

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection  
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Eugene Rostow interviewed by Richard Rusk  
1986 May 5

RICHARD RUSK: I'm talking to Mr. Eugene Rostow. This is May 5, 1986. Mr. Rostow's been an educator, an international lawyer, an economist, an advisor to the State Department during the mid-1940s, worked for the United Nations in the late 1940s. I believe he's been the dean of the Yale Law School. From the fall of 1966 to January 1969, he was undersecretary of state for political affairs during the [Lyndon] Johnson administration, and I guess that'll do for an introduction. In terms of any contacts with Dean Rusk prior to January 1961, what do you have there?

ROSTOW: Prior to January 19--well, this is January, September 1966. Well, when I was dean of the Yale Law School, which was the period 1955 to '65, I think I met Mr. Rusk for the same, for the first time. He was head of the Carnegie Foundation, I think, at that time, or was it the Rockefeller Foundation?

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. Right.

ROSTOW: And I came down to see him in connection with fund raising activities for the Yale Law School, and we had several chats at that time, but I think that was really the only extended conversation I had with him before I came down to interview him in 1966.

RICHARD RUSK: Any subjective impressions from that, from those meetings'?

ROSTOW: Well, of course, I knew a great deal about him and his reputation, and I found him in person to be very much what I expected to find, a man of character and ability, who had a, much more of a sense of humor I discovered even in that first interview for, when he was head of the Rockefeller Foundation, than I had expected from hearing about him, reading about him in the newspapers.

RICHARD RUSK: What about during the [Harry] Truman administration, any contacts back during that period'?

ROSTOW: No, I had no contacts in that period.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you know enough about my father to have had a reaction to his appointment as John Kennedy's secretary of state?

ROSTOW: Well, I thought it was a fine and logical idea, and I was prepared to be enthusiastic about it. I, at that time, I knew Chester Bowles very well and Chet (unintelligible) came down and I discussed things with him during the period that he was in trouble about, with the administration before he was sent out to India.

RICHARD RUSK: As undersecretary for political affairs, perhaps we can get you to comment in general on your relationship with Dean Rusk then. This would've been from--

ROSTOW: Surely. Well, he was an ideal person to work for. I'd had the experience back during the Second World War of working as Dean Acheson's executive assistant for quite a while in that period. I worked on a variety of problems during the Second World War so I was quite familiar with the atmosphere of the State Department and with its procedures and the nature of the work. And when I came back and took on this job, I made it very clear to him against the background of my experience that he, that I was working for him. He was talking to me about [how] this is a job working for the president and the president's choice, and finally I said, "Look, I'm not going to take this job unless you want me to have it." Said, "I'll be working for you rather than for the president, and I know a fair amount about what can happen if you're not very clear on that subject because I witnessed some of the troubles that Sumner Welles had had during World War II.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you have the feeling or did it occur during that time that, as some people have said, that Kennedy bypassed Rusk and went to you directly on matters of policy?

ROSTOW: Never, I never was part of the Kennedy time--

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I see. I'm sorry.

ROSTOW: I worked only for Johnson, and never. I worked for him. And, of course, I had contact with the president, and, of course, my brother was the president's special assistant for national security affairs, which was a very easy and comfortable working relationship and environment. There was no bypassing and no temptation to bypass. I made it very clear that I worked for him, and he was a very fine person to work for in that way. I made it a rule when I started out on any particular initiative with the bureaucracy or with a foreign government, I'd drop in to see him first because he knew the business of the State Department completely and very thoroughly. I could go in at any time to see him for a moment and our conversations in that form were very- brief. I'd just fit it in as I could--(unintelligible)--worked along these lines. He'd talk about it for a minute or two, suggest a little more emphasis on this or that, and then I'd withdraw, go back to my office, literally, quite often, after one or two minutes and no more. And that was my instruction. I kept him informed, and he remembered. Six months later, he ran into Helmut Schmidt or someone, and he raised an issue on this subject. He remembered and always backed me, and that was the policy line I pursued. And, of course, at the end of the day, he was in the habit, after we became friends and began to work together, he was in the habit a couple of times a week maybe of calling up around 6:30 or so and saying, "What are you doing? Are you busy?" And, "How about coming down and having a drink?" And those were the best times of the day, really. Sit around and have a drink, alone or with two or three or four other people from the building he'd invite up, and we'd talk in a relaxed and leisurely way and explore various issues and what was happening and how things were developing. And they were delightful, those occasions. And--

RICHARD RUSK: Any specific anecdotes about--or jokes or anything, or anything?

