

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk NNNNN

Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk, David Adelman, and Sue Ellen Stokes

1985 November 5

RICHARD RUSK: And doing the interviewing are David Adelman and Sue Ellen Stokes and this is November 5, 1985. Go ahead, folks and don't let that thing inhibit you at all.

ADELMAN: Okay, I don't want to blow you away right here since you said you didn't have that much to do with the--until the tenth anniversary.

DEAN RUSK: I think as a part of the background we should remember that we had had great difficulty with the four-power arrangements for Germany following the surrender of Germany and those arrangements broke down to the point where they were simply two separate Germanies now, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Well, we thought that that kind of result was not appropriate to Austria. It was a small country. It was geographically somewhat to the side of main invasion routes and problems of that sort. And we thought we ought to try to just get all occupying forces out of Austria and let that fine little country move into the future as an independent nation without being a threat to anybody so negotiations were started with the Soviet Union on that. Now, it's hard to find any matter on which there were more negotiating sessions and where the effort was so persistent over a period of time. There were over 400 negotiating sessions which finally wound up with the Austrian State Treaty. Probably set a record in that regard. A man on our side who played a critical role was Ambassador Llewellyn [E.] Thompson [Jr.].

STOKES: My cousin's name is Llewellyn.

DEAN RUSK: He was one of our great Soviet experts, but he also played a key role in the negotiations of the Austrian State Treaty. Now, this treaty was concluded during a transitional period in the Soviet government following the death of Stalin. Mr. [Georgil Maksimilianovich] Malenkov was still a leading figure in Moscow along with [Nikita Sergeevich] Khrushchev and certain others. Malenkov was eventually brushed aside, but it was during that period of transition of power in the Soviet Union that this Austrian State Treaty was achieved. Now, there were some rumors at the time that Malenkov might even have been interested in the reunification of Germany under certain conditions. But, my guess is had Khrushchev firmly established his own personal position that we might never have achieved the Austrian State Treaty, had it not been for this period of transition of authority in the Soviet Union. But, in any event, it was finally concluded and it meant that the four occupying powers in Austria withdrew their forces, allowed the Austrians to proceed into the future not on the basis of an internationally imposed neutrality, but on the basis of a decision made by the Austrian government almost immediately after their independence proclaiming their own neutrality. Now, some people think that the neutrality of Austria was imposed at the time of the Austrian State Treaty. This is not true. This was a decision by the Austrians themselves to move into a technical position of neutrality like that of Switzerland. Now, it was clear that despite that, the sympathies of the Austrian people were

generally with the West. I remember going to Austria with President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy when he went to Vienna to meet with Chairman Khrushchev in June of 1961. When Kennedy arrived and moved around the city, large, large crowds turned out enthusiastically waving and cheering and so forth. But when Khrushchev arrived he was ignored. I mean just given the silent treatment by the Austrians.

ADELMAN: So Khrushchev was the chief negotiator for the Soviet Union.

DEAN RUSK: No, I don't remember now just who the actual negotiator was for the Soviet Union, but he was just coming into power and was sharing power with Malenkov during this period. And it was during that what I call a transition of power in the Soviet Union that this treaty was concluded.

ADELMAN: One recollection we've read had [Nikolai Aleksandrovich] Bulganin in power. Is that--

STOKES: Right. There was a time after [Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili] Stalin that Bulganin--

DEAN RUSK: Bulganin and Malenkov? I know that Malenkov was in power. All right, you can substitute--you can substitute Bulganin for Khrushchev, then.

ADELMAN: That is why possibly Bulganin disappeared. Had something to do with the treaty. You see any validity to that?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know about that. I rather doubt that. But, the Austrians have been a rather civilized people. I remember with a certain amount of affection and respect at the end of the war when the reconstruction of war-torn Europe was underway that the first priority established by the Austrians was the rebuilding of the Opera House in Vienna. That was before all of the other needs were met. The first thing they wanted to do was rebuild the Opera House. And even today that's one of the finest opera houses in the world. But anyhow, these things occurred during the Eisenhower Administration and Mr. John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State, so I personally was not involved in those negotiations that were brought to a conclusion. I did visit Austria in 1956 in connection with the fighting that had occurred in Hungary. I was then president of the Rockefeller Foundation and I wanted to visit Budapest to see if the Rockefeller Foundation might be permitted to help rebuild the medical facility there in Budapest which is not only their top medical school, but also the principal hospital for the care of the sick in the capitol there. Because that medical facility had been the locale of some of the most severe fighting in '56 in Hungary. So, I went to Vienna as my point of departure and the Austrians were receiving a large number of Hungarian refugees, particularly Hungarian students that played a prominent part in the fighting. And Austria gave them sanctuary. In fact, we at the Rockefeller Foundation provided a large number of fellowship grants to these Austrian students so they could finish their studies somewhere else in Europe or in this country. But that was a rather moving experience there in Vienna at that time. But, I think the Austrian State Treaty was one of the more satisfactory things that was accomplished in that post-war period where the cold war was in full bloom. You see just after V-J [Victory over Japan] day--and I don't want to take you too far

