

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection  
Rusk NNNN: Part 1 of 2  
Ben Read interviewed by Richard Rusk  
1985 August

The complete interview also includes Rusk OOOO: Part 2.

RICHARD RUSK: Mr. Ben Read, my dad's executive secretary from 1963 through 1968. This is a continuation of an earlier interview. Rich Rusk is doing the interviewing. This is August 1985.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Last time we talked about my dad's tendency toward reticence and not being terribly clear in what he expected or wished out of people. He was there for eight years and you were there for five of those eight years.

READ: Six.

RICHARD RUSK: Six of those eight years. This was an obvious shortcoming to many of those who worked with him. Was it obvious to Dean Rusk? Did you or anyone in the Department close to him bring this to his attention and say, "Look, we simply need more direction here and these are the reasons why?"

READ: Well, I'm sure we could have been more explicit than we were. I do think it must have been clear to him that the people with whom we had most business to conduct felt shorted somewhat in that regard. There were many times when one of us would have to go back in for more detailed descriptions on what had happened to what he wanted to have happen flowing from meetings at the White House with the President, etc. Whether we were as candid with him about the problem as we should have been--we probably weren't. It was always a little awesome to tell your superior to--

RICHARD RUSK: Ship up or shape out, huh?

READ: --improve on such basic things. But as I said when we interviewed the first time, and I've just reread the transcript, I think he was over-faulted in that respect.

RICHARD RUSK: Over-faulted?

READ: Over-faulted by some of our colleagues, because [he] had placed the very highest value on not permitting anyone to see distance between himself and the presidents that he served. That is an admirable trait and one that very few other Secretaries of State of recent vintage have been able to look back on and say they have achieved as well.

RICHARD RUSK: Or even tried to emulate.

READ: Even tried, exactly.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, you spoke of this method of triangulation that you would use to try to piece together some of my dad's--

READ: Yeah, and that would frequently be entirely adequate. But frequently it would unearth the fact that human beings hear things differently, and to some degree hear what they want to hear out of a conversation when it isn't an obvious point and subtleties are involved. I would often get his first debriefing of White House meetings. Often, as I may or may not have to go off on some new appointment or crisis or problem or back to the White House, or back to the Hill, whatever it was, and he would--you would just not be able to complete the debriefing process to the degree that would be optimum. But, circumstances were partly at fault.

RICHARD RUSK: The circumstances of the job itself?

READ: The circumstances of the job itself, that's right. It's crushing.

RICHARD RUSK: The enormity of the responsibilities, the flow of-- is that due to perhaps my dad's tendency to take on [a] bit too much and get too involved in the detail of the job, or were these things he simply had to do?

READ: No, I wouldn't say that at all. These were things he had to do and were unavoidable in that office. The expectations that we put on the top few positions in the executive branch are really horrendous. Obviously they are not as great as the President in any Cabinet post, but they couldn't be much tougher than they are on the Secretary of State.

RICHARD RUSK: George [Catlett] Marshall used to work an eight-hour day, both as Secretary of State and during World War II, while he was more or less running the American war effort. He would delegate extensively in order to work that eight-hour day. Do you think that George Marshall could have gotten away with that in the 1960s given the increased complexity of the world? My dad has often wondered if he perhaps took on a bit too much and should have delegated more than he did.

READ: I don't see how he could have, working particularly for President Johnson, who kept hours sometimes as irregular as Winston Churchill's. I remember times when he would call-- specifically I remember a 3:00 a.m. meeting on the Dominican crisis when there was also a Panama crisis and a Cyprus crisis going on. He was not notoriously disciplined in the hours that he required of his principal aides.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall instances where senior Cabinet colleagues of my father's, or perhaps either of the presidents, might have called to question his confused leadership and the uncertainties with which he left his colleagues in the Department? Or was this Undersecretaries and people within the Department itself?

READ: The latter.

RICHARD RUSK: It was mostly the latter. Do you recall specific instances where you went to him, perhaps in collusion with some others, and brought this point to his attention?

READ: It's very hard to isolate an incident among such a host of contacts. If one comes to mind, I'll relate it.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay, the Heineman Report? This is late in the process, 1968 I think, and my dad didn't know what that thing was. We ran across a Leslie [Howard] Gelb book, *Our Own Worst Enemy*, and I asked him about this thing, and he didn't know what it was. Do you recall being involved with it?

READ: I recall only a bit more than he does. It came along very late in the eight-year period. And Ben [Benjamin Walter] Heineman of the, what was it, Chicago Northwestern Railroad was appointed by the President to do an efficiency study. I've forgotten whether it was just the Department of State or several departments: probably the national security agencies. No one took it terribly seriously because the Department had been studied so many times by so many different people, and it came along about eight years into the Administration; not the time when you are apt to get fresh new departure.

