

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
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Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk
1986 January

RICHARD RUSK: Late 1940s, early 1950s--Rich Rusk is the interviewer. This is January, 1986. I'm drawing a good many of these questions from Warren [I.] Cohen's book called *Dean Rusk* in which Warren Cohen attempted to reconstruct my dad's specific policy recommendations back during the Truman Administration.

DEAN RUSK: During the Truman Administration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the State Department that Taiwan, Formosa, was important to American national security, but that there were no military forces that could be used in its defense. And therefore it was up to the State Department to defend Formosa with diplomatic and political means. Well, in the State Department we realized that without military force in the background, there were severe limits on what could be done through political and diplomatic means to maintain the independence of Taiwan under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. So there developed a little tension between the Pentagon and the State Department over this issue. It was not until the outbreak of the Korean War and President Truman's action in intruding the Seventh Fleet between Formosa and the Mainland that military force was brought to bear in that situation. There was also the rather extraordinary personal animosity between Secretary of Defense Louis [Arthur] Johnson and Secretary of State Dean [Gooderham] Acheson. Louis Johnson, who had been former national commander of the American Foreign Legion, had a real hang-up about the State Department. I remember going to a meeting in the Cabinet room once, to represent the State Department because Dean Acheson was away somewhere, and Louis Johnson was there and he refused to participate in the meeting because he said I was too junior to represent the State Department effectively, and he simply refused to take part. He was deeply suspicious of the State Department and it was that rivalry between Louis Johnson and Dean Acheson which finally brought about Louis Johnson's exit from the government.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you aware of the fact that he was apparently working at cross purposes with the administration?

DEAN RUSK: I have no doubt about it. I have no doubt about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you aware at the time?

DEAN RUSK: He also had in front of himself that attitude of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that they did not have military forces that could be used in the protection of Taiwan.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, maybe I can get you to comment on your relationship with Wellington Coe. According to Coe's memoirs, he compared you to [W. Walton] Butterworth at one point and seemed to long for the simplicity and directness of Butterworth's approach. He said that you

were less prejudiced, but so deliberate and careful that--How about your relationship with Wellington Coö, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I admired Wellington Coö as a man of very considerable ability. And I had always remembered the Movie tone News picture of Wellington Coö standing there before the League of Nations pleading for help that never came. But during the Truman administration our ability or willingness to assist Taiwan was somewhat limited, and we would have nothing to do with the myth circulated by Wellington Coö's government, by Chiang Kai-shek, that they were the government of all China and would return to the mainland, and would have American support in going back to the mainland. Now I have no doubt that Wellington Coö found me rather difficult to fathom at times because in diplomacy there are times when you must learn to say nothing at great length. And I used that on Wellington Coö. I remember one incident when Cordell Hull went to Moscow, taking Ambassador [Charles Eustis] Bohlen along as his interpreter, and he met for quite a while with Russian leaders. On the way back to the embassy, Cordell Hull turned to Bohlen and said, "How did you get along with the translation?" And Bohlen said, "Well, I'm not sure that I did very well because quite frankly Mr. Secretary I couldn't find any verbs in what you were saying. I don't think the Russians understood very much just what you had in mind." And Cordell Hull said, "That's fine, I wanted to be as clear as mud." Well, there are times when that technique becomes necessary. On the one side, I did not want a major confrontation with Wellington Coö, but on the other side, we could not do for him all that he wanted done. And so that led to the kind of opaque discussion that Wellington Coö later somewhat complained about.

RICHARD RUSK: I think he called you inscrutable.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I find it interesting that an oriental called me inscrutable because it was the Orientals who were supposed to be inscrutable. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, Asian and oriental that is. This is May 1950, just before the outbreak of the Korean War, and was it not true that you preferred a U.N. [United Nations] trusteeship for Formosa? That's something toward which Chiang Kai-shek was quite hostile. And did you not also want John Foster Dulles to visit Chiang and tell him that the fall of the island was inevitable, and that the U.S. [United States] would not come to the rescue of his regime? Do you recall policy positions along those lines?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we had toyed with the idea of a U.N. trusteeship in various situations, including Palestine, Libya, and Taiwan, but there was no possibility that a U.N. trusteeship of Taiwan could come about. Of course, it cannot occur with the opposition of Chiang Kai-shek and his forces on the mainland. No one was going to impose a U.N. trusteeship upon Taiwan. But the idea of a trusteeship was in part an effort to keep Taiwan from falling into the hands of the Chinese communists on the mainland. It was, again, a part of boxing the compass of possibilities, but it had no real future.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you prepared to recommend American force to prevent Formosa from falling into the hands of the communists prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, right after Chiang had moved from the mainland?

