of a quite different kind, a much more serious kind: that they might be willing to negotiate seriously. And that's when Dean Rusk brought in a rather civilized, almost quasi-professional proposal that some British intellectuals had signed onto, including Barbara Ward, and so on. And he sent that over to the President. And the President said, "When Dean Rusk sends over something, you know he had a reason for it." And he told Rusk, "Get on your horse. Get working on this." Now the date is very early March or late February. So he was working on it, and I knew he was working on it, and the President knew he was working on it. And he came up with this formula which was, "Let's just stop bombing and see what happens." And Clifford was against it. It's so funny, given Clifford's later stance. We had a hell of a time getting Clifford aboard.

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

RICHARD RUSK: We lost that final sentence on the other side. I believe Professor Rostow said that Clark Clifford was against this action: this peace initiative.

ROSTOW: He wanted us not to stop the bombing until we got something for it. Dean Rusk took the position that we were doing well enough at the moment and it was rolling our way, and we could afford to stop bombing for a while and see what happened. And finally his view prevailed and we got that formula into the President's speech. Now, that's the part of the story I know of Dean Rusk's involvement and what he told the President. But regarding the extra two hundred thousand men, a number of things happened. First of all, as every day passed it became clear that

they weren't needed in the field because, as I say, immediately after Tet there were ambiguities of what was going on in the countryside, but conditions got better. Secondly, it turned out that--an extraordinary affair--we didn't have enough M-16s. [Nguyen Van] Thieu was raising South Vietnamese into the colors. And as President Johnson said, "Look, if there's a choice between putting M-16s in the hands of Vietnamese boys or American boys, I know which way I'm coming out." So that foreclosed the two hundred thousand right there. And in addition, we had a balance-of-payments crisis at that time. In any case, other things moved in which made the two hundred thousand irrelevant, or impossible, or unnecessary, or whatever, and that faded away. Now what advice Dean Rusk may have given the President before that happened, before it became palpable that we weren't going to do it--but the President made the decision not to do it well before that story leaked. That was too bad.

RICHARD RUSK: I remember Townsend [Walter] Hoopes wrote a book called *The Limits of Intervention* in which he credits Clark Clifford with having more or less been the primary adviser, having the primary influence, on Lyndon Johnson to not go in with that full troop request. In Warren Cohen's book, Cohen thinks that my dad was also moving along a parallel line, but neither Clifford nor my dad knew what the other was trying to do.

ROSTOW: When I was working side by side with the President every day, what I knew was that the situation--Well, a number of things all contributed. One, it became clear that part of the reason for this foul-up was not at all Vietnam, it was Wheeler's continuing anxiety about the state of the ready reserve for NATO. Two, it became clear that the situation in the field was less and less acute and that Westie was doing pretty good without it. And there's some reason to think that he did not instigate this. That's for historians to sort out. Third, it became clear that we didn't have enough M-16s.

RICHARD RUSK: I never heard that.

ROSTOW: Yeah, a scandalous story really. And finally, it became clear that the balance-of-payments situation--well, we would have faced all that economic stuff if it were a desperate military situation. But why take the pain of upsetting the whole world monetary system for something unnecessary? So that one faded away on its own and the President firmly decided against it well before the leak in the *New York Times*.

RICHARD RUSK: When my dad discusses Vietnam now and in the postwar period, he says today that he realized after the Tet Offensive, in seeing the domestic reaction to it and to the war in general, that we had reached the limit of our effort there and that we should try to get what we could get through negotiations,. But that in any case, it looked like we would have to disengage. Was that your sense of what my dad was saying back in office?

ROSTOW: No, I did not know his view at that time. And I did not discuss it with him.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. It was closely held. I have another question here that's probably the most difficult question I have for you. I've asked this of other people and have not had too much help on it yet. It's something that a son of an American Secretary of State would be quite interested in. It deals with what I'm calling the psychology of command decision making. What

happens when policymakers lead a country into combat and head down that trail with everything that war entails: loss of life, destruction, human suffering on a mass scale? How do these human costs of decision making affect policymakers? How would these factors have affected Dean Rusk? How did they affect policy? Do you know what I'm saying here? Knowing that the decisions you are making are costing life on a mass scale, what does it mean to sit in those positions making these kinds of decisions? Let me tell you a little story about that. I remember coming home from school during 1967-68 at the end of the day, or my dad would come home later that evening, and he would be lying on the floor of the living room. And I'd say, "Pop, what's the matter?" And he says, "My gut hurts." And he did a lot of that during those years, and his gut never did stop hurting. It still hasn't. He's still got that pain in his gut. I'm led to believe that there's so much stress engendered from wartime decision making and all that that entails that there must be ways in which that affects the fellows making those decisions. And that's why I'm asking you this. Of course, you can answer that on your own behalf, because you were involved.