RICHARD RUSK: Ideas for restructured government.

READ: No one was eager to do it, and as I recall it--and this is very, very tenuous in my mind--the people who were doing the interviews for the Heineman group were not terribly profound or didn't really get into the major problems that were afoot at the time.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I see.

READ: I don't think anyone took it terribly seriously.

RICHARD RUSK: Was that done at President Johnson's initiative?

READ: I suppose it must have been, or Heineman might have been a friend of one of the President's aides at the White House who thought it would be a good idea. I just have not idea of how it really started. It was just a very small ripple.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you think that study was called by the President to focus in on this problem involving State, leadership in foreign affairs, my dad's quality of reticence, or was it a more general thing?

READ: I doubt it, and I don't think it had much of an impact one way or the other.

RICHARD RUSK: Can you recall--let me ask one more question and then we'll go on to something else. Can you recall an instance where lack of direction from Dean Rusk definitely affected policy elsewhere in the world and adversely affected the situation for another

Undersecretary that--

READ: I can't really say that in terms of policy. Perhaps if he had given more of the nuances of his own thinking to some of his colleagues, the actions they took and the policies they drafted would have been more in keeping with his own desires and impressions. But it's very, very hard for me, and I'm unable to say where there may have been a specific shortcoming. I do know there was a widespread feeling among many of the Assistant Secretaries that they would have liked to know more of what his real thoughts were. And yet he delegated a great deal to them and they never had trouble getting to him when they felt that they needed to. He was always very accessible. And those complaints are always present to some degree, as I can attest having seen two other Secretaries of State at close hand. Their time is so compartmentalized and so short; it's one of those things that goes with the job.

RICHARD RUSK: You want to identify for the tape the other Secretaries?

READ: [Cyrus Roberts] Vance and [Edmund Sixtus] Muskie.

RICHARD RUSK: How about talking some more in a more general way about my dad's administrative capabilities: running the Department as a whole and--

READ: Well, I guess I learned more in retrospect than I did at the time on that, because I was dealing in information flow in the sixties. I was working directly for him, and the administrative management and headaches were somewhat off to the side. And in those days they were handled by Bill [William] Crockett, who was Assistant Secretary for Administration. Budget matters, appointment matters, and administrative matter were in my province when I came back into the Department in 1977 as Undersecretary of State for Management. The best service one can do is not impose those problems on the Secretary of State unless absolutely necessary for their resolution.

RICHARD RUSK: Handle those below his level.

READ: To the greatest degree you possibly can. On the other hand, there are times when you need very much a presidential or secretarial initiative to push a bureaucracy in a new direction or to stop from doing what it's doing. To turn the organizational approach of a large group of people even a few degrees is not just a simple matter of writing a directive and thinking it's done. And I think he accomplished some notable things during his time, in the administrative field. The dissent channel, which you have probably heard about, which he institutionalized, is still going strong.

RICHARD RUSK: Go ahead and describe that. I don't think we have it on tape anywhere.

READ: There had been no formal dissent channel for younger officers in the field who disagreed strongly with an ambassadorial view of our policy or perception of development in that country. He encouraged the formation of the dissent channel. It is still used with discretion and sparingly, but it really has been a great outlet for Foreign Service officers who feel very deeply that--

RICHARD RUSK: --things were wrong.

READ: --the country team to which they are assigned was just not getting the gist of what was going on. And those dissent channel cables were read right up to the top, responses were prepared, and then, of course, if the policy was reaffirmed, you were expected to carry it out. You didn't want to just hear the same complaint over and over again. It wasn't abused in the field at all; it was used well and on the whole quite effectively.

RICHARD RUSK: When did he start that?

READ: Some time during his tenure, I've forgotten what year it was.

RICHARD RUSK: Mid-sixties?

READ: Probably around then. We even had a dissent prize that was awarded. I think [William] Averell Harriman's name was attached to it. He probably donated the award for the best use of the dissent channel each year, to give it recognition.

RICHARD RUSK: Sounds like something Harriman would have his name attached to. He was an effective dissenter, I suppose?

READ: Indeed. Another innovation he made from which I benefited when I picked up the management duties in 1977 was in the civil rights area. He had made a start in the sixties which was very important on a number of things. The highways between New York and Washington and the restaurants excluded people of any color other than pure white. He encouraged remedial action to be taken, and action was taken. It was a small step in retrospect, but an important one for the diplomatic corps. Most importantly, he instituted an affirmative action program to recruit young Foreign Service officers who were women and minorities.