DEAN RUSK: Not in the face of the strong opposition of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

RICHARD RUSK: There was a time early in that period when we were indeed prepared to surrender Formosa, before the Korean War and before all the international.

DEAN RUSK: No, I don't think that would be the way to put it because, to begin with, Formosa was not ours to surrender, and we were not in a position in those days to play a critical role there one way or the other.

RICHARD RUSK: We didn't take the position, then, that Formosa was necessarily critical to our interests?

DEAN RUSK: Well you see, from the point of view of the State Department, when you look at the map of the Pacific to make the proposition that if Formosa fell that the enemy would be knocking on the door of San Francisco, was just foolish. In that event, we'd just need some more admirals and generals because the Pacific Ocean is a heck of a big ocean and we had other positions throughout the Pacific. But on the other hand, we had a strong preference that Formosa remain independent of the mainland. But, when push comes to shove, we in effect had been told by the Joint Chiefs that there were no American forces to be used for its defense. And so we had to be a little careful about what kind of commitment we made on that subject without anything to back it up. In these matters you don't bluff because if your bluff is called, then you're in a very bad situation.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, what about Chiang Kai-shek's move from the mainland to Formosa? Did that receive any American support whatsoever? Were you aware that move was coming?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we knew the move was underway, of course. But I don't think we participated with American naval units or things like that in assisting the move. But I must say that Chiang Kai-shek and his government did a rather extraordinary job in getting themselves from the mainland over to Formosa. They, among other things, brought with them this vast storehouse of Chinese art that now is in that great museum in Tai-Pai. They did a rather extraordinary job. But then when they got to Formosa, the mainland Chinese of Chiang Kai-shek's regime that went to Formosa went through a period of imposing terror upon the local inhabitants of Formosa, the native Formosans. And that was very, very distressing, because it was indeed a pretty rough chapter in Chinese history. And it's taken a long time for some of those wounds to heal. So there was a period there of about a year, year and a half, or two when the conduct of the mainlanders on Formosa was pretty bad, and entirely reprehensible, and almost certainly alienated the native Formosans from their Chinese government. Indeed, when Chiang Kai-shek's government moved to Formosa, they governed Formosa as simply one of all the provinces of China. The legislative body of the Chiang Kai-shek government had in it representatives from all of the provinces on the mainland. So they imposed provincial rule on Formosa rather than accepting the Formosan people as the essential body politic of the regime on Formosa itself.

RICHARD RUSK: That's interesting. Were you aware of the fact ahead of time that Chiang was moving his forces to Formosa?

DEAN RUSK: I forget now. I think we did because we had representatives there that reported back on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you remember if you or the American government took a position one way or the other on Chiang's move to Formosa, or were we simply neutral on that question?

DEAN RUSK: Oh I think it was largely up to him and his government. We certainly would not have tried to prevent it or oppose it, even though I don't think we took very much part in the actual move itself.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, Cohen quotes you in testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, five days before the North Korean invasion, "We see no present indication that the people across the border have any intention of fighting a major war." Do you recall that testimony?

DEAN RUSK: I don't remember the specific testimony. But I'm quite sure that if I'd been asked by anybody five days before the North Korean attack whether we had information that they were about to attack, my answer would have been "no." Because we simply did not have such information.

RICHARD RUSK: After the North Korean attack, Pop, whose idea was it--and again it's hard to divine authorship for an idea when groups are meeting. But whose idea was it to move the Seventh Fleet into the waters between Formosa and the mainland? Do you remember if you took a position on that?

DEAN RUSK: I was in favor of that move. Remember that at the moment of the North Korean attack we did not know what it represented. We did not know whether this was simply a part of a general communist onslaught in the Far East.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, did you really have to convince and strongly argue on behalf of the United States taking the North Korean invasion and that whole situation immediately to the United Nations, or were they more than willing to go along with that suggestion?

DEAN RUSK: Well, remember that I had been Assistant Secretary of State for United Nations Affairs before I took over the Far Eastern desk. I felt very strongly that in a situation involving force that that is a matter which must be taken immediately to the U.N. As a matter of fact, I did not have to argue very strongly with anyone else in the administration, particularly Dean Acheson and President Truman. They very quickly approved the idea of taking it to the Security Council. Now we were prepared for a Soviet veto in the Security Council when we got there. But, as you know, the Soviets had walked out over the Chinese seat and were not present in the Security Council.

RICHARD RUSK: So there was harmony and unity--

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was no real debate in the administration on that point. That was the first step to be taken.

RICHARD RUSK: Did the idea first come from you?

