

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk RRR RRR: Part 2 of 2
Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas J. Schoenbaum
1986 June

The complete interview also includes Rusk QQQ QQQ: Part 1.

DEAN RUSK: I was never particularly concerned about Soviet penetration of black Africa because I learned through my years there that the black Africans are really quite resistant to outside ideological penetration. They would listen, smile, shrug their shoulders, and then go off and do it in their own African way. I think we learned it; I think the Russians learned it; the Chinese learned it. Even today I don't exclude the possibility that at some point the Africans are going to regurgitate the Cubans that are there as a foreign element to their situation. But there were others who get more concerned about this than I did, because on the surface it looked like here and there that the Russians might have been making some headway. There was another factor too. Perhaps I shouldn't confess this, but I always looked upon the United States as the junior partner as far as Africa was concerned; that our western European allies, some of whom had been colonial masters in Africa had a much better entree to Africa and understood Africa better. And if the western Europeans wished to concentrate a good deal of their own foreign aid in Africa, that seemed all right to me. It was a kind of an unspoken division of labor, because western Europe gave no foreign aid in Latin America, for example, and very little in Asia. So I felt that if the Europeans would take the lead in Africa, well and good. Now there were some who, particularly some of our own ambassadors in Africa, who thought that somehow the United States ought to become Mr. Big in every capitol. Well I didn't think much of that idea, and I tried to cool some of them off and let the French and the British take the lead. So I'm sure there were some on the African side of things who thought that I was relatively indifferent toward Africa. It was a sense that we couldn't do everything and there ought to be some kind of division of labor between ourselves and Europe as far as Africa was concerned.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, do you recall who engaged in this debate within the administration on increasing our aid to Africa?

DEAN RUSK: To a degree this was a debate between me and G. Mennen Williams, although it never became personal between us. President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy had announced the nomination of G. Mennen Williams to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs before he had announced that I would become Secretary of State. But I found G. Mennen Williams--

RICHARD RUSK: So he was Mr. Big? (laughter)

DEAN RUSK: I expected he might be. But in fact he was a loyal, considerate, very hard working colleague. He was one of the best Assistant Secretaries for Africa we've had. Now, naturally he wanted to put our best foot forward in Africa. And he felt there were situations where we ought to put in more aid rather than less. But we were pinched for foreign aid funds, so he did not get as much aid as he would like to see. The Congress gave us a real problem, with

people like Bill [James William] Fulbright leading the way. They became annoyed with the large number of countries on our foreign aid list and they tried to put a--well, they did put an arbitrary limit on the number of countries that could receive certain types of aid. And those numbers were around, say, forty. Well, if you wanted to help six or seven hundred million people in Asia, you could do so by working with one country, India. But if you wanted to work with six or seven hundred million people in all of Latin America and Africa combined, well there were sixty or seventy countries involved there, you see? So this arbitrary limit on the number of countries, I thought, was irrational, made no sense. We tried to work some things out by regional arrangement, by grouping countries in Africa, or through the African development bank. But this simply was one of those unreasonable kinds of limitations on our ability to help certain countries because the Congress got annoyed at the large number of countries that were on our aid list.

SCHOENBAUM: Turning to India for just a minute, just a couple of questions, essentially follow-up questions: In 1961 you went to the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] meeting, one of your first foreign trips. And on your way back, I think, you stopped and saw [Jawaharlal] Nehru. And the record seems to indicate the reason you stopped and saw Nehru on the way back was you asked him to transmit some messages to the Russians on Laos. Do you remember anything about that meeting in particular? That would have been the first meeting with Nehru after you took office.

DEAN RUSK: Well, we were--I have no doubt that I told Nehru what our hopes were in Laos and hoped that he could be helpful in bringing them about. Because, you see, we had agreed that rather than put troops into Laos that we would try to get all foreigners out of Laos and let the Laotians manage or mismanage their own affairs. That meant getting the North Vietnamese out, getting us out, getting the French out, getting the Chinese out of the northern part of Laos, and turning Laos over to the Laotians. And that was the purpose of the Geneva Conference on Laos in '61-62. And I'm sure I talked that over with Nehru. Nehru was not an easy person with whom to talk because it depended almost entirely on his mood.