RICHARD RUSK: Is that Carl Rowan's group? There was a group comprised of Carl Rowan and, I think, G. Mennen Williams, perhaps not Mennen Williams, and some others that worked within the Department to help integrate the Foreign Service.

READ: Soapy [G. Mennen] Williams was associated and Wayne Fredricks, his deputy, quite closely with the affirmative action efforts for a greater intake of minority and women officers into the Foreign Service. And that was a very important departure point, because the old criticisms were all too true of the Department at the end of the war being principally Ivy League, Eastern and white. When we came back into office in the Carter period, the Democrats, we found that that beginning had been an important one, although it had languished badly during--

RICHARD RUSK: During the Nixon years?

READ: Yes, and when I took over in 1977 in the management area, there were still only four plus percent minorities and less than ten percent women Foreign Service officers. Secretary Vance was able to give it a mighty shove and Muskie continued that, and we were able to

virtually double the number of minorities and increase by fifty percent the number of women Foreign Service officers in a static total number foreign service. This has not reversed since 1981 in any major degree. I am newly acquainted with this, because I had to testify in a women's action suit in court just two or three months ago.

RICHARD RUSK: So those changes have endured?

READ: They were institutionalized. We worked them into the new Foreign Service Act of 1980 in a number of respects. It's the only place in the federal statute books where the words "affirmative action" appear explicitly. But there was a solid beginning there in the sixties which was very important.

RICHARD RUSK: Any other innovative steps that my dad was associated with?

READ: Well there were several failing efforts that he spent quite a bit of time on, encouraging Crockett. And Crockett was working with the head of the Civil Service Commission at the time, John Mason. One was in the budgeting area. They had something called the PDBS, or something like that: planning, performance and budget system, or something of that nature. It didn't get very far. Crockett made another effort to bring everyone within the Department into the Foreign Service, requiring service abroad. It was known as the Hays bill. It never got anywhere because it was pushing against reality. A certain number of people very valuable to the Department simply don't want to serve abroad, and never will serve abroad for their own reasons. And when the Republicans were in office in the early seventies they tried to renew this effort administratively, and put out all sorts of directives to that effect. I found when I went in in 1977 that zero progress had been made. It is just not the nature of the beast. You can't require overseas service by an entire group that is at least half Washington-based and wants to be and is suited to be.

RICHARD RUSK: So there is a great deal of the Department that is not really subject to administrative control or at least administrative initiatives? Not since John Kennedy made his statement--who was it in the Kennedy Administration that referred to the Department as a "bowl of jelly?" Was that [Arthur Meier] Schlesinger [Jr.]?

READ: It could easily have been Schlesinger, and it might have been Kennedy.

RICHARD RUSK: And those other initiatives were at the behest of my father?

READ: No, but he gave them encouragement and support and a fair amount of time. He, as you also know, in the ambassadorial appointment process, made some important firsts in terms of minority appointments: minority ambassadors in the field and women appointments. A lot more needed to be done and always will in this area, but they were some important beginnings.

RICHARD RUSK: How was he with personnel? As the head of this giant department, did he get maximum performance out of people? Could he hire and fire effectively?

READ: I don't think any Secretary of State has ever hired or fired anybody as far as I know.

RICHARD RUSK: Other people do that?

READ: Other people do it. Obviously, when an Assistant Secretary really wears out his welcome, you can let that fact be known and things will be done. But personnel in the normal sense of the word is removed, and will always have to be in the Department of State, because it's just not something that a Secretary can attend to and has to delegate. So, George [Wildman] Ball and his people, for instance, were instrumental in working up the ambassadorial assignment slates that would be approved or changed by the Secretary before they went to the President. But, there just isn't time today for a Secretary to do much more.

RICHARD RUSK: Ben, this continually comes up in our conversation, and you are one of the few that alludes to this pressure business, this information flow and the daily responsibilities. You were right in the midst of it. Maybe we should talk some more about that and what implications that had for Dean Rusk's performance and his decision-making. Maybe you can elaborate on what you mean by "the crush of daily responsibilities" for my father as Secretary of State and policy implications of that.

READ: The problem is a profound one, which gets worse with the passage of the years. In Dean's time, the Secretary's normal schedule was just chock-block from beginning to end. As you may recall from the home end, we would send security people out with overnight cables: some of the top cables his immediate aides would have prepared as the most important for him to look at before he came into the office around nine. And of course there would have been some phone calls at home if there was something moving fast. Catching up after eight hours of sleep with what two-thirds of the world has been doing is not an easy task. It's something that none of the other domestic department heads has to worry about. When you come into the Department you have small and lay staff meetings to pick up immediately to help give you impressions of the most important business of the day by the top people in the Department and the USIA [United States Information Agency] and AID [Agency for International Development] and the related agencies. And then wider meetings with twenty-five to thirty-five Assistant Secretaries and Assistant Secretary-level people in a room.