DEAN RUSK: Probably, probably. I'm quite sure that I was the one who originally proposed that we take it immediately to the United Nations.

RICHARD RUSK: Was there a chance that we would not take it to the United Nations? Was it implicit in the situation?

DEAN RUSK: Well you see, when the U.N. was first organized, it was implicit in the charter of the U.N. that where there was a situation that threatened international peace, that one had an obligation to take such questions to the United Nations in order to try to limit the problem and prevent its moving directly into a general war. And if there was any chance at all that we ourselves would use force to resist the North Koreans, then we had an obligation to give the United Nations a chance to take a crack at it.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, prior to the North Korean attack, had we ever not taken a case involving aggression to the United Nations, which had been created five years earlier?

DEAN RUSK: Well, no. It was almost taken for granted in those days that we would take such questions to the U.N. For example, the Berlin Blockade was debated very strongly in the United Nations, the Greek Guerilla situation had been debated strongly.

RICHARD RUSK: In all of these other crises, the United States took those issues immediately and directly to the U.N. Is that true?

DEAN RUSK: Now, there was one little exception from our point of view. When the communist coup d'etat occurred in Czechoslovakia, the question of taking that to the United Nations came up. But we looked at that very closely and thoroughly, and we could not find evidence that the Czechs themselves had offered any kind of resistance. None of the Czechs had pulled knives out of their sleeves and gone to work to try to resist this communist coup d'etat. And so we didn't know what kind of a case we would have at the United Nations if we took it there. But then suddenly Chile, of all countries, decided that they would take the Czech coup d'etat into the U.N. And so we found ourselves in the U.N. with only the most limited information on which to take a position. But normally in these situations--After all, the Azerbaijan case was the first case before the U.N. Security Council, then in came the Greek guerrillas, and the Blockade of Berlin, and so forth. It was more or less taken for granted in those days that such issues would go to the U.N.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, do you have any additional comment on the efforts of Douglas MacArthur and perhaps Defense Secretary Louis Johnson to accept Chiang Kai-shek's offer and bring nationalist Chinese troops into the Korean War?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we felt very strongly that it would be a great mistake to allow the Korean struggle to become simply a part of the general problem between Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan and the mainland Chinese, the communist Chinese. We did not want to get those two things mixed up. But also, some of us knew, including myself, that any offer--

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, to what extent did our policy toward Formosa change as a result of the Korean War? Do you care to comment on that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think that our policy changed somewhat. Because, for the first time, American armed forces were available to assist in the protection of Taiwan. After all, the Seventh Fleet was interposed between Taiwan and the mainland. But the idea that we were somehow trying to topple Chiang Kai-shek in favor of a liberal constitutional democratic government is a rather remote idea because we knew that there would not be forces on Taiwan that had any such capability.

RICHARD RUSK: Of toppling his own regime?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. And so, although there was some gossip in that direction, it was never a serious consideration. There is one matter: Have I put on tape already a little story about General Sun Li-jen? General Sun Li-jen was the Chinese commander of the Chinese forces in Burma. He'd been a graduate of V.M.I. [Virginia Military Institute] and he was a pretty able military leader. And with General [Joseph Warren] Stilwell's help in training and equipping those forces, he developed a pretty good Chinese fighting force there in Burma. Well, then he found himself on Taiwan after the Chiang Kai-shek government went to Taiwan. And during the week which culminated in the North Korean attack, I got a personal message from General Sun Li-jen, through very indirect sources, that he was planning to take over Taiwan on the weekend in which the North Koreans actually attacked. And he expressed to me the hope that, when he did take over, he would have the sympathy and support of the United States government. Well, I had not replied to that until the North Koreans attacked. And then I felt that the last thing in the world we wanted was total confusion and disorder in Taiwan. And so I sent the message back to Sun Li-jen to keep quiet, not to move. Because we didn't want to have two problems on our hands: Korea and a wholly revolutionary situation in Taiwan. Now later something of the sort must have gotten to the ears of Chiang Kai-shek, because--

RICHARD RUSK: You mean something of his movement, his potential movement?

DEAN RUSK: Of General Sun Li-jen's plans. Because, for the remainder of General Sun Li-jen's life, he was pretty much under house arrest there at Taiwan.

RICHARD RUSK: I'll be darned. You don't think his security was blown by the American side do you?

DEAN RUSK: No, I don't think so, because the channels through which I got the message from General Sun Li-jen were very secure. And I don't believe that Chiang Kai-shek learned that from

anybody on the American side. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure how many on the American side, other than myself, even knew about this message.

RICHARD RUSK: It came directly to you? Now why did he send it to you?

