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Arthur Joseph Goldberg interviewed by Richard Rusk
1985 March

RICHARD RUSK: We're interviewing Justice Arthur Goldberg, 1961-62 Secretary of Labor; '62-65 Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court; '65-68 U.S. Representative to the United Nations; and '77-78 Ambassador at Large. This is Rich, March 1985, doing the interviewing.

GOLDBERG: I was Secretary of Labor designate, appointed by President Kennedy; the first time I met your father. I was impressed with the quality of your father from the start. In '61, before we were sworn in, my wife and I had a brunch for all the new proposed members of the future cabinet. Your dad and your mother were our ranking guests, and we have been close and dear friends ever since there.

RICHARD RUSK: I guess you've known my father in three or four different roles. You were Secretary of Labor and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and American Ambassador to the United Nations. So you've know my father in different ways. Perhaps we can start with you as Secretary of Labor and your relationship with my dad at that point in your career.

GOLDBERG: Your father and I as cabinet officers enjoyed the closest possible relationship. Your father being a man totally devoted to his country, never worried about guarding his turf, which is a common failing of cabinet officers and government bureaucrats. For example, there were trade negotiations with Japan, in which our textile and men's clothing unions were importantly involved and concerned. President Kennedy had the view that the State Department wasn't getting anywhere and was insensitive to the concerns of the labor movement and he asked would I take hold? I said, "No. Not unless I talk to the Secretary of State and am assured of his agreement." I spoke to your father. Your father said, "Thank God! If you can work something out it would be great." That was characteristic of your father, who was a rare public official, not worried about protecting his turf.

RICHARD RUSK: Was that the language that he used?

GOLDBERG: Yes. "Please do." And I worked something out and your father was delighted. That was characteristic of him. No jealousy. Nothing of that sort. The object, he recognized, was to serve our government and he understood that with my former connections with the labor union I probably could do more than officials in the State Department, which I did; and he was very grateful.

RICHARD RUSK: Were there other issues and other occasions where the two of you came together?

GOLDBERG: We went to Japan together in the first cabinet meeting with the Japanese after the

Japanese publicly protested a visit by President Eisenhower. Your father was head of our delegation. We went as a delegation. Your father and mother would not sleep in the sole bedroom on the plane Air Force One. Luther [Hartwell] Hodges [Jr.] was the oldest man in our group; he was Secretary of Commerce. He insisted that Secretary and Mrs. Hodges sleep on the sole bed during this long flight. He sat up with the rest of us. Further, at the conference he presided for our side. The Japanese were particularly interested in labor objections to their imports. When they would turn to me, he would say, on this subject, Secretary of Labor Goldberg is our authority and negotiator. This led the media to report, rather erroneously, that I was the most important member of the American delegation. This was not resented by your father. For him the priority was how best to serve our country in these negotiations.

RICHARD RUSK: Thank you a lot. I appreciate it. I guess your disagreements with my dad did not take place until Vietnam? Did you have any disagreements before?

GOLDBERG: Well, we had some disagreements. I don't want to paint an entirely rosy picture. Your dad and I did not see eye to eye on the Middle East even before I left Kennedy. I had my views; he had his. And we frankly expressed our differing opinions to the President. But there was never any animosity. Your father had been an Assistant Secretary in charge of the Middle East. But I should like to think I had a more realistic conception of what could and could not be done. That may not be so, but I thought it was. Well, I never hesitated to express myself to the President, and your dad never resented it.

RICHARD RUSK: Did the Kennedy cabinet as a cabinet group get into much substance on the issues of foreign policy and advise the President and my father, as a group, on foreign affairs?

GOLDBERG: Not very much.

RICHARD RUSK: Did the accounts that I read as a student, for example, that said that the meetings in the cabinet are more ceremonial--

GOLDBERG: This is true, particularly in foreign affairs and defense matters. However, Kennedy did consult several of us in whom he had complete confidence: your father, [Robert Francis] Bobby Kennedy, [Robert Strange] McNamara, and me. An earmark of your father's attitude is best illustrated by an example. Bob McNamara is a real good friend of mine. But when I went around settling the missile strikes which were prejudicing our defense effort--I found things wrong and reported the situation as I saw it, frankly. Bob didn't like my doing so, even though we were and are friends. Your father never reacted that way. It sounds like I'm extolling his virtues, but I'm going to say a few things that are not as praiseworthy.