RICHARD RUSK: How often would he have those wider meetings?

READ: A couple of times a week. That meeting process would be through by ten (a.m.), and in that interim between nine and ten there would have been all sorts of other things that would have transpired. Cables would have come in. Phone calls would be waiting. If it was a day in which you had to go to the Hill, you were due on the Hill, you would have had to leave the staff meeting early to go up on the Hill. Requirements of major committees and subcommittees dealing with foreign affairs just can't be underestimated in any way.

(interruption)

RICHARD RUSK: What about congressional testimony? Dean Rusk estimated that he spent at least twenty-five percent of his time getting ready for congressional testimony or actually participating in congressional testimony.

READ: That process was a tremendous strain. I remember sitting with him for the two days of the Fulbright Vietnam hearings.

RICHARD RUSK: You were there for that?

READ: I was sitting right behind him through the whole thing. I had been in charge of the preparation of the briefing books from all parts of the Department. The books were phone book size to be ready for questions, only a fraction of which would be asked, but which you had to be prepared for. And the emotional strain of preparation and testifying was a tremendous drain. I would have guessed at time that Congress took a third of his weeks.

RICHARD RUSK: A third of his week went to congressional testimony?

READ: At the worst, yeah. And then travel and press problems were always present. Headaches that the press can cause, particularly with two Presidents that were so sensitive to the media and the amount of time you have to spend as Secretary to achieve the right understanding by the media is great. Therefore the day is considerably shorter before you even begin to grapple with your appointments or how you're going to move arms control along, or what you're going to do about German discontent, or whatever may be needed.

RICHARD RUSK: What percent of his day, or his time as Secretary, do you think was spent discussing or analyzing the substance of policy?

READ: I'm sure he would say, and I would say, never enough. The problems of the immediate, the problems of the ephemeral are your biggest enemy. When a press headache breaks in the morning story, that may look terribly important to the President and they call the Secretary to do something, who remembers a day or two later, let alone in history? And therefore you're always fighting for more time to spend on the longer run basis issues. Analytical time and the times to discuss those subjects tend to get put off endlessly. I can remember his scheduling Saturday morning meetings to discuss population problems and such issues: the type of things that just never break into the urgent stuff. And I can remember his doing that with countries that weren't on the front page: Indonesia, the seventh most populous country in the world, but one in which things usually weren't pressing. And it's the hardest thing in the world to do, because everything is pushing you toward attention to the crisis of the moment.

RICHARD RUSK: Did he delegate as effectively as he could or should have?

READ: How do you delegate some of this? You don't, and you can't. The committees want to hear you, the Secretary of State. The press is clamoring to get at you. He used to hold Friday afternoon background press briefings.

RICHARD RUSK: The bottle club?

READ: The bottle club. But infinitely more time he put into guidance to [Robert Joseph] Manning, or [James Lloyd] Greenfield, or [Robert James] McCloskey on what was uppermost in



their headache book, or how to cope with it, and relaying to them the President's concerns or his own concerns: trying to mop up when some other wing of government went off on a different note. And on top of that, of course, he had information that was pouring in all through the day. So if you're doing the sort of staff job and you're constantly juggling the cables that are at the top of his pile, and you almost need to develop a new skill: not reporting, not even editing reports, but editing editors. Because the need for synthesis, the need for awareness that you can piece into this mosaic is just crushing and continuous.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, my dad says ninety-five percent of the Department's work gets handled at levels below the Secretary of State. He's absolutely right in that respect.

READ: Of course he is. And yet that five percent, in terms of importance, sometimes approximates ninety percent.

RICHARD RUSK: And you traveled with him as well?

READ: Yes, off and on--not all the time, but a number of the major trips that he was on.

RICHARD RUSK: Then he had the society routine, the social functions of diplomacy as well, on top of that. It was a busy eight years.

READ: Very, very busy.

RICHARD RUSK: What happened at the end? Everyone comments on how tired he became during that last--certainly the last year, perhaps the last two. The job began to get to him. Do you care to comment on this? And how did it affect the performance of his job in the final year?

READ: I don't think tiredness affected his performance. God knows the fatigue was there. I felt it even in my totally secondary position. I was dog tired by the end of January 1969. And when you look at some of his colleagues in the Kennedy-Johnson cabinet--McNamara had worn out a year and a half earlier, or a year earlier.