afield from your paper--but just after V-J day, the United States demobilized almost completely and almost overnight. By the summer of 1946, we did not have one division in our Army or one group in our Air Force that could be considered ready for combat. Our defense budget for three fiscal years, '47, '48, '49 came down to little over 11 billion dollars, groping for a target of 10 billion. Now it was during this period of Western disarmament that Joseph Stalin looked out across the west and saw all of the divisions melting away and so he tried to keep the northwest province of Iran the first case before the UN Security Council. He demanded two Eastern provinces of Turkey, Kars and Ardahan; he supported the guerillas going after Greece; he transformed Eastern Europe into a great colonial empire which is there now; he had a hand in the Communist coup d'etat in Czechoslovakia; he blockaded Berlin; gave the green light to the North Koreans to go after South Korea. So it was against--I mean, those were the events which in my judgment launched the cold war. Now it was in the middle of all this cold war psychology that the Austrian State Treaty was accomplished and that made it a rather remarkable event.

STOKES: It's interesting it occurred after his death. I guess that was convenient timing.

DEAN RUSK: After Joseph Stalin's death.

STOKES: Right.

ADELMAN: Let me ask you. Well, along the same lines--looking at the people in the Kremlin today, what do you think are the prospects of any type of a similar treaty if we could go back in time and look at that--a treaty such as Austria where there wasn't a drop of blood shed in a country, compromise was made over a country that both sides were satisfied with. You seem satisfied with it and I'm certain that the neutrality was satisfactory to the Soviets or obviously the agreement would never have been reached. What about the leaders today over there or in Washington, for that matter? Like for example, a compromise over--for the reunification of Germany?

DEAN RUSK: I don't see the possibility of a reunification of Germany for many years to come. It seems to me the only thing that can be done there is to reduce the importance of that frontier between the two Germanies in terms of travel and trade and the reunification of families and cultural exchanges and things of that sort. But, I doubt that the four major powers, the four major victors in World War II--the Soviet Union, United States, Britain, and France--would agree to the reunification of Germany and those four powers have retained jurisdiction over what is called the all-German question. That is the question of German reunification. But, there may be other subjects. I personally think that it's very important for us to find some way to put a ceiling on this arms race, because it's verging on the edges of insanity at the present time. But one thing I think we need to note, and I'll make a point of this when I visit your class, in this year of 1985, we can say that we have put behind us forty years without the firing of a nuclear weapon in anger despite many serious and even dangerous crises we've had since 1945. So, given all those crises, it's very important to be able to say that. There had been that ultimate limit on the actions of the two sides. Partly because the leaders in both countries simply are not idiots. Whatever you think of the leaders in the Soviet Union, or for that matter, in Washington, they're not idiots. They're not going to not only destroy each other but raise serious questions as to whether this planet can any longer sustain the human race. So, I'm optimistic about the prospects of avoiding nuclear war.

But since a nuclear war is that war which must never be fought, it seems to me that we ought to take major steps to reduce--well, to halt the arms race and reduce the inventories of nuclear weapons on both sides. That's a very difficult negotiation for a variety of reasons, and we can discuss that when I come to your class, but it just makes no sense for the two sides to keep piling up these weapons which must never be used. Because if they ever were used, it would not only eliminate all the answers, it would eliminate all the questions. And so I think we need to start from there. And hopefully, Mr. [Ronald Wilson] Reagan and Mr. [Mikhail] Gorbachev can recognize these great common interests we have such as the common interest of preventing nuclear war, and the common obligation we both share to the entire human race not to let such a war break out. But, so I hope we can make some progress on arms control. Now, whether we can get agreement on other matters like Afghanistan, Nicaragua, places like that, is much more doubtful.

ADELMAN: It's interesting to back up a little bit along the same lines as your statement. You mentioned crises and in what we've read, they've described the Austrian State Treaty as a crisis prevention treaty.

DEAN RUSK: I think in a sense that was true. That is, it has eliminated Austria as a flashpoint of violence among the great powers. Whatever happens, it's not going to happen over Austria. And that itself is a significant step, because we had--the four powers had their occupying armies there in Austria glaring at each other across those demarcation lines, and that has been removed. And it's important to try to find ways to eliminate such flashpoints if we can.