RICHARD RUSK: That's fine. I hope you'll be as candid as possible. I realize it's difficult for some of you to be fully candid, perhaps, in view of the fact that I'm family.

GOLDBERG: I will try to be, but before doing so, I should like to point out another aspect of your father's tolerance and sophistication. Well, when I was on the Supreme Court I decided, I think, ten cases against your father's department. An example is the case of *Aptheker v. Rusk*, striking down State Department restrictions on the right to travel abroad. You think that affected

our relationship? The answer is no. He recognized that neither of us has a monopoly on wisdom. Shall we now talk about the United Nations?

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

GOLDBERG: Your father is a great U.N. man, perhaps too much so, because of his early associations with the world organizations.

RICHARD RUSK: Right: a real believer in the United Nations.

GOLDBERG: Yeah. When I left the Supreme Court to the U.N., we had some understandings. The basic one was that I represented the President and was not an official of the Department of State. Further, I had cabinet rank, next in protocol to your father. In fact, during state of the union messages we walked in and sat side by side.

RICHARD RUSK: And you made this clear at the beginning of your relationship?

GOLDBERG: Yes. And your father understood it too: I was not in the State Department; I was the President's representative. As a courtesy I would advise your father as to developments, and he rarely interfered in the conduct of my mission. Did this cause a rupture between us? No. No. You see, we had some periodic meetings with the President. Your father would express his viewpoint. I would likewise. Sometimes my view prevailed; sometimes his prevailed. Our differences were articulated with great respect. I blame your father for two things: He, in '67, thought he ought to disqualify himself for our position at the U.N. because he previously had been Secretary of State in Middle Eastern Affairs and he had said some things which he thought might prejudice our relationship with Israel. His statements were somewhat anti-Israel. He thought, therefore, he should disqualify himself.

RICHARD RUSK: Disqualify himself in what way?

GOLDBERG: Not to participate in decision making. So President Johnson said, "You take charge," to me.

RICHARD RUSK: He told you to take charge? Are you talking about the six-day war in 1967?

GOLDBERG: Yes. '67--and your father did not object.

RICHARD RUSK: And you took charge of the American position?

GOLDBERG: Of everything; I ran it.

RICHARD RUSK: Our policy during the sixties?

GOLDBERG: Total policy and foreign policy, subject, of course, to the President.

RICHARD RUSK: Not just the United Nations issues?

GOLDBERG: No. The officials at the State Department, Joe Sisco, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, was ordered to take orders from me. He acted as my assistant. Any rub? My second complaint is that your father is too much a loyalist. I heard this from Kennedy himself. Bobby didn't like your father, you know that.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you close to Robert Kennedy?

GOLDBERG: Not as close as President Kennedy.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you have any insights on Robert Kennedy's relationship with my dad?

GOLDBERG: Not very much, but Bobby didn't exactly take to your father and vice versa.

RICHARD RUSK: No, they didn't care much for each other.

GOLDBERG: Your father never said that to me. But I had heard. I think Bobby never understood that your father had a top flight intellect, which he has to this day. And in foreign policy, not an exact science, one may agree or disagree. I disagreed. I disagreed on Vietnam. Bobby attributed this to over loyalty, not speaking up. I never agreed with Bobby Kennedy. I think that your father's view represented his real convictions.

RICHARD RUSK: On Vietnam?

GOLDBERG: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm sure they did.

GOLDBERG: I saw a little item in the press recently that rather disappointed me. Your father sort of waffled. That was not like him.

RICHARD RUSK: At what time was this, now? Waffled?

GOLDBERG: I thought I saw it in the newspaper. Maybe it was a bad report.

RICHARD RUSK: Just recently?

GOLDBERG: Yeah. Fairly recently. Some symposium he engaged in. It was always my conviction that it wasn't just loyalty to the President. I shared with him that a President is entitled to due deference. But I think by nature I am more direct and outspoken and I have overawed my President. I don't think he was. I think what he said represented his view.

RICHARD RUSK: I think so. He doesn't have any doubts now. He's as firm a believer in the premises and the assumptions that went into that policy as back when he was secretary. The only doubts that he has had have been more of a tactical nature.

GOLDBERG: If he has doubts now then it's second thoughts.

RICHARD RUSK: Right, but not on the premises of our commitment.

