

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk PP: Part 4 of 5

Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas J. Schoenbaum, and William Bundy

1985 February

The complete interview also includes Rusk MM: Part 1; Rusk NN: Part 2; Rusk OO: Part 3; Rusk QQ: Part 5.

BUNDY: But you hark back, and you must do this Dean, in your own knowledge of General [George Catlett] Marshall and the way the Second World War was conducted. General Marshall handled all the top command assignments out of his own shop, at least in the European theatre, and basically in the Army throughout the world. And once the commander got the job, he got the job of picking his own staff.

DEAN RUSK: Right.

BUNDY: And he could hire and fire within his command at will. [William Childs] Westmoreland always felt a little bit that he had to have [a balance among the services.] Well, for instance he had a Marine J-2 for a while. And Marines, for all their values in many respects, are not trained except in a tactical sense in that field. He didn't really have [a] team that was utterly and thoroughly his team.

SCHOENBAUM: Can you follow this question of the bombing? Can you follow that up and discuss that?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, go ahead.

SCHOENBAUM: Who brought that up? That is of course one of the most important aspects of the war. And I would like to bring up two questions in connection with that. One is that, as to Dean Rusk's views--and I realize here that once the decisions were made, your views were identical to those of the Administration--but of course--

DEAN RUSK: Identical to those of the President.

SCHOENBAUM: Of the President. I'm sorry. Of the President. But there's that period before the President makes his decision, and the debate must go on. And perhaps both of you gentlemen participated in that debate. Was there any theme that you tried to stress in connection with the bombing? Now, I suppose there was a basic bombing philosophy as to when to pause and when to--what targets to--what kind of target to hit. And then there's the question of the military aspect of actually picking the targets. Were you involved in either of those?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, very much. The bombing targets in the far North were selected or approved at President Johnson's Tuesday luncheon sessions. The Pentagon would send over to us their choices for bombing targets, and [William] Bill Bundy's office would look at those and give me

a briefing paper on those targets that I would take with me to the Tuesday luncheon sessions, and we would look over that. Now, on my conscience is the fact that we tried very hard to avoid civilian casualties. I remember there were times when a particular target could be approached from one direction where the defenses were lighter but where the chances for civilian casualties were greater, whereas if you approached it from another direction, the defenses would be tougher but there would be less chance of civilian casualties. We also tried to concentrate those targets on genuine, military targets; that is, things which made a significant contribution to the war effort.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, to follow up that specific point, do you recall other types of decisions that you were involved in that, in which this same issue is raised: the weighing of civilian casualties versus damage to our own forces?

DEAN RUSK: If one looks at the rules of engagement that were in operation out there for our ground forces, you would see that considerable care was used to try to prevent civilian casualties. The Lieutenant [William L.] Calley situation was very much an exception to the general situation. That got him a court martial. But I'm sure also that even the ground operations that we took extra casualties in an effort to prevent civilian casualties. Because some of these civilians were kids on bicycles with a bomb on the back of their bicycle or old women doing this and that, but, by and large, most of the civilians were indeed non-combatants.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you involved in the drawing of the rules of engagement?

DEAN RUSK: No. I don't think I can say that I was. I think it's possible that Bill Bundy's office might have been involved.

BUNDY: I don't think we were directly.

DEAN RUSK: I think the embassy in Saigon followed up on those.

BUNDY: Yes. They certainly had civilian input, most certainly. Now, I myself think that's inherent in this kind of war, because it's basic to the effectiveness of the effort as a whole, that you should have as much civilian support as you possibly can. And damage to civilians could hurt you in terms of the basic objective of consolidating your hold in the countryside. So I think it's inherent in this kind of war that there's going to be that issue raised much more acutely when you're fighting among a population that does contain [a] substantial minority of [actual or potential] sympathizers for the other side but contains many more whom you regard in one degree or another as full supporters of what you're trying to do.

SCHOENBAUM: Would you comment also on your, on what your offices' steps [were] in recommending targets or taking what the Pentagon would send over?

BUNDY: We'd review. We didn't attempt ourselves to propose targets, as I recall. We did review what they proposed. For example, when the B-52 strikes were initiated we were reviewing [them] very carefully, [and] we actually looked at photographs in great detail. I don't think that went on in that great a detail after that. And on politically-sensitive efforts like the headquarters area near the Cambodian border, we looked very hard at the maps to know what

you were trying to hit. This was before the Nixon period when we got into bombing overtly--or at least, semi--no, not overtly. It was covertly, across the border. That kind of issue was certainly reviewed on civilian levels.

DEAN RUSK: On the second part of your question, Tom, about such things as bombing halts, those also were determined largely at those Tuesday luncheon sessions. President Johnson had said that Robert [Strange] McNamara was his right arm, whose job was to press the military side of the problem to the best of his ability, and that I was his left arm. And my job was to try to find a possible political settlement through a negotiation of some sort. We had bombing pauses from time to time. But President Johnson became quite skeptical about such bombing pauses because we would pause for several days and the only thing that would happen would be that the North Vietnamese would take maximum advantage of such pauses to rush men and supplies to the South. So McNamara and I wrestled on occasion with Lyndon Johnson about some of those bombing pauses toward the end.