SCHOENBAUM: We've got that: mood A and mood B.

DEAN RUSK: Okay. But he at times could be articulate, interesting, and interested. At other times he was just out on cloud nine.

SCHOENBAUM: There was one thing you've mentioned in the Kennedy tapes, that toward the end of his life he became more reasonable about Kashmir. And you didn't elaborate.

DEAN RUSK: Well, one tragedy for us about this postwar period was that Lord Louis [Francis Albert Victor Nicholas] Mountbatten was in such a hurry to bring British rule in India to a close that he did not persist to the point of getting an agreement between the new India and the new Pakistan about Kashmir. And this, for many years, has been a festering sore between the two countries. And we were caught in the middle of this because if we were trying, as we were, to give aid to both countries, the purposes of that aid were somewhat frustrated by their mutual quarrel about Kashmir. And if you think that India and Pakistan were at each other's throats about Kashmir, that was matched by the attitudes of the American ambassadors to the two countries because they fought each other like tigers over that issue. And I spent a good deal of

time, not only in Washington but with Indian and Pakistani leaders, trying to find some way to bring about a solution in Kashmir. The United Nations had apparently, from the Pakistani point of view, called for a plebiscite in Kashmir, but the Indians refused to accept a plebiscite. See, Mr. Nehru's own ancestors were rooted in Kashmir. And they had a Hindu ruler, but the overwhelming majority of the population was Muslim.

RICHARD RUSK: Can't permit democracy in a situation like that if you're afraid you're going to lose the vote. (laughter)

DEAN RUSK: So Nehru simply wasn't going to give away at least the valley of Kashmir and then keep parts of Kashmir, although the Pakistanis have since then occupied more than a third of Jammu and Kashmir for their own forces. The result has been a de facto partition, and the military relationship between the two countries makes it clear that Pakistan has no capability of forcing a solution by armed force.

SCHOENBAUM: Any reason for Nehru's mood A and mood B swings that you could tell? Was he some kind of a strange personality?

DEAN RUSK: I never tried to analyze people in those terms. I just don't know how you explained it. He could be affable, an agreeable host if he had you to dinner or something of that sort.

SCHOENBAUM: You felt a personal rapport with him? You had known him--You had met him, at least, in the Truman Administration.

DEAN RUSK: Yes. I didn't know him personally during the war.

SCHOENBAUM: Yes, we have that.

DEAN RUSK: Because we were not in touch with Indian nationalist leaders during the war. But he had a rather high-caste attitude, not only toward many of his own people, but toward us. In general his attitude toward the United States seemed to be like the attitude of the most conservative British Tories sitting in those clubs in London.

RICHARD RUSK: That's strange.

DEAN RUSK: And so it was not always easy to deal with Nehru.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you find him very British?

RICHARD RUSK: You were a lower caste, the way he saw you?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I probably was in their system. You see, Nehru himself was a member of the second highest caste, the caste just below--

SCHOENBAUM: The Brahmans were the highest and then the warriors.

DEAN RUSK: Just below the Brahmans. I forget the name of that caste.

SCHOENBAUM: Kshatriyas, I think. Kshatriyas.

DEAN RUSK: Nehru was a member of that number two caste.

SCHOENBAUM: I'm getting near the end here. The Rusk-[Anatoly F.] Dobrynin channel: I wanted to ask about that. This is something we've covered, but I want to ask more detail. [Warren I.] Cohen says that at one point on a yacht on the Potomac you talked to [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin, and Cohen does not say what the position you talked about was, or what was reversed. He was speaking about the Test Ban Treaty and your talks with Dobrynin at the time of a key negotiation on the Test Ban Treaty. Do you have any recollection of that at all, what that could be? I'm trying to track that down. What issue you talked to him about? You got a key reversal by the Russians by talking to Dobrynin?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I had many talks with Dobrynin, some of them aimed at particular problems between our two countries. But also a good many of them were simply pointless talk which I thought might help to broaden the basis of understanding between our two governments and help us understand each other's system better. And I spent, I suppose, more time with Dobrynin than any Secretary of State has, for comparable periods of time. And I would have him to lunch from time to time, and he and his wife would have Mrs. Rusk and me to dinner over at their embassy.