ADELMAN: What do you see as prospects for similar treaties in Afghanistan, for example, or in Berlin, you know, which are obvious flashpoints?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we had a first class crisis in the early sixties in Berlin when Khrushchev in very harsh terms threw an ultimatum at Kennedy at the Vienna meeting in June '61, so for quite a while after that we had a real crisis over Berlin. I was once asked by some newsmen what my hopes were with regard to the Berlin question. I told them that I hoped to be able to pass this problem along to my successor, which itself is something of an achievement, because it meant that it did not blow up into war. Well, that problem did simmer down, and in the early seventies, the four powers reached a new agreement on Berlin which has gone a long way toward removing Berlin as a flashpoint of violence among the great powers. It's not absolutely certain because of the geographic location of West Berlin and the presence of so many East German and Russian divisions surrounding the city, but nevertheless, I think that problem has cooled off considerably. I'd be surprised if it were to be revived again as a source of a major crisis. So, I'm not sure it's worth stirring up the Berlin question again. Let it rest there on that new agreement of the early seventies.

ADELMAN: More recently then, maybe Nicaragua or an Afghanistan. What can we do as superpowers to bring those flashpoints to a treaty that would be a so-called crisis prevention type?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I don't know. It's a theoretical possibility for us to ease up the pressure with regard to Afghanistan if they would tell [Fidel Ruz] Castro and Nicaragua to cut out all their

monkey business in El Salvador and Costa Rica and places like that. But, it's not easy to trade off peoples in a situation of that sort. So, I just doubt that any kind of an agreement on that could be reached. It may be that de facto certain things would happen without an agreement, such as our backing away on Afghanistan, and their backing away on Nicaragua. But those things don't lend themselves to formal agreements. We and the Soviets, I don't think, should sit down and try to divide up the world into spheres of influence. That's using other nations and other peoples too much as pawns in a great game between the two superpowers. The world is not like that and won't play ball on that basis.

ADELMAN: Going back more historically, that is in fact what did happen in Austria. There was a compromise made over someone else's land. And, you know, what we've come into in studying this at least initially, we really haven't taken a dive into it like we probably will be before the conclusion of this quarter; we've found that very little consent was given to what the people of Austria felt. Like you said, they were leaning towards the west, but from what we've read, that's not why the Soviet Union left. The Soviet Union might have had some other motives, whatever they may be. You know, the--in 1943, I've got written down here, the initial agreement was, "to help Austria toward political and economic security which is the only basis for lasting peace." But it took over ten years, twelve years until the Soviet Union was gone. And, you know, we're just looking at--part of our paper we're trying to hypothesize what could happen in Nicaragua or Afghanistan to bring it to a similar situation--a peace-keeping strategy that could maybe be applied in other regions. And you know, I don't know if we'd be neglecting the people of Afghanistan and the people of Nicaragua, but, you know, we're just looking for a bend in this that could be used elsewhere since it was so successful in the fifties. I'm just, you know--like I said, do you think that the Austrian r State Treaty was unique and one of a kind and would never occur again?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it's unique in one sense. By and large, you won't find instances where the Russians have withdrawn the Red Army from any position that the Red Army has been able to establish. The--now, it's true that when they tried to keep the Red Army in Azerbaijan, the northwest province of Iran, this matter was taken to the UN [United Nations] Security Council and the rest of the world mobilized opinion, governmental opinion against the Soviet presence in Azerbaijan. And after a while, the Russians decided that it was not worth the candle and they withdrew their forces from Azerbaijan. See, the Russians are sensitive to propaganda values, to a degree, because they rely heavily on what we would call propaganda. During the blockade of Berlin in 19⁴⁸, from a purely objective point of view, there was no reason why the Soviets could not have continued that blockade indefinitely. West Berlin was a bone in their throat. A little island of freedom right there in the heart of Communist East Germany. But again, after several months of brilliantly executed airlift on our side to keep the West Berliners alive, the Russians reached a point where they apparently decided that a continuation of the blockade was simply not worth the candle and they brought the blockade to an end. In the Korean struggle there came a point where the North Koreans, the Russians and the Chinese decided that pursuing the matter was not worth it, and therefore they accepted the talks at Panmunjom and brought the Korean affair to a conclusion on the basis of the status quo ante. The restoration of the situation before the North Koreans attacked. So--but whether you can expect things like that in Afghanistan, Nicaragua is still a puzzle. Still up in the air.