But in retrospect, I must confess that I really don't think the North Vietnamese ever had any strong incentive to negotiate. I expect that up well into 1966, they really thought that they could get what they wanted by military means. But by 1966 we had established a military position there which they could not have overrun, regardless of what they tried to do. Then in '67 and '68, they began to hear all sorts of voices out of the United States: demonstrations and senators of the United States, and other things. I think they, in effect, were being told by people in this country that if they just persisted they would win politically what they could not win militarily. I say that because when we would talk to people like the Poles, Rumanians, and others about this problem who were sort of intermediaries at times to Hanoi, they seemed to think that their problem was to find some way to save our face while getting out. Well, we weren't, at least in my time, we weren't trying to save face, we were trying to save South Vietnam. But I doubt very much that Hanoi ever had any real incentive to negotiate, except possibly just after the Tet Offensive of February '68. But at that point the voices out of this country were so strong that we persuaded them to persist.

SCHOENBAUM: There are two more aspects of the bombing that I would like you both to comment on. One is the widespread perception here I think at the time, at least after a certain point, that they bombing was not making any real difference. It was not the kind of society where you could take out significant targets and make a real difference. That was one point. And the second point, and this gets into the credibility gap and also what the newspapers and photographs were publishing at the time, and the running of programs on television--and it may have been that a lot of these things were fabricated, at least partially, for their news value--I have no doubt that-- but pictures, dramatic pictures of civilian installations, you know, civilian casualties. And in this country what we had, as you well know, was a kind of juxtaposition of the Administration spokesmen saying that civilian targets were avoided, and then the newsmen in Hanoi were showing some dramatic picture that could have well been false. I'm not saying that these were all true. But you had pictures in newspapers and TV of civilian targets in a way that looked, at least gave the appearance of looking, different than what was being said by the Administration spokesmen. Could you comment on that, those two points? I think those are important points.

DEAN RUSK: After the first full year of bombing the North Vietnamese themselves put out a statement in which they said there had been five hundred civilian casualties from bombings that first year. Now, that itself is a clear sign that we were not trying to destroy civilians. Indeed, had we been trying to destroy civilians, we could have bombed Hanoi into ashes with conventional weapons and there wouldn't have been any Hanoi there for Jane Fonda and [William] Ramsey Clark to visit. We could have bombed those dikes south of Hanoi, which might have flooded very large acreage of rice. But we did not do that because of its impact upon the civilian population. These are things that need to be studied, because it may be that if we had made the war more frightful earlier for the North Vietnamese, they might have pulled up on their effort. But it was simply not our purpose out there to kill civilians.

BUNDY: Let me give you my personal judgment on that. It was sometimes said, after the Christmas bombing of Hanoi in '72-'73 which did seem to bring Hanoi back [to the table], and shortly after you had the Paris peace agreements [that this kind of attack earlier could have ended the war much quicker and on better terms]. [But] if you look at that [situation hard, you will see, first, that] what North Vietnamese had to concede was minimal, absolutely minimal, in return for an agreement that they undoubtedly thought gave them a very strong chance of getting South Vietnam in due course. Its most basic provision was that it left in the South, the North Vietnamese forces, under totally inadequate provisions for policing, and reinforcements, and supplies to those forces. In other words, they really didn't have to move more than about two inches [to come to an agreement very satisfactory to them.]

And secondly, at any time, I think, [and certainly] was very visible at that time, a sustained all-out attack of that sort--[perhaps] not quite all-out, but a very, very strong attack--would have kindled intense opposition, both within the United States and in key countries with which we had to have a strong relationship for the whole basic fabric of our foreign [and] security policies. [So] that I don't think you could have sustained it. My own feeling was that, sure, there was this theoretical option of [a] hard-hitting bombing campaign. We looked at it, of course, in one sense at the time of the November-December policy review in 1964--the so called "hard and fast" bombing program. And I would still, myself, stick to the conclusion that it could not have been successful in a time that would have been tolerable in very concrete [political] terms, [let alone terms of] underlying moral and humanity issues. [I concluded, and still believe,] that it simply wouldn't have worked, at least not [for] the United States of America operating with other democratic nations in a basic alliance. That's just my judgment of it. I think you [would] find that the military hindsight on this is sharply divided. Those who were most seized of the bombing program, [particularly] in Honolulu for whom this was their chunk of the war, would tend to build it up more. I don't think General Westmoreland in his memoirs concludes that lack of strong bombing was the real thing that we should have done differently. But that's my personal view.

DEAN RUSK: There's one factor I think that reduced the value of the bombing in the far North in relation to the outcome of the war. [It] was that the North Vietnamese needed to move only about two hundred tons a day to keep their forces in the South supplied with what could not be gotten off the land: ammunition, certain medical supplies, a few things like that. It's hard to conceive of a way to stop two hundred tons a day from the air in terrain which was heavily covered, bad weather, night time. So we were not able to interdict that amount of tonnage on

which the North Vietnamese forces could live. So that, I think, reduced the value of the bombing. If they had had a highly organized industrial society which would have presented other kinds of bombing targets, that would have been another matter. But you can't bomb "out of business" a country which has no place to fall. Even though they had some industry, they were also heavily agricultural in the North. And you don't bomb that kind of society out of existence.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you make this kind of a statement at the Tuesday luncheon?