GOLDBERG: Because at the time he was pretty vigilant, you know, and direct, that it was the right policy. I didn't think it was. There was the difference. And I disagreed. But again, it was on the level of two people, one of whom--I might be wrong; he might be wrong. Who knows in foreign policy? I once was terribly put out with your father, when the Pueblo incident happened. I didn't want to repeat Adlai Stevenson's fiasco, not knowing what was going on. So I insisted that the National Security Agency, give me the tapes which we had intercepted from the North Vietnamese. They showed that that ship was foolishly as close as only thirteen miles away, but nevertheless in international waters. Why the hell was it thirteen? It could have been twenty. Now at breakfast, between your father, McNamara, myself, and Johnson, I said, "You want to get in another war?" Johnson said, "Absolutely not." I said, "Then let me handle it at the U.N. We'll demonstrate to satisfy the American people that the Pueblo was in international waters. Ultimately we will negotiate the release of our men who had been captured. We'll never get the boat back, but we'll negotiate the release." The Pueblo had an incompetent commander. It was the first time in American history where a commander on the naval vessel did not shoot before striking his colors. But then President Johnson, who could not resist overkill, had your father and McNamara get on television. And because they were being very careful and had not listened to the North Korean tapes as I did, had this question put to them: "Are you sure that the Pueblo was in international waters?" They replied, "Well, you can't be sure, we think it was." This is after I made a big show that it was. And I knew it was.

RICHARD RUSK: It was in international waters?

GOLDBERG: I had listened to the tapes; they hadn't. I was furious with them.

RICHARD RUSK: I think what I'm going to ask you to do is just keep going with your impressions, the key things, the anecdotes, important things, and I'd like to come back later with some questions.

GOLDBERG: Well, I also was a little put out with him because my leaving the Supreme Court and going was based upon the fact that I would be a leading factor about the Vietnam War.

RICHARD RUSK: Vietnam War, yeah. You left with that condition?

GOLDBERG: Yes. I did not know that there were Tuesday meetings going on with your father, McNamara, and the President, and then periodic meetings of the so-called "wise men" until after Tet, when I was called to such a meeting. Before then, I wrote Johnson that he had lost the consent of the governed. Johnson got angry, but President Johnson thought it over and invited me to a meeting of the so-called "wise men."

RICHARD RUSK: When, approximately, did you leave the Supreme Court?

GOLDBERG: I left the Supreme Court in '65, July.

RICHARD RUSK: So you went for nearly three years without playing a major role in the decision making.

GOLDBERG: In part, I was told I was playing a major role. I was given permission to try to bring it to the U.N. I was sent on a peace mission. I had all the indicia of playing a major role without real substance. However, the President and your father should have been entirely frank with me.

RICHARD RUSK: And you took that United Nations position on the assumption and with the provision that you would have the major influence in Vietnam decision making?

GOLDBERG: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: When did you first have doubts about the war? From the start?

GOLDBERG: Yes. I didn't see our national interest involved and I was convinced that we were fighting the war in the wrong place and wrong restraints on our armed forces. Also, we were placing too much reliance on our air force.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. My dad was not receptive to you nor your views on the Vietnam

GOLDBERG: He always listened.

RICHARD RUSK: He did?

GOLDBERG: But he stood by the President. And I attribute it primarily to his conviction, but also to his loyalty.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you advising with him or talking with him on Vietnam throughout?

GOLDBERG: Yes we always talked.

RICHARD RUSK: Including 1968?

GOLDBERG: Yes. It was only because of your father I didn't leave the U.N., by the way, when I resigned April '68. He called me; Johnson was reluctant. Your father said, "The Nonproliferation Treaty has to go through the Assembly. It's important." I said, "I agree." "I'm told that you are the key to its adoption. Will you stay on and steer it through?" And for patriotic reasons since nuclear weapons were involved, and my respect for your father, I stayed until July. That's when I resigned.

RICHARD RUSK: Go ahead and continue with your impressions, both of a positive--

GOLDBERG: Your father's a rather shy person, do you know that?

RICHARD RUSK: Yes he is. And isn't that fantastic, given the positions that he has held and his stature?

GOLDBERG: Yes. Also his ability to articulate before Congress. He saved my face once. I negotiated the space treaty myself. I was in South Vietnam. I had jet lag. I was absolutely out and had to testify before Congress in support of the Treaty. And for the first time in my life, I wasn't myself. Your father, however, came to my rescue. He pulled it out.

RICHARD RUSK: Tell me about that.