DEAN RUSK: Wei 1,1 had known him in Burma during the war. And after all, I was Assistant Secretary of Far Eastern Affairs, and it would have been a fairly natural thing for him to try get such a message to me if he wanted to get it to anybody in the United States government.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you encouraging him prior to--

DEAN RUSK: No, not at all. I'd had no contact with him at all.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you encouraging any folks within Taiwan?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. RR - According to Cohen here--I don't know where he got it. But here, on July twenty-fourth, you met for two hours with Hu-Shih, the well-known Columbia-educated philosopher and one-time-ambassador to the United States, trying to persuade Hu to lead a liberal anti-Chiang movement.

DEAN RUSK: No, that is not true. I did not try to persuade Hu Shih to make any such effort on his own. I have no doubt that I discussed with Hu Shih whether there was any likely alternative to the Chiang Kai-shek regime on Taiwan. Hu Shih was an extraordinarily able man: worldwide reputation as a scholar and a man of the highest possible intelligence. RR - So there's nothing to this, then: the fact that you, as F.E., might have been in communication with folks either within Taiwan or Chinese nationalists in this country?

DEAN RUSK: That is correct; I never took any part in any effort to plot an alternative to Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan.

RICHARD RUSK: And yet this fellow, this general, sent this message to you?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: . in a situation that was so touchy that he spent the rest of his life apparently in some form of house arrest. You must have had a rather good relationship back in C.B.I. [China-Burma-India].

DEAN RUSK: Well, I did. I did.

RICHARD RUSK: You knew him well.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I visited him from time to time in Burma. I had a high regard for him as a military leader. He seemed to be less corrupt than some of the other Chinese leaders. He was the man with whom I had lunch down in the jungle with that shark's fin soup.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, that was him? (laughter) Did you ever see him again?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. There was one amusing echo during the Truman Administration. George [Catlett] Marshall got a letter from General Sun Li-jen, and the letter started, "As the other great general who graduated from V.M.I., I want to--" and then he went on with his letter. He called himself "the other great general who had graduated from V.M.I."

RICHARD RUSK: That's funny. Did Marshall respond to that?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, we responded. Marshall smiled at that.

RICHARD RUSK: Could General Sun Li-jen potentially have overthrown Chiang? Did he have the capability?

DEAN RUSK: It's possible that he might have been able to, if everything had been otherwise normal. He had a pretty high standing within the Chinese Armed Forces. He was their most successful commander during World War II, and he was a good military man, and had the respect of the officer corps. And it's just possible he might have been able to do it. I just don't know.

RICHARD RUSK: Now, when he sent his message to you, did you take that message to Dean Acheson or Harry Truman?

DEAN RUSK: I have no doubt that I discussed it with Dean Acheson, certainly before making any reply at the time of the Korean outbreak. But, had the Korean War not begun, I think it's entirely possible that I would simply have sat on my hands and done nothing about it one way or the other.

RICHARD RUSK: Not given him a green light, but not tried to discourage him either?

DEAN RUSK: That's right. Because it was a long way away, and our ability to influence Taiwan was extraordinarily limited. And I just might have sat on my hands to see what happened.

RICHARD RUSK: Fascinating. You're quite certain that the Dean Acheson channel did not lead to any breach of this man's--

DEAN RUSK: Oh yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure.

RICHARD RUSK: Did it go before Truman?

DEAN RUSK: I have no idea, that would have been up to Dean Acheson.

RICHARD RUSK: Fascinating. Pop, what were your arguments with Wellington Coe on why we were not going to accept the offer of Chinese troops?

DEAN RUSK: Well, underlying that point--made the point to Wellington Coe that his position that their forces on Taiwan were unable to defend Tawiwan without our help was inconsistent with their offer of troops in Korea. But I also knew that this offer was a phoney from the very beginning.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, maybe I can get you to talk a little more at length about our shift in policy after the North Koreans came into Korea, attacked South Korea, towards Formosa. Could you comment on the shift in our policy towards Formosa after the North Korean attack, and specifically how you hoped Taiwan would conduct its affairs after receiving American aid, perhaps in exchange for receiving American aid?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there's one point that Warren Cohen makes that is simply not correct. That is that, as a condition for our aid, we were demanding that Chiang Kai-shek step aside. That simply was not true. Of course, we did want any aid that we sent to Taiwan to be used for the purposes for which it was provided and not be siphoned off into Swiss bank accounts by anybody, including the Kung family.

RICHARD RUSK: K-U-N-G?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah: brother-in-law of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. But, the aid was, in any event, rather limited.

RICHARD RUSK: You did attach some strings to that aid to the effect that you clearly wanted Chiang to pipe down on this business of retaking the mainland?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Put that in your own words.