BUNDY: This has come up repeatedly. And, indeed, there were estimates on whether a "hard and fast" bombing program would cause the North Vietnamese to pull back in a finite time. How much you could hit and cut off was exhaustively examined. I think the basic conclusions were the ones that I would still accept.

SCHOENBAUM: What value did the bombing have? How would you assess the bombing? What value did it have? You did make the statement that in hindsight, perhaps it was not worth the costs.

DEAN RUSK: I think the bombing on the Ho Chi Minh trail did slow them down considerably, and extended into several weeks what otherwise might have been done in a few days in terms of moving troops and supplies. It also had a bearing on the morale of the South Vietnamese to know that the North Vietnamese were getting some punishment. It had some effect, I think here in this country because we would have had great difficulty in meeting committees of Congress if we were not prepared to bomb these infiltration routes. That was almost a minimum action that the Congress would expect of us. So, there were a variety of reasons for it.

BUNDY: I'll just add my personal note. I remember saying again and again on public platforms what we also said in the internal papers of various levels, and I think up to the presidential level: It can be a useful supplement and [a morale factor, and all that the Secretary says.] But the real test is how the war goes in the South. And at the point where we really had the North Vietnamese wavering in the South, then perhaps bombing could be a very important contributor to getting them to move that last step. Unless they were feeling some direct pain themselves, they might say, "Okay. We'll just accept this." They might move that last step because of the bombing, but the real hinge was always going to be how the war went in the South.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, Warren [I.] Cohen spent two years studying your career in public service and spent a great deal of time studying your involvement and role in the Vietnam War. His basic premise was that you fought the "Vietnamization" of that war: the introduction of the American combat troops, the bombing of North Vietnam.

BUNDY: You mean the "Americanization" don't you?

RICHARD RUSK: The "Americanization" of the war. That's correct: the bombing of North Vietnam, the introduction of American combat forces up into the point where President Johnson decided in the spring of 1965 that we had to take these steps. At that point, for the rest of the war, you fought restraints on the use of these things. I'll ask the general question now. In reading Cohen's account, did he accurately state and explain your role?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think Warren Cohen, after his study, decided that basically I was a good guy. But he, therefore, attributed to me some of his own thoughts about Vietnam. Since I was a good guy, I must have done this, that, other. Well, in fact, what I tried to do was to be sure that we fully understood the seriousness of the decisions that were being made. And when we made such decisions, we did not do so under any sense of illusion. So I did raise a good many questions along the way. But to say that I disagreed with President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy or President Johnson on major decisions would be wrong.

RICHARD RUSK: You think so?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: When Lyndon Johnson decided to land Marines, for example, in February to protect the bases--

DEAN RUSK: I was in favor of that.

RICHARD RUSK: You were in favor of that?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: What about the introduction of more combat forces?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I was in favor of that.

RICHARD RUSK: And the bombing of North Vietnam?

DEAN RUSK: I had some misgivings about that and expressed them at those Tuesday luncheon sessions from time to time. I did try to keep those bombing targets centered on genuine military objectives. I was always skeptical about whether the bombing in the far North was, in effect, a profitable undertaking.

SCHOENBAUM: So you would distinguish, and did distinguish at the time, between the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail and the bombing of the far North.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, yes. I thought that we should have been free to bomb the areas immediately north of the 17th parallel, and bomb the Ho Chi Minh trail without limit, because our job was to try to stop that infiltration coming down from the north. So that didn't bother me at all.

RICHARD RUSK: If I can follow up on Cohen's book, he did say that in the early sixties, and even as late as 1964, you were very much aware of the problems of what would happen if we made a major effort with armed forces. You were concerned about the weakness of the South Vietnamese regime.

DEAN RUSK: That's true. That's true.

RICHARD RUSK: Were there lots of doubts? You were toying with doubts to some extent. You never wavered from your feeling that we had to defend that country, yet you had many forebodings about what could happen in the future. And yet, when the President did make his decisions in the spring of '65 you more or less put those private doubts of yours to the side. You signed on--you, yourself, became committed to the war. Once in--"in for a dime, in for a dollar." I think that was your comment to Bob McNamara on another point.

DEAN RUSK: For six years of North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam, we tried to get along with a minimum of U.S. forces in Vietnam, hoping for the breaks, thinking that maybe some political processes would work as it worked at the time of the Berlin airlift or helped to bring the Korean thing to a conclusion, or things of that sort. But those never came. I must confess that I personally underestimated the tenacity of the North Vietnamese. Even by conservative counts they took frightful casualties. In relation to population their casualties would be roughly equivalent to ten million American casualties, related to our population. And yet, they kept coming. They never really reached a point where they were prepared to call the whole thing off.