RICHARD RUSK: Just the two of you?

DEAN RUSK: Just the four of us for that dinner. And I did make one mistake in talking with Dobrynin. I forget now what the subject was. But there was a White House reception for the diplomatic corps and all the ambassadors were there. And I made the mistake of sitting down with Dobrynin in one of those, in the Red Room or whatever it was, for about forty-five minutes, talking in a rather animated fashion about something that was on our minds while the other ambassadors could sort of pass by and see us in there. And I spent much too much time with Dobrynin that evening. I should have wandered around among the other ambassadors. But it was I who urged Dobrynin to use the basement door and use my private elevator so that he could come in for a talk and the reporters wouldn't blanket the town trying to find out what it was we were discussing. Dobrynin himself seemed to appreciate that kind of conversation because just in the last couple of years he was at dinner sitting next to a congressman friend of mine and he spoke with nostalgia of these talks that we had had and expressed his disappointment that he had not had that kind of talk with the present administration.

SCHOENBAUM: Probably the roughest conversation you ever had with him was in 1968 after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, would you say? There was the Cuban Missile Crisis. We've got that. But didn't you kind of read him the riot act after the invasion of Czechoslovakia when you first heard about it?

DEAN RUSK: Well what we were trying to do after the invasion of Czechoslovakia was to, other than cancelling that joint statement about LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] going to Leningrad to open the SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty] talks, we tried to limit that kind of action so as not to include places like Rumania or Yugoslavia. And so we wanted to make enough fuss about Czechoslovakia to cause the Russians to think twice about going ahead with it. And then after they invaded Czechoslovakia they announced the [Leonid Ilich] Brezhnev Doctrine.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah. We got that. But your conversation specifically with Dobrynin right after you got the word of Czechoslovakia when you were testifying in Congress and you--

DEAN RUSK: We gave them some strong indications of our outrage and disapproval of their action in Czechoslovakia in the hope that they would limit it to Czechoslovakia and not expand it into other areas.

SCHOENBAUM: Did Dobrynin know about the invasion at the time you talked to him or did he give you the impression--

DEAN RUSK: Oh yes. Oh yes, because by the time I talked to him the invasion was public knowledge. As a matter of fact I was testifying before the platform committee of the Democratic party when the news came in to me sitting there on the witness chair about the invasion of Czechoslovakia. And I had to leave the platform committee.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, we've got that.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, getting back to your discussion with Dobrynin on the yacht regarding the Test Ban, Lewellyn [E.] Thompson [Jr.], according to Cohen's account, says that that discussion, that personal conversation between you, was a turning point in the negotiations for the Test Ban.

DEAN RUSK: I think one would have to say that it was Mr. [Nikita Sergeevich] Khrushchev who turned the key to the partial Test Ban Treaty because we had been locked up on the problem of how to verify underground tests. And at that time we were negotiating on the basis of a comprehensive Test Ban agreement. But we couldn't get agreement with the Russians on how we verified underground tests and how you distinguish underground tests from earthquake events. And I think the argument was between three and seven black boxes, stations, or something of that sort.

SCHOENBAUM: Three and eight.

DEAN RUSK: Then it was Mr. Khrushchev who finally said, "Well, all right, let's go ahead with a test ban in the atmosphere, in outer space, and underwater and leave the underground problem for later." And that was what opened the way for the partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

RICHARD RUSK: Lewellyn Thompson has said that your discussion with Dobrynin was the turning point in the Test Ban negotiations.

DEAN RUSK: Well it's possible. It's possible that this alternative might have come up. I think it probably did.

RICHARD RUSK: Now, did you float the idea to Dobrynin.