ROSTOW: Oh, yes. I remember one day, for example, that Arthur Schlesinger had written something particularly outrageous in the newspaper that morning, and Mr. Rusk said--we were discussing it. I think there were a couple (unintelligible) present. He said, "You know, it's interesting. How many times did I see President Kennedy while he was in office? A thousand? Two thousand? Something like that, I suppose. I never once remember his stopping and saying, 'Wait, Rusk, before we begin this conversation. Let me get Schlesinger in here.'" (laughter) And he was, there were all sorts of episodes of that sort. He has a dry, sharp sense of humor.

RICHARD RUSK: Following that up, I realize you weren't in the State Department at that time, during the Kennedy years, but did you have the impression that Schlesinger's attack on Rusk was unfair and that Rusk was really the major foreign policy advisor for President Kennedy?

ROSTOW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, sure. I did, I do have that impression, and I know, you know, I've heard a good deal about various episodes in that period, especially the Cuban Missile Crisis and so forth. Remember that I started my life in the State Department with Acheson, and so I saw Acheson regularly all through this period, too, and we were very good friends, so I heard a fair amount about Rusk in that, in the Kennedy period, from Acheson, too.

RICHARD RUSK: Could you comment on that, from what you know of that relationship between Dean Acheson and Dean Rusk? Dean Acheson is no longer around to comment on it, and I've read the brief references to my father in his books. And, uh, could you elaborate upon that? I do believe my dad was Dean Acheson's recommendation, or certainly very high choice, to be secretary of state, and I understand they had some, there was some degree of a falling off later.

ROSTOW: Yes, I think there was some falling off. I never had anything from Mr. Rusk critical of Acheson--

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: But in, umm, especially his handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, from the beginning, Acheson criticized Rusk and told me that he was quite frightened by it in the start and almost broke down, something of that sort, in the early days of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

RICHARD RUSK: Dean Acheson was quite frightened and almost broke down or Dean Rusk?

ROSTOW: (unintelligible) Rusk was.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I see.

ROSTOW: And, uh, he had to stiffen him up and keep him going, but I didn't pursue that very much. I know that one of the first things that happened after I took over in September 1966 was that Rusk said, "Look, you're fresh from the outside. Maybe you'll have a new point to make about our handling of Vietnam because after you're here for several months you'll be absorbed in it and you won't be able to be detached enough, perhaps, to take a fresh look and come up with

some original ideas." And so I came back after a day or so, and I said, "Well, I've thought about it and I make one suggestion" because Acheson had told me the story about how, the Korean War, they made a breakthrough in the Korean War by approaching the Soviets. So--

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: Uh, I went over that story with him, and he said, "Well, why don't you try it? Work it out, and then we'll go ahead." So I brought in Acheson, and we had several long talks. And then I got hold of [George] Kennan, and he came down, and he got out his notes because Acheson had used Kennan, who was already then at Princeton, to conduct some of the talks with [Yakov] Malik that helped to break the tension in the Korean War.

RICHARD RUSK: Yes. Yes.

ROSTOW: And, uh, of course, I told him all about our talks and went over the plan with him, and then I started a series of talks with [Anatoly] Dobrynin on the subject so that I worked very closely then with Acheson and with Rusk. We didn't meet together, as I recall it, but we were drawing on Acheson's experience to construct a new approach to or attempt to approach the same sort of a solution for the Vietnamese War we'd had in Korea. Nothing came of it for a very interesting reason. There were some conversations that went on. We got [Averell] Harriman into it, too, and it was taken very seriously by Dobrynin and by the Russians, and they never turned it down. On the other hand, they delayed and delayed, and we had some extended conversations (and the net effect?) was that the nuclear balance was different in 1966 and '67 than it was in Truman's time and, therefore, the same hint and suggestion didn't work.

RICHARD RUSK: The Russians didn't have the incentive to do anything, I take it.

ROSTOW: That's right. And, of course, they said very frankly that the Chinese are (unintelligible) in it much more and so on. But it was a most interesting effort and a most interesting series of conversations and most depressing (unintelligible), too.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: But that was the closest I came to having a, to working on anything which involved both Acheson and Rusk.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: That was personally harmonious (unintelligible) on all sides.

RICHARD RUSK: Could you elaborate about Dean Rusk and the Cuban Missile Crisis? What specifically did Acheson say, or what, when was-- because Dean Rusk was very active during the meetings.