RICHARD RUSK: Why was that?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know. I don't know. But at least I underestimated. I think I also, the second mistake I made was overestimating the patience of the American people about a continuing flow of casualty reports without any perceptible move toward a conclusion that you could show on a map. Finally, I think war weariness took hold of the American people at the grassroots.

SCHOENBAUM: This brings up an interesting problem that is very current today, and I am sure you are aware of it: this very interesting exchange of speeches between Caspar [Willard] Weinberger and George [Pratt] Shultz, which it seems to me reflects this idea we have and the statement you just made about under what circumstances our leader should be willing to take military action in relation to the American people. Caspar Weinberger, in a speech that he gave for the National Press Club, said that basically he had a list of conditions we would set, but basically amounted to the idea that our leader should think in terms of quick, decisive wars with the full support of the American people. Whereas George Shultz, in a speech about two weeks later obviously intended to disagree with Weinberger, said that the United States has to be prepared to combat guerrilla operations and wars on national liberation as in the past. Do you, have you--you've noticed that, and that seems to be the problem?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I'm not sure that we have fully worked out, Bill Bundy, the most effective tactics to use in a guerrilla situation. You see, when the enemy is engaged in "hit and run" tactics and your own task is to try to defend major centers, cities, districts, towns, things of that sort, as well as the communications that lead you to and fro, this imposes--I've heard the figure--a ten-to-one burden on the defense as opposed to the guerrillas. I'm not sure that we have fully worked out the most appropriate strategy for that kind of situation. There were times, for example, when I thought it might be advisable for us to just put a picket line of soldiers right across Vietnam, every five feet, with some combat units in reserve right behind them, and just let them move

right across the country: move north and right through the country, being sure that they combed out anything that looked like guerrilla bases or guerrilla activities or anything of that sort. That would not have taken more men than the men we already had out there. But there are tactical issues here that I don't pretend to know the answer to. But the defense against guerrilla action is extraordinarily difficult and requires a great deal of manpower. Just think what would happen if, on a basis of population, we had 500,000 determined people, dedicated people, in this country going around blowing up bridges and assassinating sheriffs and bombing power plants and things of that sort. It would be one heck of a job to get rid of them. And the first casualty would be the Bill of Rights. We would go into martial law.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, this question of tactics relates to the early question I asked. And that is, why were the North Vietnamese so tenacious? And I wonder if we could stay with that one for a minute and explore that. I think it strikes at the heart of the matter. Why did those people never stop coming?

DEAN RUSK: Well, that means going into the minds of the North Vietnamese. And I'm not sure we were ever capable of doing that fully. I think the original demand of Ho Chi Minh to take charge of what all had been French Indochina was a very deep-seated feeling, at least among the leadership. And, of course, they had a regime up there that imposed its leadership upon people at the village level, who didn't think much about it one way or the other. And they were able to sustain it. I don't know. Bill, do you know?

BUNDY: Let me offer a hypothesis that I remember thinking at the time. When Harrison [Evans] Salisbury came back from Hanoi--the first serious witness we had had from Hanoi--and we debriefed him in the State Department and got all of his thoughts and-- incidentally, his trip was a dramatic example of what [Thomas J.] Tom Schoenbaum was mentioning earlier. These pictures of lateral, civilian damage belied what people had interpreted as the Administration position that we were [not] hitting civilians [at all.] We couldn't avoid this completely. And I wasn't particularly amazed at what he said about the degree of civilian damage. But one thing he said just stuck to me like a burr, and that was that it was really cool at night in Hanoi [at] that season. And there is a perceptible difference in the climate of the North and the South. The North is subtropical. The South is basically exceedingly tropical. And I certainly always felt my efficiency go down twenty percent the moment I got off at Tan Sanh Nhut. And I truly think-- and this I think would be to some extent borne out by history--that there was a difference [in climate and energy habits that played a big part.] I think I've heard French people refer to it, that the northerners were [just plain] tougher than [the southerners]. If I may be anecdotal for a moment, I remember being [at a party] with Max Ascoli, the editor of the Reporter [Magazine], and with the Ambassador from Italy, [Egidio] Ortona, and saying, "I've just got this thought and I put it to you as Italians: Aren't you northern Italians rather tougher than the southern Italians? Aren't you the ones who move and shake the destiny of Italy more than your southern confreres?" And they said, "Oh, absolutely!" [They both came from Bologna, in the north.] I don't think that's a trivial point. [The northerners] were that degree tougher. This was the kind of point that Lee Kuan Yew used to say about the Chinese, that they became less energetic and less tough in the south. And we kidded him about it, personally. But I think the point has some validity. I think we were all well aware--

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

BUNDY: [Of course, many of us had] followed what has happened over the years [in the earlier Indochina War.] You, Mr. Secretary, lived with it closely. And so had I. Of course, George [Wildman] Ball, particularly perhaps, because he was involved with the government of France during that period. [So] we all knew that these were tough people. We are talking a matter of degree here that they were tough. They were implacably dedicated to this ambition and objective of taking over the whole of Indochina successor states. But I agree with the Secretary. It didn't quite prepare you for that extra degree of toughness. And I think that extra degree of toughness does take you back to some degree to the gradualism of the strategy. They could adjust a little bit [better.] People put under that kind of gradual pressure will probably develop an additional layer of toughness. I just throw that out as [one more] thought.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, do you have any further speculation on North Vietnamese tenacity? I think it's a point worth addressing.