DEAN RUSK: I don't remember in detail, quite frankly. But it's very possible that I did. You see, Dobrynin and I used to--we seemed to be free on each side to talk about alternative possibilities, realizing that neither one of us at that moment would be speaking officially for our respective governments.

RICHARD RUSK: With him comforted by the thought that you would never write memoirs. And over there in Moscow he must be quaking in his shoes right now.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, that's right.

RICHARD RUSK: Having heard what you're doing now.

DEAN RUSK: That's right.

SCHOENBAUM: I've gone through the record on this. And the record shows that although the agreement on an atmospheric test ban treaty came because Khrushchev decided to accept it, that the idea came from our side. The idea as an alternative [to go ahead with a partial ban and forget about underground testing] came from our side.

DEAN RUSK: I think that is entirely possible. I wouldn't dispute what you find in the record on that. But the simple truth is that I had many, many talks with Dobrynin and I simply do not recall the details of individual talks.

RICHARD RUSK: However, Lewellyn Thompson says--This is in Cohen's account, page 161--"Reinforcing Dobrynin's personal interest in the treaty, Rusk succeeded in getting the Russians to reverse their position. Similarly, it was Rusk who carried the burden of selling the treaty to a wary Senate."

DEAN RUSK: I hope that's true. I'd be glad to know that it's true. I think it's entirely possible that it was true. TS - Did you have a tough time selling it to the Senate? What was your battle plan?

DEAN RUSK: We kept in close touch with the Disarmament Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. So they were aware of what was going on at all stages in such negotiations. No I don't recall that we had great difficulty in getting it through the Senate.

SCHOENBAUM: One account has Kennedy saying that, "I don't care if this will cost me the '64 election, I'm going to get this thing through."

RICHARD RUSK: He wanted the test ban.

SCHOENBAUM: Did he say that?

DEAN RUSK: Well I think the partial Test Ban Treaty was something from which he derived great satisfaction. He was really very pleased with it. RR - Continuing Cohen's account, he says: "In closed hearings he," meaning Rusk, "stressed Khrushchev's difficulties with the Chinese to persuade conservative senators that Khrushchev had an interest in ending atmospheric tests and improving relations with the United States.

DEAN RUSK: We thought at the time that the partial Test Ban Treaty would somehow serve as a limitation on the arms race. As it turned out, its most important result was its environmental aspects. Manmade strontium 90 disappeared from the atmosphere. It was beginning to affect milk and all sorts of things during the period of testing. But it was a certainly a clear lift of spirit for Kennedy. He was very pleased with it. I sort of regret that we didn't have the actual signing ceremony in Washington where he could personally participate, but we agreed that we'd do it in Moscow.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, and when you went to Moscow did the Russians themselves seem quite pleased with what came about?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. Yes, they received us very well. One curious thing about that visit, when we first got there, and we had a substantial delegation: officials including senators and congressmen and things like that. But when we first got there and traveled around the streets nobody paid any attention to us whatever. Then on about the end of the second day the signal went out. And everywhere we went out there were crowds and cheering and applause and so forth. But I think that Khrushchev himself was pleased to get the partial Test Ban Treaty. I remember they had a big reception there on that occasion and we met all the members of the Politburo and the high officials of the Russian eastern church and all sorts of people.

SCHOENBAUM: Was that in the Kremlin there?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. In the Kremlin.

RICHARD RUSK: What were your own personal feelings about the successful conclusion of the test ban.

DEAN RUSK: Well, one has to know a little something about me to understand how pleased I was with the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. I refer you to that page in Paul-Henri Spaak's memoirs in which he talks about me. All my life I've been strongly interested in peace. I regret, more than I can possibly say, every casualty on all sides of every war in my lifetime. That begins with World War I. It just happens that I was Secretary of State during periods of pretty high crisis, tragedy. But anything that would appear to move toward the possibility of a durable peace in the world was a matter of great importance to me. And the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty seemed to be if not a major, a significant step in that direction. And I was very pleased that it occurred. And I enjoyed that visit to Moscow, except for a certain conversation down at the Black Sea.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, we have that.