DEAN RUSK: Well, we did, on several occasions over the years, try to get Chiang Kai-shek away from the idea that he was the government of all China, that he was going back to the mainland, and that he would have our support in doing so, because that was wholly unrealistic. His own forces had no capacity whatever for a serious military campaign on the mainland of China. And this gap between his myth and the real world was so great that we several times tried to get him to abandon that idea and concentrate on improving the situation in Taiwan and strengthening it to maintain its own independence from the communist Chinese. On several occasions over the years--

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DEAN RUSK: --We tried to enlist the interest of the government in Taiwan in a two-Chinas policy. As a matter of fact, up until --

RICHARD RUSK: When did you first recommend that to those people, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think I discussed that with Wellington Coe, for example, during the Truman Administration. You see, up until perhaps even the mid-1960s there would have been pretty strong international support for two Chinas, each with a seat in the United Nations. After all, even though Chiang Kai-shek had his myth of return to the mainland, it was a myth. The reality was that there were, in fact, two Chinas. But that idea of two Chinas did not get anywhere because both Chinas rejected it, categorically.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, yeah. But you do recall advocating a two-Chinas approach early in the Korean experience?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, there was one little incident that you might find amusing. The Nationalist Chinese representative to the United Nations, during the Truman Administration, was a man named Ambassador Tsiang. We learned that the Chiang Kai-shek government was thinking about replacing him with someone else. And I told the Chinese government that they ought to think hard about that because we were not at all sure that we could get the seven votes necessary in the Security Council to approve the credentials of his successor, and therefore, they'd better stay with this man in order not to let that question come up. And so they did keep him on for a while. And then finally they replaced him with his own deputy at the U.N., whose credentials had long since been approved. But, it would have been a very close thing as to whether there were seven votes in the U.N. Security Council to approve the credentials of Tsiang's successor.

RICHARD RUSK: That's cute. Was that trip to Wake Island to meet with MacArthur partially a result of uneasiness in Washington about the possibility of Chinese intervention?

DEAN RUSK: Not really. I think Truman had his own reasons for me to meet with MacArthur.

RICHARD RUSK: But that was not one of them?

DEAN RUSK: No, I don't recall that that played a significant role.

RICHARD RUSK: There really wasn't that much uneasiness in Washington about the possibility of Chinese intervention?

DEAN RUSK: That's right.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. When the Chinese came in, for all of you I'm sure, you realized it was a brand new war, and it must have shaken the hell out of everyone back there. Acheson writes about it, and others have commented on it. Is there anything you could say that would illustrate how badly shaken we were?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we in the Truman Administration were shaken by the massive entry of Chinese so-called "volunteers" into Korea, and were dismayed by the relative ease with which they were able to deliver a serious military setback to MacArthur's forces up in North Korea.

RICHARD RUSK: Really, that retreat of the Eighth Army was the worst defeat for American Arms since Civil War times, I guess?

DEAN RUSK: Well, as I've indicated before, MacArthur split his forces and the Chinese were able to attack them piecemeal. It was a very serious setback. As a matter of fact, I was told at the time that a good many of the GIs were calling this move to the north, in that particular configuration, Operation Three Star, or something like that. In other words, the purpose of the operation was to get a promotion for some of MacArthur's generals.

RICHARD RUSK: Operation Three Star? Is that right? (laughter) Any sense that the GIs had any idea of what was coming?

DEAN RUSK: Well, while they were being driven south, I understand that the GIs began to call that "Operation Haul-ass" because they were really set back severely. For example the American Second Division lost its divisional artillery up there in the north. And, believe it or not, so soon after World War II, we did not have reserved stocks of divisional artillery. And we had to take the divisional artillery away from a National Guard division that was on active training on the West coast and sent that artillery out to replenish the Second Division's divisional artillery. Our demobilization after V-J [Victory over Japan] Day meant that we simply did not have the money with which to bring back any significant part of the vast war supplies that we distributed all over the world.

RICHARD RUSK: Did the entry of Chinese troops make this a new war?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we tried to keep it from becoming a new war. MacArthur felt very strongly that It was a new war, that the war was also against China. But we did not want to have the Korean war and what was happening on the Korean peninsula expand into a general war with China.

RICHARD RUSK: True. Nevertheless, within Korea proper it was a new war. It was definitely completely and wholly a new situation.

DEAN RUSK: Yes. As it turned out, MacArthur was not able to inflict upon the Chinese the devastation that he had talked about at Wake Island, in the event the Chinese did come in. At Wake Island he said that if the Chinese came in, It would lead to the greatest slaughter in history.