DEAN RUSK: I just don't think I know. I just don't think I have any constructive observations to make on that.

RICHARD RUSK: North Vietnamese, interviewed on that question after the war, have generally said, "We were fighting for our fatherland."

DEAN RUSK: So was [Adolf] Hitler.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, again, let's get back to the question of tenacity. They didn't necessarily see it as a war of aggression. I would suppose that there is [sic] a good many Vietnamese today, very much alarmed over that fact that they are in Cambodia and Laos, and somewhat disappointed with their own leadership. I can remember a Time magazine story five years ago, approximately, with a quote from a North Vietnamese soldier in Laos, "What are we doing in Laos?" That kind of thing. But you know the issue wasn't necessarily Laos and Cambodia as extensively then as it has become now. Again, there's a difference between being aware of the history and fully accepting the implications of that history. North Vietnamese tenacity had been established by 1960. As a matter of fact, they had established that point by 1954.

BUNDY: Let me inject a comment on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay.

BUNDY: One of the people who kept reminding us of North Vietnamese tenacity [was] Bernard [Bruce] Fall, who died in Vietnam in [a tragic accident.] [He was the] French writer who became an American [and] wrote a lot about [the earlier Indochina War.] I very well remember when

Bernard Fall came back from a trip to Vietnam in the fall of 1965. I went out to his house and talked to him at length about how he saw the present war compared to the French war. And at that point--and he didn't say this publicly to my knowledge--he said to me that "the whole American strength and cohesion is so vastly different from the French that, I have to say, I'm not concluding you can't do this."

RICHARD RUSK: That's interesting. That's interesting.

BUNDY: And this was at the time when our forces had just begun to be really felt. And about the time of the Ia Drang battle you remember--

RICHARD RUSK: 1965 or 1966?

BUNDY: And this was the conclusion of a man who had pounded people over the head on how tough and resourceful the North Vietnamese were. But he was just saying that [while] they had coped with the French, [this did] not [mean] that they could cope with what the United States [was] now bringing to bear against them. And of course his judgment might have changed over a period of time. But in other words, if you put yourself in the shoes of those who had to judge, "Can we pull this off?" at that time, there was a least respectable expert testimony that we were very different from the French.

DEAN RUSK: By the way, up until well into 1966 our American forces in Vietnam were largely professionals. That is, career Army, Navy, Marines, and so forth. And their morale was high. They did a very effective job. But by mid-1966, we had begun to rely very heavily upon fresh draftees to man our forces out there, and we did so under a policy that a man would be out there for a year and then that was it--he would come home. I think that is a question that ought to be looked at later. By putting a time limit on service in an area of that sort, inevitable factors start working that affect morale. As a matter of fact, during World War I when the great First Division was in North Africa waiting for the Sicily landing, their morale was shot because the word had gotten around earlier that when they got through with the North African landing, they would go home. Well, there's nothing more erosive of morale than the idea that you don't want to be the casualty in your last month of responsibility. So that's a question that needs to be looked at. We did not fill out our forces by calling up all the reserves and National Guard for that job. I indicated on another tape that that was because we were trying to maintain some kind of strategic reserve. I remember telling Bob McNamara that as far as I was concerned the forces in Vietnam were a strategic reserve, that we could pull them out and use them somewhere else if a much higher priority need for them arose somewhere else. And therefore, we could use more of our National Guard and Reserves out there than we in fact did.

BUNDY: You'll remember, Dean, that in March '68 a factor and I don't mean it was a decisive factor, was that at that point [the] strategic reserve in the judgment of the Joint Chiefs was down to zero. That is the non-committed strategic reserves. Unless you considered the forces in Vietnam as your strategic reserve, you didn't have a strategic reserve.

DEAN RUSK: Yes. I know Senator Russell was always very concerned about the condition of the strategic reserve during these events.

Colonel [Harry G.] Summers and others have raised the question as to why we did not declare war on North Vietnam. In this postwar period, formal declarations of war practically disappeared. I think it's possible that one or two of the Arab states might have declared war on Israel. I'm not sure, Bill. But normally you have not had any declaration of war since World War II. A formal declaration of war tends to make the situation much more rigid, tends to drive people toward the idea of unconditional surrender, makes it more difficult through negotiations to try to work out cease-fires and so forth. And further, as far as this country was concerned, a formal declaration of war changes the constitutional situation very drastically as between the President and the Congress. And so I was never in favor of a formal declaration of war, and if you declared war, would it be simply against North Vietnam or against China and the Soviet Union who were heavily involved in supplying them with arms and supplies and so forth.