DEAN RUSK: Virginia [Foisie Rusk] and I went to Leningrad and visited the Hermitage Museum.

SCHOENBAUM: What's that story about you almost getting--This is new.

RICHARD RUSK: Just a minute, hang on.

DEAN RUSK: We were taken on a guided tour through the Hermitage Museum and saw a lot of those remarkable art collections ranging from Sythian gold to French Impressionist paintings. At the very end of the tour was the original of [Pablo] Picasso's "Dove," which had been the symbol of the communist peace movement, the anti-American communist peace movement throughout the world. And they tried to get me to sit in a chair under Picasso's "Dove" and have my picture taken. But I politely declined that.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you realize what was up? You saw it, huh?

DEAN RUSK: Oh sure. Oh sure. But that's a magnificent museum that anybody could spend a month in and still enjoy. One curious thing happened to me during that tour of that museum. My legs buckled on me and I found it very difficult just to move. And I had to sometimes take the arm of my security man. Not to this day do I know what might have happened to me during that tour. I don't think the Russians did anything to me that caused that. But it was very strange and it's never been repeated. But I remember driving around the city of Leningrad with the man that we would call the mayor of the city. And Leningrad has been restored by the Russians in the old classical beauty, its original form.

SCHOENBAUM: Beautiful city.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. And I at one point turned to this official and said, "I am so glad that I came because Leningrad is not what I expected to find. I'm so happy to see how you've restored it." And he said, "Don't mind. Dean Rusk is not what I expected to find." And we both chuckled. But I think he expected to find me with horns and a forked tail or something.

SCHOENBAUM: There's a story in the press account that you got surprised, or got wet, when you visited Peterhof, the palace of Peter the Great, by some trick fountain. Apparently they turned a fountain on you?

DEAN RUSK: Oh I think there was some device in which somehow where I stepped turned the fountain on or something and then I got a little sprinkle and everybody chuckled about it.

SCHOENBAUM: There is an indication that Dean Rusk and Anatoly Dobrynin, as well as [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko, were all on first-name bases, or Dean Rusk was on a first-name basis with them. Did that come easily with you? Did they call you Dean?

DEAN RUSK: Well we used first names only when we were simply one on one. We did not use first names when there were others present, either on the Russian side or on our side. We kept a formality of manners when there were others present. But when Gromyko and I would slip off into a corner by ourselves we would sometimes use first names. And Dobrynin and I frequently used first names with each other.

SCHOENBAUM: And they didn't have any big conversation like, "Let's use first names," you just slipped into this?

DEAN RUSK: No, no. No, no. That's right.

RICHARD RUSK: What was the depth of your relationship with both? Did you talk about your own families? Did you talk about your hopes for the future? Just how deep was that relationship?

DEAN RUSK: We didn't go into--I mean Dobrynin was aware of my three children and I was aware of his daughter, particularly. But we didn't go very far down that trail of purely personal relationships. One would have to say that although I came to know both Dobrynin and Gromyko really quite well, one would not call those relationships friendship because the differences between our two governments were so deep and so broad that it would be incorrect to try to translate that relationship into a friendship. But it was--let's say the relationships were about as close as the circumstances would permit.

RICHARD RUSK: Cohen, in his account, says that Rusk trusted Dobrynin in a way he had never trusted his predecessor, Mikhail [A.] Menshikov.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I had only a brief experience with "Smiling Mike Menshikov" who was there at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration. But he was a cold warrior of the old school and I didn't have much confidence in him. But over time I came to have a considerable amount of confidence in Dobrynin in the sense that he was accurately representing the views of his own government. But also he was trying to understand us and our complicated system of government. And I spent a good deal of time educating him about the American Constitution and political system.