RICHARD RUSK: Why do you think he said that?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know. I think partly it was the feeling that Chinese soldiers were, as expressed by his own G-2 [Military Intelligence], that Chinese soldiers could not stand up to American and British regulars. I think it was possible--

RICHARD RUSK: This was expressed by his G-2 at Wake?

DEAN RUSK: No, somewhere else along the way.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. And that's the wording you recall, "regulars?"

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. [But, I lost the line of thought I was on.]

RICHARD RUSK: In fairness to MacArthur, perhaps he anticipated--

DEAN RUSK: Well, I did put on another tape that MacArthur's statements at Wake Island on this may have been based upon the assumption in his own mind that if the Chinese did come in, that we would open up general war against China. But that was one thing we simply did not want to do in Washington.

RICHARD RUSK: Was the issue ever in doubt after the Chinese came in? Could we perhaps have withdrawn, regrouped, perhaps pulled offshore? Was that seriously considered?

DEAN RUSK: Well, because of MacArthur's view that we ought to withdraw from the Korean peninsula if we were not prepared to open up general war against China; we gave some thought to what we would do if we were forced into that eventuality. We talked about a large offshore island there south of the Korean Peninsula; we talked about whether we would bring those forces back to Japan, or to Taiwan, or right back to the mainland, back home. No, we gave serious thought to what the evacuation of the Korean peninsula might mean. But, that was all made unnecessary by the remarkable job that General Matthew [Bunker] Ridgway did in turning our forces around when he went out there to take charge in Korea.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Was it a close thing though, that particular decision to go ahead and hold?

DEAN RUSK: Not really, not really.

RICHARD RUSK: Despite the anxiety?

DEAN RUSK: Truman, Dean Acheson clearly took the view that we just must not be driven off the Korean peninsula. And, Matthew Ridgway made a big difference. Matthew Ridgway was one of the finest soldiers this country has ever produced. He was an Airborne commander in World War II. He had a remarkable sense of duty. He was handsome, articulate, a very impressive individual. And, when he went to Korea to take over demoralized American forces out there, his own personality did as much as anything else to turn those forces around and head them north again. But I personally think that he was one of our finest soldiers.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, to what extent do you think we provoked China's entry into the Korean war with MacArthur's movements of his forces to the island?

DEAN RUSK: I think it's entirely possible that if we had remained south of the thirty-eighth parallel that the Chinese would not have intervened. So in that sense, the movement up to the Yalu River might well have been the trigger that set off the Chinese. Now that's a very different question from whether, in any sense, the Chinese were entitled to come in, to share in an act of aggression. And indeed the U.N. General Assembly called the Chinese Communists aggressors for that move. But, no, I think it's entirely possible that if we had not gone north of the thirty-eighth parallel, that the Chinese might have accepted the status quo ante, the situation that existed before the North Koreans attacked. So in that sense it's possible that we, it's entirely probable that we stimulated them into coming into the war.

RICHARD RUSK: To what extent did your decision to go north of the thirty-eighth parallel simply get caught up in events and in the momentum of a decisive military victory at Inchon?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was both the military and a political component to that. After the Inchon landing and the flight of the North Koreans north of the thirty-eighth parallel, we knew that they were regrouping, refitting, rearming, getting themselves braced to come again.

RICHARD RUSK: Did American intelligence definitely establish that?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, we had a lot of information on that. And so it was unattractive from a military point of view just to sit there while they were getting all set to try again. But from the political point of view, we jumped the track by changing the war aims from a defense of South Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel, into the hope that we could finally establish the unified, independent Korea in accordance with the declared policies of the world community as reflected by the United Nations. I don't believe that the events are determined by historical forces or by any impersonal kind of turn of events. Decisions are made by living, breathing human beings, and our decision to go north of the thirty-eight was made--

RICHARD RUSK: In Washington?

DEAN RUSK: In Washington, by those in charge. And I think it turned out to be a mistake. Some thought was given to a declaration of war against Korea. But one of the complicating factors was that if we declared war against North Korea, who else might have been involved? Would that mean that we would be declaring war against the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China? We, in effect, pretended that it was the North Koreans, and the North Koreans alone, who had been guilty of that aggression. At the time, I remember, Chip Bohlen reminded us that if you pull off the fig leaf, you have to be prepared to deal with what's behind the fig leaf. He was among those who advised that we not declare war because it would be a very ambiguous situation just to declare war on North Korea alone. In any event, we did not declare war. But in this postwar period formal declarations of war pretty well disappeared.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, that we have.