But that raises another question which needs some study. We did not make an effort to develop war fever here in the United States. We did not have military forces parading through our big cities. We didn't have beautiful movie stars out selling war bonds in factories and things of that sort, didn't use the apparatus that we had used in World War II for that purpose. We felt that it was just too dangerous in a nuclear world for an entire people to become too angry. Now, that needs to be looked at. We were trying to do in cold blood here at home while we were asking our men and women in uniform out there to do in hot blood. And that's very tough. It's tough on the men in uniform. It's tough on the home front. Whether we should have done a lot more to develop a patriotic war spirit in this country is a question that needs to be examined. But we deliberately decided not to do that during the Vietnam struggle. Of course, we made our speeches and we testified before Congress. But we didn't really make a major effort. And it was possibly because we felt that from the testing that we had had, we had the overwhelming support of Congress and a very strong support among the American people, at least at the grassroots.

**RICHARD RUSK:** Richard [Milhous] Nixon went further down that trail than the Johnson Administration did in drumming up the patriotism of the American people and appealing to the so-called "silent majority," to the extent and with sufficient success that the leaders of the anti-war movement somewhere in 1972 decided they had better cool it, that they were going to lose in a contest like that. Given Richard Nixon's experience with that, does that reinforce your belief that perhaps we should have appealed to the patriotism in American people?

**DEAN RUSK:** Throughout most of my period there, I don't know whether we could have increased significantly the degree of support that we had. I remember I would go to national conventions of AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor- Congress of Industrial Organization], the American Legion, International Rotary, International Kiwanis, and there was all the evidence there of very strong support. Checking our mail and other kinds of ways we had of checking the attitudes of people at the grassroots, there was strong support. But I think a lot of that evaporated, in my judgment, during the first half of 1968. Maybe it began a little earlier. We turned over to the Nixon Administration a military position which the North Vietnamese could not overrun. But we could not turn over to them a people and a Congress who were thoroughly committed to the war effort.

**BUNDY:** Let me comment a little on another important business which I think makes the Nixon years really quite basically different. From very early in the Nixon years, Nixon was operating on the basis of withdrawing American forces. I'm not saying he was wrong on that. I'm only saying

that we were pulling back steadily toward a target figure of zero American forces. And he also, if you look at the time when he did manage, as it were, to create a surge of public support or a decline in opposition, I think his speech in October or November of '69 was indeed a very effective Presidential speech. And another very effective one was in early '71 or '72 when he spoke about the secret negotiations. In other words, he was creating a fairly credible picture of an administration that was finding every way to get out of this, and it was a wholly different backdrop. The Nixon Administration was essentially in a "Maybe we can still make this work, but we are basically on the retreat" mode. It was quite different.

DEAN RUSK: That was acknowledgment of the facts of life in terms of the attitudes of people at the grassroots.

BUNDY: It was indeed.

RICHARD RUSK: If I might follow up that question with this one: under the terms of that settlement, and I believe it was 1974--

BUNDY: '72, well '73 the Paris Agreements were signed.

DEAN RUSK: It was '73 for the Paris Agreements.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Under the terms of that settlement, Pop, do you think that same settlement could have been had within the Johnson years? And a related question to that would be, was it worth what this country went through under Richard Nixon to get that Paris Peace Agreement of 1973? Again, we were looking at an additional twenty thousand American dead, millions of dollars, a much intensified air war against both North and South Vietnam. What do you think?

DEAN RUSK: I think the agreements of 1973 were, in effect, a surrender when you accompany that agreement with the withdrawal of support for South Vietnam by the Congress in terms of appropriations and things of that sort. If in 1961 President Kennedy had looked forward to the agreement in 1973, I doubt that we would have started putting American troops out there to start with. But in terms of the question, "Was it worth it?," there is one point that has to be kept in mind. And that is, other capitols will still have to remember that the United States of America went half way around the world, paid fifty thousand dead and a couple of hundred thousand wounded, to try to make good on its treaty pledge to assist somebody who was under attack with whom we are allied. And other capitols had better not forget that. My guess is that they won't. That fidelity of the United States to its treaty commitments is a principal pillar of peace in the world. As I've said many times--

RICHARD RUSK: Could that same agreement have been made, say, during the [J. Blair] Seaborne mission, or perhaps in the fall of 1968 when the North Vietnamese seemed willing? Could we have pulled that one off at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think we had to assume in 1973 with that agreement that the North Vietnamese would take over South Vietnam, because we could not count upon them for any kind of loyal or honest compliance with the terms of that agreement. Under those circumstances, that was an agreement that could have been had before we even started.