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

READ: The Vietnam War imposed the greatest strains. I would come in late in the day with lists of what the Air Force was going to bomb in the next twenty-four hours. And sometimes he would have to interfere in that process because of negotiation going on that the field commanders knew nothing about. But he would never say, "Oh, I'm just too tired, go away." He would stay with it despite fatigue. The time when I saw fatigue at the most dangerous level was the time I mentioned earlier, which was something that most people have forgotten: the Dominican, Panamanian, and Cyprus crises simultaneously, and Johnson new in presidency,

trying to burn the candle at both ends. They were all just dog-tired and at the point of silliness. They were proposing Dominican Republic Cabinet lists but the names meant nothing to them, sometimes early in the morning, and flashing this stuff to Ellsworth Bunker down there. You knew they didn't know what they were doing. [tape interruption] Well, I was then in my late thirties or early forties, and, you know, I felt that fatigue. I was there early and I was there after he left, and not only that but I was a lot younger and I didn't have any of the responsibilities he had. But there is a point where you've had a crisis that is relentless, it goes on beyond two or three weeks, when you are just not operating at your top potential. And he was no more immune to that than any other human being that I've ever met, although he was an incredible stoic--durable beyond belief. But things would just pour in. You'd be finishing a day when you were just so tired you could barely put your brief case in hand and get out the door, and were about to try to do so and something new would break: a new Berlin crisis, or a Pueblo affair.

[break in recording]

READ: [taking about Dominican Crisis]--talking to Ellsworth Bunker afterwards--he was one wise old bird, as you probably know from your father's recollection of him. He received some directives that made no sense, and he knew it.

RICHARD RUSK: From my dad?

READ: From the system: from the President, from the Secretary, etc. And he would say, "Yup, yup," and he would do what needed to be done and was feasible.

RICHARD RUSK: Not necessarily in conformance with that memo?

READ: Not in that precise way or form. And thank goodness, because he was a wise enough old bird to be able to do that. A younger, less experienced person would have saluted and done something stupid and played it by the book. The presidential understanding--any president's--of that sort of process is negligible. I remember being over with them one evening during the Dominican Crisis when the President wrote a message to Bunker, handed it to me, or somehow it got to me, and I sent a messenger over to the State Department. And there it was being typed and put on the old green form of cable, and was probably being put into the cable machine when Johnson turned to me and said, "Have we got his answer yet?" And, of course we hadn't gotten his answer yet.

RICHARD RUSK: It had just gone out.

READ: So the President wouldn't wait, and just picked up the phone, got Bunker, read him the message, and in the clear talked about it. The ability to misunderstand what you're talking about at late hours is profound, when you're tired and only half awake and not really alert.

RICHARD RUSK: What kind of health was my dad in physically? Was he bothered that much during all this last year in office?

READ: Yes. I'm not a doctor, and I never asked him about his insides, but my impression was

that he was suffering at least some stomach distress and had genuine pain parts of the day and had to take pills for it. Obviously that's a debilitating additional stress and strain to have to suffer through on top of all other duties of office.

RICHARD RUSK: Now, you served for Secretary Muskie and Cyrus Vance in a little different capacity. Are you in a position to draw any comparative analysis of my dad with these other two, on this question of information flow and the total sweep of the job? How did he do, in the comparative way, handling the vast complexities of duty?

READ: I'm not sure how profitable comparisons are, people are so different. Vance would get in much earlier. His first meeting would be an hour earlier in the day, even an hour and a half sometimes. We used to meet at seven thirty in his office after having read cables and all that. He only suffered for three years in that job and not eight years, which is a very big difference, of course. Ed Muskie was only there for eight or nine months. So, I don't think comparisons are relevant.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: About the amount of time my dad spent getting ready for testifying before Congress: this was a strong card for Dean Rusk, his abilities to relate to the Congress and communicate with people on both sides of the House. Why was he good at it? I take it that is a more or less unanimous opinion that he was definitely good in his relations with Congress. Why was he so effective?

READ: Well, he conveyed a sense of knowledge and integrity which was all important in dealing with Congress. They never had the feeling that he was being duplicitous [sic]. He could be very, very cryptic, but he would never mislead, and they knew it, and he had his own sense of decorum and civility. His dignity stood him in very good stead. Members who would be rude to him, and there were some, would be looked at askance by their colleagues. A few in the House and one or two in the Senate would try to pick away at him. They never got anywhere and I think they demeaned themselves in the process. But they didn't give him any patsy balls. They gave him some awfully tough workings over on Vietnam in particular. Because a lot of them came to doubt profoundly the reasons for what we were doing.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Do you think that the administration was able to hold support for Vietnam as long as they did because of the strength of my dad's relationship with the Congress?

READ: In part, yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you have any particular stories about the Fulbright hearings of '66,'67, I think it was?