DEAN RUSK: Now, in case I missed it earlier, there's an internal aspect to this that is important. Under a declaration of war, enormous powers are vested in a President. And there are basic changes in the constitutional arrangements in the event of a declaration of war. None of the

presidents that I served, Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, wanted that kind of transformation of power.

RICHARD RUSK: Really?

DEAN RUSK: In the case of the Berlin Blockade, or Korea, or Vietnam or whatever it was. But--

RICHARD RUSK: Why, you would think a President would want all the power he could have at his disposition in situations of crisis?

DEAN RUSK: No, because we were trying to keep these situations as limited as possible. And we just did not want a major mobilization of the manpower of the country and all that kind of thing. We did not want to establish the unconditional surrender as a war aim in any of these situations. And so we stopped short of a declaration of war. Now there've been some, particularly in the military side, who think that we should have declared war in Korea and Vietnam, partly because of the impact of that on domestic opinion and domestic support. But, I personally think that we ought to hang as loose as possible in order to keep maximum flexibility and to see how these things can be brought to a conclusion, short of unconditional surrender and short of a formal termination of a state of war, just get the damn thing over with.

RICHARD RUSK: A declaration of war would vastly complicate the negotiating process.

DEAN RUSK: That's right, that's right. We tried to deal with the Korean situation on a limited basis, both in the use of force and in terms of the political attitudes toward it. For a long time we called this a police action: a police action, in effect, in support of the United Nations charter. And there were units of some fifteen nations involved in Korea. So we did not try to whip up war fever all over the country. Now, that has a disadvantage that very soon, public opinion tends to turn against the protracted war with the casualty reports coming in every day. So it's a difficult situation to try to keep these matters limited. But, we had a much larger war in Korea than we wanted; we didn't start the damn thing. And so we were very anxious not to have it develop into a larger and larger and larger war. We did not know exactly what arrangements the North Koreans had had with Moscow and Peking. And so we tried to keep the political side of it on as limited a scale as we did on the military side.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Pop, in Warren Cohen's account, as far as your role is concerned, when the Chinese came in--this is page fifty-nine: "As the Chinese advanced, the panic MacArthur evidenced in Korea began to affect Washington. Rusk tried to focus attention on American objectives in Korea. Rusk and [George Frost] Kennan joined forces to stiffen first Acheson, then Marshall and [Robert Abercrombie] Lovett. They argued that MacArthur was giving up too easily, that the United States had to show the kind of spirit the British had shown in 1940."

DEAN RUSK: That's a fair representation of my views of that situation. I had seen other situations where the outlook was very dark: in World War II and some of these other postwar situations.

RICHARD RUSK: What kind of spirit are you talking about, regarding the British in 19⁴⁰?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, well, after the occupation of most of western Europe by the Nazis, the fall of France, the British showed a remarkable determination, beginning with the famous Battle of Britain, with the R.A.F. [Royal Air Force]. One of the great political cartoons of all time was a cartoon by the famous British cartoonist [David] Low. It showed a British tommy standing on the cliffs on the south coast of England, his head up in the air, looking out across the channel, and he was saying, "Well then, alone." That was before we came in, it was a very dramatic cartoon. But I thought that the American Allied Forces in Korea had enormous firepower at their disposal and the Chinese and North Koreans did not. We had complete air superiority over that entire area of Korea.

RICHARD RUSK: Complete naval superiority as well.

DEAN RUSK: And naval superiority. And, so I felt that a defeat of our military forces in Korea was simply not in the cards, did not have to be accepted. That, the attitude at the top was the problem, primarily with General MacArthur.

RICHARD RUSK: You felt that MacArthur was giving up too easily there?

DEAN RUSK: Well, when he was, he showed a certain amount of panic at one stage there. And it was during that period when I remember Matthew Ridgway made that remark that "When an American general loses faith in the morale of his own troops, the problem of morale is with the general." And he, Matthew Ridgway, demonstrated the truth of that when he went out there and turned the situation around. But if there had been a clear choice between withdrawing from the Korean peninsula or opening up general war against China, I think I would have come out on the business of evacuating the Korean peninsula.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Your advice was that our forces dig in, hold their ground--

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Referring again to this example that Great Britain had shown the rest of the world by facing the Nazis alone in 1940--

DEAN RUSK: Well, if one took into account all of the so-called "objective" evidence, Britain would have given up. Because everything pointed toward the impossibility of their taking on and defeating the Nazi armies. Now, the total difference was made when [Adolf] Hitler made the foolish mistake of attacking Russia. That brought Russia into the war. But in this country, before Pearl Harbor there were two major points of view. One was reflected by the America First Committee, as well as some other pacifist groups, to keep us out of the war. The other was represented by the William Allen White Committee--he was a newspaper man from the Midwest--which was in favor of giving maximum support to the allies, and if necessary getting into the war directly. Well, it was between those, the America First Committee and the William Allen White Committee. I was strongly inclined to the William Allen White Committee. I thought we simply must not let Adolf Hitler dominate the European scene. But I was then a reserve officer, ready for active duty if need be, so my views were not a free ride, because I knew