BUNDY: I would agree with that. The most basic thing [about the Paris agreements] makes nonsense of what [some] Admiral wrote the other day, that "Thank heaven Nixon made peace on the kind of terms that were really tougher than the fudging that [William Averell] Harriman was doing in Paris," or something [like that.] The fact is that our basic position, [phrase deleted] as of the close of the Johnson Administration and throughout the Johnson Administration, was that we would insist upon the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese regular [forces.] The Nixon people, for reasons that I think were understandable--I'm not saying this in a critical way because they were conducting a retreat action and holding on to what chance they could- -[accepted dropping that demand.] [By then] it was perfectly clear that they could not get a peace agreement that led to the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese. And in effect, they conceded the point, not later than October 1971, and admitted as much effectively by the spring of 1972. In other words, this was one gut issue. [There] was also an issue of whether we agreed, in effect, to just throw [Nguyen Van] Thieu out. And in the end Nixon and [Henry Alfred] Kissinger held firm on that. But they had made a tremendous concession earlier, [on the troop withdrawal issue.] The peace terms embodied in the Paris Agreements were different. But I agree with the Secretary that if we had ever made a deal at an earlier point that permitted the North Vietnamese to stay, in effect, that would have meant in due course an almost impossible situation to sustain.

SCHOENBAUM: Now the silver lining, if we can find one, is probably what you mentioned, Mr. Rusk, despite the fact that I guess we would say that we did, it was a losing effort. We did abide by our treaty commitments as we saw them and no one can fault us for not trying to live up, making a sincere and very concerted and costly effort to live up to our treaty commitments. Could that be the silver lining?

RICHARD RUSK: What do you mean by silver lining?

SCHOENBAUM: Well, I mean if you can find anything good.

BUNDY: Let me suggest--

SCHOENBAUM: And that holds true today that we retain some credibility. We're not invincible, but we retain our credibility.

BUNDY: There's something in that, although I think the fact that in the end we were defeated makes it a little less [powerful]. I think, Dean, and I just throw this out--while I always accepted that line of argument that you just made, [Dean,] which was certainly a very powerful one, my own mind--and perhaps this was in the nature of my regional responsibilities--always ran [a little more] to [what the war meant in terms of getting] Asia settled down and at peace into the future. And I always said two things: [first,] that my ultimate conclusion is that [the war] was a tragedy in what it did to the country, and so on, in the end that exceeded any gains [from it.] But [second, and] I've said that at least for ten years; if you look at the situation in East Asia today, in Southeast Asia and in Asia as a whole, and ask yourself whether that situation could be as stable and in most respects remarkably progressive [as it is] if we hadn't at least gone in and held on [in Vietnam] for a very considerable period of time, my answer would be that it would be unlikely.

[That is, the war did help Asia.] If you put the question to many Asians and you get them to reflect on it, they will go along with that.

DEAN RUSK: One specific--

RICHARD RUSK: Have you put that question--

BUNDY: I have put that question to Asians, yes.

DEAN RUSK: One specific example of that has to do with Indonesia. You remember that there was an attempted communist coup in Indonesia which succeeded in killing four out of six of the leading generals in Indonesia. Two of them survived, and they were able to fend off this attempted communist coup d'état. Well, we were told by Indonesian leaders later that, had we not been in Vietnam and the Seventh Fleet had not been there, they could not have succeeded in fending off that communist coup d'état in Indonesia.

RICHARD RUSK: That was '67?

BUNDY: That was '65.

DEAN RUSK: '65. Yes. Then I have no doubt that our work in Vietnam helped the British liquidate their problem in Malaysia. There was less possibility of infiltration of reinforcements to the Malaysian rebels from the communist countries. Thailand remains an independent nation, even though they were subject to all sorts of penetration during much of this period. So it's not completely bleak. Still, it was a tragic and agonizing affair.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me ask the big question if I may. In listening to both of you gentlemen discuss the lessons of Vietnam and some of your reflections on that, I get the feeling that not only do you feel that the commitment itself was valid, that we had a legitimate interest there, but that also perhaps the war could have been won, there may have been a way to win it, and Bernard Fall might have had the appropriate insight. Is there a way that we could have won that war without the use of nuclear weapons?

SCHOENBAUM: I think you covered that in your three points.

BUNDY: Well, I don't--that would take a lot more study than I have ever given it to come to a firm judgment. That is, [whether] such ideas as the Summers idea of just putting a "cordon sanitaire" beneath the 17th parallel extending into Laos [might have worked.]

DEAN RUSK: Right.

BUNDY: It's just an enormous "might have been." It [was never really] considered, to the best of my knowledge, and it certainly was not the kind of plan that any military man would wish to put forward because it would immediately be subjected to the charge of being another Maginot Line. Just maybe [it might have worked.] But on the lines we actually fought for, I must say that I came, by '67 or at least '68, to accept the conclusion of the single newspaperman I most

respected in this whole period, namely Stewart [Johnnot Oliver] Alsop, [the man] who first called it the unwinnable war. That is, it could have been won in theory, but not won in the time span that the American people would have accepted.

DEAN RUSK: First, winning meant simply preventing the North Vietnamese from seizing South Vietnam. It did not mean the destruction of North Vietnam. But see, we had remembered that the Korean struggle came to conclusion through negotiations, that the Berlin blockade was lifted through negotiations. But we never got to a point where the North Vietnamese were willing to think seriously about ending the war on terms that were acceptable to ourselves or the South Vietnamese. They were looking for victory. They stuck in there and stayed with it till they got it through political means, not through military means. Had we been able to fend off somehow the effect of the Tet Offensive on American opinion and morale in this country that might have been the time when the North Vietnamese might have been willing to call the thing off because it was a very serious setback for them militarily.