READ: I just remember an enormously tense, long, probably sixteen hours spread over two days, and difficult set of exchanges with him. At about lunch time the second day, something

like that, he turned to me and said, "When are they going to ask the tough ones?" We had--he was so well prepared. (laughter) And there were so many vulnerabilities that they hadn't touched on.

RICHARD RUSK: So Fulbright's group wasn't too well prepared, then?

READ: No, they were not.

RICHARD RUSK: Son of a gun!

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Were you there for his civil rights testimony in--that would have been '64? I think it was on behalf of the Civil Rights Act.

READ: I don't recall.

RICHARD RUSK: Anything else relating to congressional testimony?

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Just go ahead.

READ: I think he could have used two or three more really close associates among the members. On the Republican side, [Bourke Blake] Hickenlooper was someone he dealt with closely. I knew, having worked in the Senate, he didn't have terribly much weight with his colleagues on that side of the aisle. And if he had one or two really close and intimate friends on the Democratic side who would have gone to bat for him on occasions, it would have been very helpful. But there were few [Arthur Hendrick] Vandenberg's in the Senate in those days.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, there were a few. Of course, he had Everett [McKinley] Dirksen and Richard [Brevard] Russell [Jr.]. They were a few of the so-called "whales," but he could have used some more, I suppose.

READ: Everett Dirksen was a selective whale on certain subjects at certain times.

RICHARD RUSK: The marigold? What about press relations, now? I'm sure you were involved in getting Dean Rusk ready for his press conferences that were a major part of his job. How did he handle working with the press?

READ: Well, I missed the first two years of his period as Secretary. My impression was from what Greenfield and Manning and others tell me, that it was a very uneasy relationship initially, that he was ill at ease, unyielding, and didn't give as much as he could have given even though the press always wants more than you can give them. But, he certainly got much better, visibly during his period as Secretary. He had some very, very strong admirers among the press corps.

RICHARD RUSK: Who were some of those people?

READ: Oh, John [William] Hightower, AP [Associated Press], I remember. I think Chalmers Roberts, to some degree.

RICHARD RUSK: Was John Chancellor perhaps one?

READ: I don't remember that specifically. Obviously, he was of no use to those who were trying to write gossip columns and finding cleavages in the administration and liked to build their own theories and that sort of thing. He never gave them any information, and so he was thoroughly unpopular with that type of--the gossipy end of the Washington press corps, but there were only a few times when he lost his cool with them. It usually was with significant provocation. I guess the one that's remembered best by the press people that I talked to, and by me too, was when he turned to them and asked, "Whose side are you on?" at one point, on Vietnam. It was a mistake; I'm sure he could see that in retrospect. But he handled it usually quite professionally. There was a difference among his press advisers. Manning and Greenfield and McCloskey tended to be much more constructively critical than Ernest [Kidder] Lindley. Ernest would always say, "Dean you were the greatest ever, ever." And none of the rest of his staff thought that was very useful for him. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: What were these other people likely to say to him when they were being constructively critical? Just reacting to substance of his--

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, they would say, "Gee, you really hit such-and-such a question, but did you really want to go as far as you did," or "Couldn't you have gone further on subject A and B?" And obviously that's a more useful reaction than one of unadulterated praise which Ernest had.

RICHARD RUSK: My mom said my dad really began to unwind and became quite good at dealing with the press once he started taking a little shot of brandy or scotch just before a press conference.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: What about Dean Rusk's sense of professionalism and his dealings with other diplomats?

READ: Well, I think he's had no peers in that respect. Among the Secretaries that I've known and dealt with, many of the foreign ambassadors told me in the years after he had left office that they respected his professionalism more that they had anyone else's. He had never been devious. He had been effective in getting across what he was trying to get across, but he didn't do it in a tricky way. He wasn't trying to dissimulate or mislead. His professionalism was such that he could speak with really a significantly high degree of clarity and precision and almost shorthand in the 'diplomatise' of the period, so that he could accomplish a message, get across a message, faster and more clearly than others that I observed first hand. And that included both of his immediate Republican successors. This is not a small virtue in that office. It's the one on which you build up that credibility with time and experience; and it's a rare and valuable commodity. I

guess the only area where I would fault him, and I'd fault every one of the others that I've dealt with, is that--and to some degree the better they get at it the worse they get in this other respect--that they are so clear in their mode of expression that they are convinced that the other fellow comprehends. Indeed, that fellow should comprehend if he were up to snuff on English and the vernacular and the idiom. But all Secretaries of State should deal more on paper, as well as oral communication, more than they do.

RICHARD RUSK: And that's a good general rule of thumb for the entire experience?