RICHARD RUSK: I presume he spent a good deal of time trying to educate you about the Russians?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, but he had to be somewhat careful about that because there's one subject on which they do keep their mouths shut, these Russians, and that is the personal relationships among the members of the Politburo. That they never discuss with foreigners. Well, once in a while Dobrynin would use the diplomatic technique of saying to us, we ought to make certain concessions in order to encourage those in Moscow who are working for good relations with the United States. Well that often is just a diplomatic ploy. Our corresponding ploy on such matters is to say to them. "Well, maybe we could agree on this but we've got to persuade our Congress. We would have difficulty in persuading our Congress to accept this." So you use these little levers back and forth from time to time.

SCHOENBAUM: I'm getting near the end. I wanted to ask about in the Congo, the two deaths there, of the leader, [Patrice] Lumumba, and of course Dag [Hjalmar Agne Carl] Hammarskjold, who died on September 18, 1961, I guess it was. I think we've broached before that Lumumba is maybe a case of an excessive zeal by some people who thought they were acting on behalf of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or something like that.

DEAN RUSK: I've always been skeptical of those reports.

SCHOENBAUM: Have you?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. I could not find, myself, any hard evidence on it. When did he die? Do you remember the date?

SCHOENBAUM: Lumumba died right about--let's see, in February 15, 1961, right at--

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RICHARD RUSK: He was involved in Lumumba's assassination.

DEAN RUSK: That's correct.

SCHOENBAUM: What about Dag Hammarskjold? There's some speculation that the Russians may have been involved, that KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoye Bezopastnosti] may have been involved in that.

DEAN RUSK: I never saw any evidence of that. I think that was simply a legitimate plane crash. I had a high regard for Dag Hammarskjold because he, like Trygve Lie before him, seemed to take the charter of the United Nations in their hands as their Bible. And they would fight for the charter regardless of where the chips might fall. And I thought that's what a Secretary General of the U.N. ought to be like. We haven't had a Secretary General since then who had that same passion for the charter. But Dag Hammarskjold was, I think, a very good Secretary General.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you ever read his book, Markings?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

SCHOENBAUM: Any thoughts right now about it?

DEAN RUSK: Well he was a kind of a mystic in some respects and a rather complicated man. But I didn't see those traits get in the way of his being secretary general. I did take up with him

what I thought was the slight given to the International Court of Justice. There at the United Nations when the General Assembly meets the president of the Court usually comes, or at least two or three of the judges. And they have very fine quarters for the President of the Security Council and for the President of the General Assembly. And of course the Secretary General has his suite there on the top floor of the U.N. building. Well when the representatives of the World Court came in they were given crummy offices with no rug on the floor and the most bare furniture and nothing on the walls. And I protested and insisted that they pay the Court the respect that is due the Court by giving them more adequate quarters when they came to the U.N. I think they did improve things considerably as a result of that.

SCHOENBAUM: Maybe a last question about your old friend Lester [Bowles] Pearson. You must have been happy to see him. Of course the Kennedy Administration didn't make any secret of the fact that they were glad to see [John George] Diefenbaker go and Lester Pearson come in. You knew Lester Pearson from the Truman Administration? Was that a--

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I was an old friend of Lester Pearson. I had a great regard for him.

RICHARD RUSK: And you knew him at Oxford?

DEAN RUSK: No. He was--

RICHARD RUSK: After your time.

DEAN RUSK: He was just after my time at Oxford I believe. But he was a fine international figure, both at the U.N. and other bodies, places like NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. He was one of the most able Canadian diplomats they've ever turned out. And they've turned out a lot of able diplomats, disproportionate to the size of their population, in fact. But he knew how to maintain Canadian identity and independence and dignity and at the same time work cooperatively where possible with the United States. I think he had served as ambassador in Washington for a period. So I found working with him a very agreeable experience. He was one of the early presidents of the U.N. General Assembly, and he did a great job in helping to launch the new United Nations. But I always had the highest regard for him. He was a rather reluctant politician. He was a professional diplomat in their foreign office most of his life. And then he resigned to go into politics. And I always had the impression that he was a rather reluctant warrior in the give and take of political life in Canada. But nevertheless he served with considerable success both as their Minister for External Affairs and as Prime Minister.

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