ROSTOW: Yeah. It's a very good question; a very fair question. I can't vouch for how Dean Rusk felt about it except that I'm sure he felt the pain of it, and he felt the pain of it not only for Americans who were killed or wounded or torn from their families, but everyone else. Any human being who knows anything about war, and Dean Rusk did know a lot about war--more than he ever wanted to know--understands how inherently evil war is. That's about as far as I can go. I regard him as an extraordinarily sensitive and humane person, and therefore I think that he, and assume that he felt that way. Now, aside from that I can't probe. I can tell you what my own view is. I grew up in a sort of pre-1914 democratic socialist family, with a very strong strand of--what's the phrase for not sanctioning war under any circumstances?

RICHARD RUSK: Pacifism?

ROSTOW: Pacifism. Yes. And, you know, Gene [Eugene Victor] Debs, after whom my older brother is named, went to prison as sort of a democratic socialist. He was kind of a hero in the family. And the first song--I was born in 1916--that I am alleged to have sung is "I Didn't Bring Up My Boy to be a Soldier." So, I understand that tradition and I respect it and gave a lot of it, actually, in growing up. Many of my friends at college, both in Yale and at Oxford, were Quakers. So I'd given it a lot of thought. On the other hand, I never could bring myself to what a pacifist must bring himself, which is, under no circumstances is war to be contemplated. So I took the view that war should be a kind of very much a last resort. Now, so far as this war was concerned, I had an advantage over almost all of my colleagues, because in the 1950s I had to do this study of China and American policy in Asia and looked very far back and very far forward at the strategic structure of Asia. I think I'd thought through the significance of southeast Asia, not merely to the United States, Australia, and Japan, but to China, to Russia, to India, which people don't give much thought to. And I knew, which very few of my colleagues remember, that what led to the cutting off of Japanese oil supplies and scrap and sequestering of their assets was the Japanese movement from northern to southern Indochina, and the significance of the South China Sea, and so forth. I had thought these things through and felt this was a fundamental area. And I also felt that if we didn't fight the thing early, didn't deal with it early, we would not walk away from it; there was no way we could walk away from it. It would simply mean a larger war later. The point is that I had these deeply rooted convictions, and I felt that if we stopped them here it would save a lot more casualties than it did. And therefore, with a heavy heart--I was not

in the White House, incidentally, when they made the decision in '65. And perhaps that helped me some in mitigating, but not really because I felt if we'd acted earlier, still we wouldn't have had as big a war as we had.

RICHARD RUSK: Well those issues are still open. There are Vietnamese in Cambodia and Laos right now, and a million-man standing army, and North Vietnam has been condemned by the General Assembly of the United Nations as an aggressor nation. These were real issue. Let me ask you again about this psychology of command decision making.

ROSTOW: One thing I would add is that I was luckier than some of my colleagues in that I had a family that had gone through the same experiences I had in making judgments. But there was a tremendous family cohesion through this period which. That was, I think, the hardest part of it in a way, to have telephone calls at night threatening my life and having the house picketed, and I to feel you were bringing this on your family.

RICHARD RUSK: Was this while you were in office?

ROSTOW: Yes. But you know that was trivial compared to what people in the field were experiencing, so I never really felt sorry for myself and I hated war. But this seemed to me a vital American interest, which if we did not protect would lead to even heavier casualties in the long run.

RICHARD RUSK: What about the effects on my father, or men making these decisions, physically and personally in terms of their ability to sleep at night, to relax, to maintain their sense of options, their sense of perspective on what the war is all about? What did the effect of that type of burden have upon their decision making? Would it tend to lock them in, in the sense that one dead American might beget another dead American, that somehow because of this tragic loss of life, we've got to make this policy work, we've got to see it through? Is this a factor?

ROSTOW: That's an interesting question. I think it really depends. I think that people could keep their poise and balance in this harrowing circumstance only to the extent that they had a lucid and deeply rooted sense that this was terribly important. Once you got the notion that, "This is a second order affair," then I think it became terrible.

RICHARD RUSK: Good point. If you either got that notion or began to suspect your premises and your reasoning, such as--

ROSTOW: Then, I don't know how people could live with that.

RICHARD RUSK: Perhaps Robert McNamara went through that phenomenon.