ADELMAN: Do you feel optimistic?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I'm optimistic about preventing a nuclear war. We've learned during those forty years that the fingers on the nuclear triggers are not itchy. We've also learned that Soviet leaders have no more interest in destroying Mother Russia than our leaders have in destroying our beloved America. And so I'm optimistic about preventing a nuclear war, but that doesn't mean that you might not have other lesser conflicts here and there and what is rather a turbulent situation. I will comment that Mr. Reagan has been more moderate in his action than he has been in his rhetoric. When the Japanese airlines plane was shot down or our American officer was killed in East Berlin, in East Germany, he gave eloquent expression to our shock and horror and anger, but in a world of action, he did not pile tragedy upon tragedy and go down the road toward much larger conflicts. After all, one--there are many of us who still remember that foolish men in several governments in Europe allowed the assassination of an Archduke to lead step-by-step into the horrors of World War I. And I think we and the Russians came out of the Cuban missile crisis somewhat more prudent than we were before we went into it. And we both, I think, realized that we better do what we can to prevent such crises from occurring because they're just too damn dangerous. But we'll see. We don't really know much about this new leadership that is emerging in the Soviet Union. We should be finding out here in the next few months.

STOKES: I'd like to ask a question. If we can bring it back to 1955 and getting back to the Soviet motivation for signing the treaty. Do you think that perhaps one of the reasons they let Austria go, more or less, was that it was no longer valuable to them as a propaganda tool?

DEAN RUSK: Probably. And Austria in any event was not playing any key role in the strategic or general political relationships between East and West. It was sort of off to the side of the central conflicts and my guess is that they decided that it just wasn't important enough to try to maintain the status quo of the occupying forces in Austria and that we could all abandon Austria as far as our forces were concerned without any real danger or even discomfort. And, I suppose the Russians realized that they would gain some brownie points with public opinion if they agreed to the Austrian State Treaty.

STOKES: Do you think they consciously considered Austria as a potential flashpoint and therefore decided signing the treaty would eliminate that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there were irritations along the demarcation lines for the occupying forces in Austria, occasional incidents along there, and I suppose that they might have agreed that it would be well just to get rid of that kind of exposure and that kind of harassment, those difficulties. In other words, they got Austria off the agenda at very little cost. My guess is that they looked upon that as an advantage, and certainly we did on our side.

ADELMAN: They looked at it as a peace-keeping strategy just as we would. They just were looking to eliminate a flashpoint or a potential flashpoint. So you think the Austrian State Treaty overall--I'm confident that on our part--but on the Soviet's part was very good-natured, not so strategic.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, partly because it was not--their position there was not critically important to them, in any strategic sense.

STOKES: If it had been you don't suppose that they would have gone ahead with signing the treaty then?

DEAN RUSK: I think it's unlikely.

STOKES: Okay.

DEAN RUSK: Although there were some rumors at the time that Malenkov was giving some thought to a similar arrangement with regard to Germany. But that proved to be a phantom. Nothing ever came of that.

STOKES: One of our sources has suggested that that was part of the reason that they went ahead signing the Austrian treaty was--

ADELMAN: Leading to Germany--

STOKES: Right, to hopefully follow through with Germany.

ADELMAN: So, you feel probably Eastern Germany was just too strategic?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, and--

ADELMAN: It wasn't an Austria.

DEAN RUSK: --and I think also that the countries of Eastern Europe beginning with the Soviet Union, as well as the countries of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] were nervous about a reunified Germany acting like a loose cannon rolling around the deck because the two most destructive wars in human history began with Germany--Germany and France. And I don't think NATO members were very comfortable about the idea of a unified Germany, so-called neutral and independent, playing a game of its own there right in the heart of Europe. So, what turned out to be a very good thing for Austria just didn't appear very attractive as far as Germany was concerned. Well, I'm afraid you've exhausted my little knowledge of this.

STOKES: Well, you've helped us a lot, I'm sure.

ADELMAN: Tremendously. Just to tell you a little bit about what we're really looking for as--and you know, this is going to be worked on on our own, not so much regurgitation. We want to somehow be able to apply events that led up to and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty as a lesson in peace-keeping.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah.

ADELMAN: And maybe even draw scenarios for the future how similar principles can be applied and I think, you know, you've been very optimistic about it, but r the underlying theme, I think, of your hypothesis has been that Austria was not strategically important enough--

DEAN RUSK: And the Austrian experience is a unique experience, and therefore it is not going to be easy to draw from that experience things that might be done in other places.

ADELMAN: That's what we're finding.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, right.

STOKES: We were hoping to pull some wonderful peace-keeping lesson out of all this if finding that the Soviet Union only plays ball when it's convenient, and going to benefit them. So, it's kind of--

ADELMAN: Benefits the world.

DEAN RUSK: Well, it has been a benefit to the Soviet Union as well as to the West to have Austria in the position that it's in. I think Mr. Khrushchev was a little annoyed in June '61 by the cool reception he received in Vienna compared with President Kennedy, but he got over that.

ADELMAN: Thank you again.

DEAN RUSK: Austria plays an important role in receiving political refugees.

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