GOLDBERG: Well, in the testimony I was in countless appearances before Congress. I was absolutely beat.

RICHARD RUSK: He came in there with you and testified?

GOLDBERG: And he quietly pulled it out. And I have always been grateful to him.

RICHARD RUSK: I've got a question for you about the Tet offensive and the policy review at the Tet offensive.

GOLDBERG: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: There's been a number of conflicting accounts--

GOLDBERG: It isn't much conflict. Your father can remember Tet.

RICHARD RUSK: We talked about it.

GOLDBERG: The review of Tet was the first time I was invited to the Nine Wise Men.

RICHARD RUSK: You didn't go to the first one then?

GOLDBERG: I never knew it existed. President Johnson never told me. But after I wrote that he had lost the consent of the government, after his initial anger he invited me to a meeting of the Wise Men. I attended the meeting, and lo and behold I saw a whole galaxy: Dean Acheson, Jack [John J.] McCloy, Doug [Clarence Douglas] Dillon, George [Wildman] Ball, Clark [McAdams] Clifford, General [Omar Nelson] Bradley, General [Matthew] Ridg way, your father, and some others. General [William Childs] Westmoreland sent his intelligence officer. He gave an update as did the deputy director of the CIA and Ambassador Habib. It was a great victory. As you probably know, I served in OSS [Office of Strategic Services] in World War II. I was a civilian officer in OSS. Westmoreland's intelligence officer gave a briefing saying that Tet was a famous victory but his figures about enemy dead and casualties did not add up. And I turned to General Matt Ridgway, who was sitting next to me, and said, "General, can I point out an obvious discrepancy in the figures?" He said, "Yes." So, I asked three simple questions. I said, "How many effectives do you think the North and South Vietnamese had at Tet?" "Two hundred thousand." (I'm guessing about the exact figures after these many years, but the point is the

same.) Then I said, "How many did we kill?" He said, "Two hundred thousand." I then said, "You said there were only two hundred thousand enemy effectives, that we killed two hundred thousand and seriously wounded one hundred thousand. This being the case, my final question is, who are we fighting?" There was silence--

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: The Tet Offensive and the policy review after the Tet Offensive--there have been some conflicting stories as to exactly--

GOLDBERG: Well, I can really answer very simply. CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] called me. They had read this story somewhere. Where was it? I guess [David] Halberstam's book.

RICHARD RUSK: Halberstam had it in his book. That's right.

GOLDBERG: I don't know where he got it. I didn't tell him. He got it from someone. After all, it was a big group which, by the way, changed their mind that day. Anyhow, CBS called me and said, "Is this a true story?" I said, "Yes, substantially." "Can we subpoena you as a witness?" I said, "If you subpoena me I, of course, will have to comply. However, on cross-examination I will testify that I don't believe there was a conspiracy. I believe President Johnson knew everything that was going on." CBS did not subpoena me.

RICHARD RUSK: He did. Townsend [Walter] Hoopes wrote a book called *The Limits of Intervention* in which he claims that Clark Clifford played a decisive role with Lyndon Johnson in turning the policy around.

GOLDBERG: He had been a hawk but partially changed his mind.

RICHARD RUSK: My father's only biographer, Warren Cohen said my dad was very influential with the President. My dad has said that Lyndon Johnson himself was ready to move on his own.

GOLDBERG: I don't know.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you have any idea the relative weights of influence?

GOLDBERG: I cannot answer because I was not in Washington. I participated in that meeting and then following the meeting met with the President and others the following day at either lunch or dinner with Dr. Schapino of Boston, an old friend who is reputed to be the greatest ophthalmologist in the world. It seemed obvious then that the President was changing his mind. But the Nine Wise Men previously changed their minds.

RICHARD RUSK: I guess that group really had a decisive influence on him.

GOLDBERG: Perhaps so. I did not approve of Clark Clifford's proposal to confine the bombing behind the 19th parallel. It was my view that we should withdraw with dignity rather than

prolong the agony. And it was prolonged for three to four years with consequent casualties.

RICHARD RUSK: You bet. Well, I want to thank you for the time you gave me. And we'll do it again at your convenience.

GOLDBERG: You're going back home?

RICHARD RUSK: I'm going back--I'm going to New York Saturday morning.

GOLDBERG: Tell your dad if he wants what I regard to be the best man to examine his eye problem, I shall be glad to arrange an appointment.

RICHARD RUSK: Well thanks for your concern. I'll tell him.

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