READ: Very, very much so. I remember one instance where Dean was talking to [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin. It was something real important at the time; I think it was Berlin, but I'm not even sure of that. And he was trying to make three points: A, B, C. and they were concisely and clearly put. And he repeated them. And Dobrynin nodded comprehension: not agreement of the viewpoint, but agreement that he had gotten the message. He didn't indicate any confusion, just took at face value, apparently, what had been told him. We had proof positive in the form of a defector within forty-eight hours, from another eastern European country, that the message Dobrynin had sent back was in error on all points. They were like ships passing in the night. And when you look at the profoundly different electrochemical systems we have upstairs and the perceptual gulfs that divide east and west, that's not terribly surprising. The more you know about the neurosciences, the more concerned you become about your ability to communicate across these vast gulfs of linguistic problems, orientated towards totally different cultures and value systems.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall the substance of what was discussed there?

READ: I think it was Berlin, but I remember specifically the process because it was such a complete confirmation of oral communication falling short, even with as polished an ambassador as Dobrynin. But who knows what's driving him? I was talking to a man in the White House yesterday. He had a proof positive that Dobrynin has miscommunicated to Moscow as recently as two or three months ago.

RICHARD RUSK: Maybe he's doing that for his own purposes?

READ: It could be for his own purposes; it could be for self-glorification, for fear of--but who knows?

RICHARD RUSK: That's an interesting point.

READ: But if you give a person a diplomatic piece of paper, he is duty bound to convey it. He fails to do so only at his peril. And so why not let other eyes fall in the government on the essence of that communication and have the double check that that permits?

RICHARD RUSK: In talking about Soviet diplomats and people on the other side--

READ: I remember coming in to your father's seventy-fifth birthday party at the State Department in line with Dobrynin, and we got to chatting about your father. It was very clear

then, and I have talked to Dobrynin in the intervening years, that he really had very considerable admiration for the abilities of your father in that office. He obviously had to go toe to toe on all sorts of issues, but he really had the greatest respect for his professionalism.

RICHARD RUSK: Any other people other than Dobrynin, here in Washington, or perhaps not here in Washington, that could speak on that?

READ: I think only Dobrynin and [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko would be able to give you the full flavor of that.

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Did you go with him to the United Nations during his annual trip there when--

READ: No. I made a point of avoiding that.

RICHARD RUSK: Good for you. You had some call over your own schedule?

READ: Yes.

[break in recording]

READ: He was also a superb draftsman. I guess the message he dictated that went almost without change that I remember best is one for which he got a lot of criticism later, or the government did, but which was, in my books, completely necessary to accomplish what we were doing at the time. It was the first Cyprus crisis and we had information as solid as a rock that the Turks were boarding their ships for an invasion of the island. And we gathered in your father's office one evening. The White House crowd was there. I've forgotten whether it was [McGeorge] Bundy or his Middle East fellow at the time, I think it was [Robert William] Komer, and all of the Middle East people from State. And in their presence he dictated an absolute blast at the Turks, telling them in the straightest possible language what irreparable damage it would do to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] if they moved in this way, and we would have to reassess basically our relationship if they carried through their threat. But it worked. And of course, after it had worked and the Turks were smarting--

RICHARD RUSK: Can you identify that message at all?

READ: I think it was to Inonu in Turkey.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall the timing of that?

READ: Well it was the first Cyprus crisis. You'd have to look that up. I think it was '64 or '65.

RICHARD RUSK: He more or less did that on the spot to his colleagues?

READ: Yes. To his colleagues. They had minimal, if any, suggestions during or after his dictation. None of them thought it was too tough, which some of them did in retrospect. But it was an extraordinary piece of drafting. You will be seeing later today [C.] Jane Mossellem, who will recall how polished some of the speech drafts came out in terms of what he would put on the dictating machine and give to her.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad did most of his own speech writing? He would take drafts from other people?

READ: He'd take drafts from others but do a major rework.

RICHARD RUSK: Of course, that's something he developed back during the CBI [China-Burma-India Theater] days working for General [Joseph Warren] Stilwell. Those cables are what caught the attention of the superiors in Washington. Something else you had in mind?

READ: Well, I was going to mention arms control, because of the period of your father's tenure in office he was so associated with Vietnam that people just don't recall him as interested in or concerned with arms control. And it's a perversion of history to let that impression remain. I don't think there's anyone who was more pleased and delighted to see the Test Ban Treaty achieved in 1963. I used to go over with him--I think I may have mentioned in our first interview--to see Kennedy each day during those negotiations.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally Ben, you were under fairly short leash with the distribution of those cables from Averell Harriman. Was that something that my dad wanted to institute?