I would be directly involved with the war. But I think we do owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the British people and to Churchill for their staunchness at a time when gloom and doom might well have taken over. Matter of fact, I still believe that one of the great mistakes that Hitler made was in not attacking Britain before he attacked Russia. He was not able to get air superiority over Britain, and therefore apparently his plans in that regard were scrapped. Britain was almost defenseless after Dunkirk. They had relatively thin forces and their arms were in a very sad state of depletion. We were gathering up in this country, before Pearl Harbor, any kind of weapon we could find.

RICHARD RUSK: Such as?

DEAN RUSK: Well, pistols, shotguns, rifles to send to Britain so that they could fight behind every hedge and do whatever they could in the event that the Nazis attacked. When I took command of the company A of the Thirtieth infantry in December 1940, we had a good many of the old Springfield rifles from World War I. We did not have our machine guns; we did not have simple mortars, because so much of that stuff had been sent to Britain. But, I think we have to--

RICHARD RUSK: They were, in fact, prepared to do what Churchill had asked them to do, and that's fight behind every hedgerow and--

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think so. I think any Nazi forces that landed in Britain would have run up against a determined and implacable British people. I think that would have been a major fight. But from Hitler's point of view, it would have been preferable to the kind of experience he had in attacking Russia. Now when, after the Chinese came in, we returned to our original war aim of preventing the North Koreans from seizing South Korea--And in effect, our war aim became that of holding the thirty-eighth parallel--we had no intention at that time of driving the North Koreans and all the Chinese back behind the Yalu River. Well, I was very much in favor of getting a field commander in Korea who would concentrate on the situation in Korea, rather than have MacArthur try to run the war from Tokyo. Also I felt--

RICHARD RUSK: Now wasn't MacArthur in Korea?

DEAN RUSK: He was there, he went there a number of times, but he remained based in Tokyo.

RICHARD RUSK: Really?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. And I also felt that MacArthur had not, even during the occupation of Japan and Korea, that he had not really paid much attention to Korea, he had not been very much interested in it. And I felt he had done an impeccable job in handling the occupation of Japan, and I hoped he would concentrate on that and let another commander take responsibility for the operations in Korea.

RICHARD RUSK: What you seem to say back then was that you recommended the relief of General MacArthur.

DEAN RUSK: Well, the first stage was to relieve him of the operational control of forces in Korea. And that was what I may well have proposed to General [J. Laughton] Collins, who was one of our able soldiers. But I was strongly in support of letting Matt Ridgway see what he could do.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you the first to recommend the relief of General MacArthur?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I don't know. It's hard to remember that story. But now we're talking about the relief of MacArthur in Korea, not his relief as supreme commander.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right, that's right. Again Pop, your suggestion that General Collins replace Douglas MacArthur in Korea: what was the response, the circumstances?

DEAN RUSK: Well, see, we were talking with each other a lot during this period. I was meeting frequently with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for example, and I was talking frequently with Dean Acheson, and was present when others were talking with President Truman, so that in that kind of situation where we were all mixed up in a single basket, the actual origin of an individual idea is a little hard to pinpoint. But, I did feel that we needed a new commander for the forces in Korea. I think it's entirely possible that I might have suggested General Collins. But the result of that was to send General Ridgway. And that proved to be a stroke of great luck for us, that we had him available to go out there.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

DEAN RUSK: Don't put this on tape, okay?

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Go ahead.

DEAN RUSK: I appeared several times at the Air War College over near Montgomery, Alabama. And usually they would send over a special V.I.P. plane to pick me up here in Athens; food and drink on board, crew of about four. They would fly me over there, and then when the session was over, they'd fly me back; all very pleasant and courteous. But the last time they invited me, we were in a serious gasoline shortage. So I said, "Look, I've always appreciated these special plane flights, but you've got a Navy School here in Athens, and they could turn out an enlisted man in a Chevrolet and drive me over there in three-and-a-half hours. So why don't you ask them to do that and save that double round-trip plane flight over here?" Well, apparently they couldn't bring themselves to ask the Navy for a favor, so they turned out the colonel commanding the Air Force ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] here on campus and made him drive me over there and back. And I've never been invited back to the War College since. But that cut the cost of my trip over there by ninety percent.

END OF SIDE 2