BUNDY: I think that's fair. If Tet had gone the other way, then I think you might have had the possibility. There's a good deal of reason to focus on Tet, although not in the way the Westmoreland trial did on the picayune details of an overall order of battle that simply wasn't taken that seriously in terms of handling the war.

SCHOENBAUM: Would you comment on the recent Westmoreland trial? And what I specifically would like your comment on, were you surprised by the testimony at the end by Westmoreland's subordinates, who apparently-- well--

DEAN RUSK: It seems to me the key issue did not really come out of the discussion of the Westmoreland trial. The key issue there was what should be included in an order of battle. There are those who think that an order of battle should include a catalogue of all those who contribute to the war effort on the other side. But there are others who think that an order of battle should be just that. That is, a listing of enemy forces that had a military capability to interfere with a mission of our own forces. That mission consisted (a) of keeping your own forces intact, in position to perform their functions, and (b) secondly, to deny North Vietnamese the capability of seizing South Vietnam by force. Now the argument was over what should be included in an order of battle. We were aware of all these irregular types of people: the village local defense people who--old men, women and children--who would drive stakes in the ground and do various things. We were aware of their political cadre whose job was, in effect, psychological warfare. But there was no hiding of any of those elements as far as Washington was concerned. The argument was a rather specific and technical argument on what should be included in an order of battle. On that, people's judgment can differ.

SCHOENBAUM: Why did his subordinates testify, in effect, against him that he was juggling the figures that he was sending up to Washington? Do you have any theories on that?

BUNDY: I think it is always the partial view of the man [with a narrow special job.] I read a lot of the testimony. I've read the major pleas on both sides, and I've read the newspaper reports and testimony. And I did testify briefly and, therefore, talked to Westmoreland's lawyers and to Westmoreland himself. I think it's that narrow vision that [throws things out of focus.] If you

look, and I think this is what the evidence in the end showed rather conclusively, at the figures and the estimates that MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam), [Westmoreland's people,] brought to the conferences with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], first in August then in September in 1967, you would find, for example, that a figure was given for these local self-defense forces. It was identical, within a thousand one way or the other, to the figure that had been in General [Joseph Alexander] McChristian's report to Westmoreland, which General McChristian rather vividly says Westmoreland threw up his hands and said, "This gives a terrific problem with Washington and public relations," and didn't send the cable that night. I emphasize "that night" because it does appear that Westmoreland briefed Admiral [Ulysses S. Grant] Sharp [Jr.] on it the following day, that he briefed [Ellsworth] Bunker, that he briefed [Barry] Zorthian, that he briefed the whole mission on it. As I say, there may have been--I get the thrust of the evidence--there may have been a period when there was a feeling among some members of that command that the boss doesn't want figures to go to Washington that are high.

DEAN RUSK: But those figures were coming to Washington.

BUNDY: But the point is the figures did go to Washington. And one reason I think that McChristian testified as he did, apart from any personal factors that may have been involved, is that McChristian wasn't there through the whole process. He left Vietnam within two weeks after he introduced those figures, and he didn't see how they were handled from that point on. And I have to say frankly that I think, while there were undoubtedly major misjudgments that contributed to the degree of apparent success of [Hanoi's] Tet Offensive, the question of these numbers doesn't seem to me in hindsight all that important in it.

DEAN RUSK: Westmoreland could have at the time--and in retrospect it may have been well if he had--to send us his own order of battle, and then say in addition, "There are irregular elements which need to be taken into account," and give his views on those other forces. You see the Vietcong and North Vietnamese made an all-out effort in the Tet Offensive of February 1968. If you look at the figures on the numbers on the other side that participated in that all-out effort, those were well within Westmoreland's own order of battle.

RICHARD RUSK: Good point.

DEAN RUSK: So there was just no deception of Washington.

BUNDY: I would say also--and this is a point that was never gone into detail at the Westmoreland trial because Westmoreland limited his complaint to the issue of whether the government was deceived or whether there was an attempt to deceive--as to whether the public knew or could have known about this, I would have to say that the ultimate press conference in Saigon wasn't as explicit as it might have been. But it was immediately supplemented by background briefing of any reporters who asked. And if you ask for the most complete statement of the government's views on the strength figures, including the self-defense forces, the place to look is a dispatch by Hedrick [L.] Smith in the New York Times, December 1967, within two weeks after the completion of the estimate and the press conference.

SCHOENBAUM: '67?

BUNDY: '67. That's all in the record of the various procedures.

DEAN RUSK: Now, bear in mind that some of these--

BUNDY: I have refreshed myself to some extent on that.

DEAN RUSK: Some of these local self-defense forces were villagers who would sway with the wind and cooperate with whichever side had control, general control, of a particular area. These villagers were survivors. Of course there were some villagers, as I pointed out the other day, which would cooperate with the government by day and the Vietcong by night. To assess their value in a situation--

END OF SIDE 2