READ: It was the President's directive. And we had to broaden it one by one as the days passed on. And your father would concur in that. But it was all handled with a single copy in the State Department and a single copy to the White House. But after the test ban was achieved, what was the next target? It was a very much tougher one to accomplish: non-proliferation. It took many years to hatch. It was '68 before it was achieved. Both of the principals involved in that effort from the Arms Control Disarmament Agency are dead: Bill [William Chapman] Foster and Butch [Adrian S.] Fisher. But I can remember time and time again when one of them would come to me and say, "We've got to get Dean's help. We're just at a dead end here," or "There's a problem with the White House and we're not getting through to the President," or "The Defense Department's doing this or that and we can't clear things."

RICHARD RUSK: Butch Fisher is Bill Fisher?

READ: No, that's Adrian S. Fisher. He was the Legal Adviser of the State Department in the [Dean Gooderham] Acheson days, but was the Deputy Director of ACDA from 1961-69. And many, many times he and his boss, Bill Foster, would work into the late date schedule with your father, and he would give counsel and advice on how to move that tough subject forward, giving them a sense of what else was going on with the Soviets on Vietnam and other things that made an opening possible or not possible. And he would encourage me when I would put together the evening reading items that he would send to the President and sign off on at the very end of each day, I would always try to put in something about where we stood on that long-range quest



without too many days in between, he would encourage that: reminding the President that this was on the agenda and an important part of the agenda. And in many, many quiet ways of that sort he would show his extreme interest in achieving progress in that field.

RICHARD RUSK: Yes. I was aware of it. They negotiated five major arms control agreements back during his tenure.

READ: And not terribly many in recent years.

RICHARD RUSK: Was his degree of interest in arms control more substantial than Lyndon Johnson's?

READ: I can't say what Johnson's own instincts and motivations were because I never talked to him directly on that subject.

RICHARD RUSK: As an operational thing, was he heavily involved with arms control, or was this the type of thing that was more or less done by other people and they would come to him at certain points? Did he ever get into the operational day to day negotiations?

READ: Your father?

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. In a major way, the details of the negotiations?

READ: Well, we had these two very able people at the head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. And they used good discretion regarding when to bring things to him and when to consult him and when they needed his help. He was always available. Looking back in terms of opportunities we've missed on arms control--and there were some--I think probably the most crucial one we missed was an effort to try to accomplish a ban on deployment and testing of Multiple Independently Targeted Reentry Vehicles.

RICHARD RUSK: MIRVs?

READ: Yes. There was a point where that conceivably could have lent itself to the same sort of treaty that we accomplished in the test ban field. It was verifiable by unilateral means. It wasn't attempted. And there were some people who raised that with your father. No one knows whether he ever raised it at the time either with the President or if it's something he didn't think it appropriate to raise.

RICHARD RUSK: Was he himself sold on the need to put a cap on MIRVs. Did you ever talk with him personally?

READ: I don't remember ever getting his personal view on that specific subject. But I remember having people come to me who were concerned and working them into his appointment schedule. They were going to talk that problem with him. And they were deeply concerned about where we were headed. In the luxury of hindsight, it's a great pity that we didn't accomplish something here, or try to.

RICHARD RUSK: Would Dean Rusk's acknowledgment of, or his support of that position to try to cap MIRVs have been essential in the scheme of things to negotiate a treaty?

READ: Undoubtedly, because the great military engine had found a new technical tool and was moving inexorably in that direction. Now of course, the problems implicit in these multiple warhead weapons is so obvious to anybody that we're trying to move back towards single warheads. But it'd be interesting for you to get his view on that. I fault us as a State Department on that point, and some people specifically fault him on not having gone to bat on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Any of these people still alive?

READ: Yeah. Len [Leonard Carpenter] Meeker, Jose [Joseph John] Sisco, and some others who felt that way. But Len and Joe were the ones that I remember specifically who sought time to raise it with him, and did. (interruption)

RICHARD RUSK: You're talking about my dad's--

READ: Final soiree and departure.

RICHARD RUSK: Final few days at the Department.

READ: I think we got the idea about six weeks ahead of that, after the Nixon win at the polls, to have a final evening as close to the very end as we could, when he could invite the President over and do some "hail and farewells" to Dean and Virginia [Foisie Rusk].

RICHARD RUSK: Is that normally done?

READ: I don't know. But at any rate, I formed a committee of six, which included my wife Nan [Read] and myself, and Luke [Lucius Durham] Battle and his wife Betty [Battle], and Clem [Clement E.] Conger and his wife LeAnne [Conger]. The committee of six--

RICHARD RUSK: Safety in numbers.

READ: Well, we needed Clem's help for a variety of reasons--

END OF SIDE 2