ROSTOW: And that's why I began by saying that I was terribly lucky to have been forced at a time of tranquility to think through the structure of Asia, the past, the future, where this Southeast Asia fitted in, where Korea fitted in, where China fitted in. So I wrote it all down and thought it through as best I could. And the odd thing is that nine successive presidents, including Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, starting with Franklin Roosevelt--and that's, incidentally,

where the Pentagon Papers should have begun--have made these commitments to Southeast Asia. And it still is a terribly important region. One thing that I'll send to your father when it's published: I've done six studies of ideas and action, the last on Asian regionalism. And one of the things I learned on this trip around the world is that in Asia they're very conscious, in the minds of the people in ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations], but also in Japan and elsewhere, that those ten painful years we bought, from '65-'75, may have made all the difference in the shape of Asia because that's when ASEAN emerged and southeast Asia found its feet on the ground. If in fact the tide of the Vietnamese recedes their own borders, which I think may well happen in the next five or ten years, then it will turn out that all that bloodshed and that buying of time, painful as it was, did seal off and keep the balance of power in that part of the world. That's a view in Asia, in Australia, in other places, that I ran into.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I grew up during the sixties, and went to Cornell during the late sixties, and thought I had my chapters all figured out on Vietnam. But because of some developments in the postwar period, by God, I'm having to rethink a few things. And I must say the Vietnamese have made life difficult for some of us 1960s campus radicals. They really have. The world is not as simple as we thought it was.

ROSTOW: No. I was very close to these kids because I was a target. I accepted talks with them, and President Johnson would let me do it so long as it didn't get into the papers. There were a number of talks. None of these sessions went less than three hours, and most went five or six, literally. As you know, I'm a teacher, and I never was sore at anybody who took a different view and I understood very well what tormented the young. And then there were a lot of things that were deeply disturbing which were, first of all, that they saw the establishment split. And they saw [James William] Fulbright going one way and the President another way. Then there was the whole question of the draft, which was disturbing. Another thing was that they saw, in the general revolt of the undergraduates--After all, the ferment in the universities was much more than Vietnam--they saw that many of the university administrators and faculty were either frightened of them or aping them. And that was terribly disturbing to young people. There's a passage in Plato which describes that kind of thing. So they were much less certain, when I sat and talked with them for a long, long, long time about these things, than they sometimes appeared and much less dogmatic after a while. But they had very serious questions to ask. And I had great affection, and compassion, and understanding, so I wasn't sore at anybody, and I think I understood pretty well. I'm not an old Mr. Chips. There's a tremendous continuity, ultimately, in what undergraduates are concerned with.

RICHARD RUSK: May I ask you one final question? The most impressive aspect of Dean Rusk's performance in office: What would that be?

ROSTOW: It wasn't a moment. It was the extraordinarily sustained high level of performance from beginning to end and the clarity of his priorities. He felt that his duty as Secretary of State, working with the President, was to (a) look after vital U.S. interests. He never forgot that he was an American Secretary of State, but in ways (b) that spared the world the use of nuclear weapons. And finally, when he used that phrase, "a trade union of foreign ministers," I think he used the British rather than the American way of talking. He had in mind that the use of violence represented a failure in diplomacy, so he was constantly, with his colleagues, searching for what

he called 'wobble room.' So he had the highest respect for diplomacy as an instrument of civilization, and he sustained his view of the priorities in that job, never wavered from beginning to end. To carry that in that period for eight years was one of the truly great performances in American history.

RICHARD RUSK: Professor Rostow, you're a very eloquent man and I'm just glad we had this chance to have a talk with you. I promise to send you that transcript when it's ready. It'll probably take a month or so to get it ready. And we will wait for your revisions or any possible editing before we enter it into our Dean Rusk Oral History project. But I look forward to the chance to meet you some day.

ROSTOW: Come to think of it, I didn't say anything except that bit, I thought, that we might take out.

RICHARD RUSK: I'll send it to you just in case you might think of something else or to help the flow of the transcript.

ROSTOW: That kind of editing I shall do gladly. And as you gathered, it was a great pleasure for me.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you plan any trips to Georgia in the near future?

ROSTOW: No, but Elspeth [Vaughan Davies Rostow] asked me something. She was enlisted to go and tape your father, I think. Do you know about that?

RICHARD RUSK: I believe the Southern Center in Atlanta is making those arrangements.

ROSTOW: That's dropped off the radar screen. If someone would tell her what they have in mind, or whether they've forgotten about it, or are not going to do it, she'd be grateful.

RICHARD RUSK: When was the last time she heard from the Southern Center?

ROSTOW: Damn if I know.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, really? Because those arrangements are cooking along very well. I don't believe it's going to happen soon. I think it's been scheduled for something like late April or May.

END OF SIDE 2