ROSTOW: It was, it's a, of course, it's a secondhand sort of thing, but it may be of some use to you. As I remember, what he said was that there was a meeting early on of that Control

Committee that met during the Cuban Missile Crisis in the conference room outside the secretary's office, and that at one point, Rusk went back to his office to take a telephone call or something, and Acheson went in to follow him, and he was almost in tears, he was so appalled by the situation, and Acheson said, "Well, you're the only secretary of state we've got, so pull yourself together and come on and we'll do it," you know.

RICHARD RUSK: No clue as to what that call might have been all about?

ROSTOW: No.

RICHARD RUSK: It's not often we hear of situations where Dean Rusk was nearly in tears.

ROSTOW: That's right.

RICHARD RUSK: As his son, I can't recall him in tears ever except once. Was that call from the president, do you think?

ROSTOW: Probably.

RICHARD RUSK: Uh-huh.

ROSTOW: But it's, uh, you know it's a thing that-- when you asked me the question, it fled through my mind, but it's nothing that I went into in any detail.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Any further (unintelligible)--

ROSTOW: --Long experience with Acheson convinced me that his stories were always the same. He never embellished them.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: No matter how dramatic they were.

RICHARD RUSK: Uh-huh.

ROSTOW: So that's there's something there.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Anything further you might say about the relationship between Dean Acheson and Dean Rusk?

ROSTOW: No. I'm hesitating only to see if anything floats up into my mind. I'm not trying to-- to, uh--

RICHARD RUSK: I asked, I asked William Bundy the same question. He says that it's an unfair question. (laughter) Because of the relationship. He also said that Dean Acheson was a very

critical man in general, but he did criticize my dad quite severely, I think, for insufficient leadership.

ROSTOW: Yes. I think that's, I think he, I think it's fair to say that he was, that Dean Acheson was a very severe critic. He was that tough on Bill Bundy because after all he was his father-in-law.

RICHARD RUSK: Right. Uh-huh.

ROSTOW: And, but I think at that period of his life Acheson felt a little acid and out of things. And that neither Kennedy nor Johnson really liked him terribly and treated him with great deference. And I think he had what's a very normal attitude toward the fellow who came after him. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: That's interesting.

ROSTOW: Of course, I think so, too.

RICHARD RUSK: Umm hmm. Add the normal level of acidity of any man in his seventies or his eighties.

ROSTOW: (laughter)--pretty acid. He thought, remember, that he'd known Rusk for a long time as assistant secretary. I suppose he could never really take him quite seriously as the secretary.

RICHARD RUSK: (laughter) That interesting. Perhaps we can go back for a moment as to Dean Rusk as your boss.

ROSTOW: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: A number of his colleagues have criticized him for his quality of reticence, for not really knowing where he stood on the issues and not really giving them sufficient guidance. In terms of your own personal experience with my dad, would you agree with that, or did you have, was that not a problem in your relationship?

ROSTOW: No, that wasn't a problem because, as I say, I always asked him for guidance before I started out, and he always gave it to me. It was very brief, but I understood him, you see. We were really very much on the same sort of wave length about foreign policy and the positions the United States took and ought to be taking and even on very, very sensitive things, the Middle East, for example, which I suppose was the hottest of the assignments I had during that period. I was chairman of a control group that, interdepartmental group at the undersecretary's level, that prepared policy recommendations for the heads of the department and the president and then carried them out after the meeting. And it couldn't have been, you know, more sensitive stuff and more interesting and demanding professional assignments, (unintelligible) assignments, but he always made his policy positions clear, and when he wanted to modify a line I'd be taking, we'd discuss it, and he'd do it. And it was just a pleasure to work with him that way.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: He would say, he called me in one morning, I remember, and he said, "You know, let's try something. I don't know if it'll work or not, but why don't you bring the British and the French ambassadors in every afternoon during this [it was just before the Six-Day War, I think, or just after it, in that period] and just brief them and go over the issues, consult with them every day as to the way the situation is developing." And, of course, I was meeting with the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] ambassadors and the South American ambassadors and all other kinds of groups of ambassadors all the time to keep them consulted, to keep them informed. And it was characteristic of Rusk's handling that he used the entire orchestra. He had everything going. And he would tell me what he wanted in general, and we would pour out a series of telegrams and instructions all over the world. He had the whole (unintelligible) of the U.S. government working on this, and so we tried that little experiment of talking every day with the British and French ambassadors, and I remember I was very good friends with both of them, and after the second or third time we met, the French ambassador took me aside alone and said he was a little bit embarrassed by meeting this way every day; it had the atmosphere of the tripartite approach to it. (laughter) I said, "Well, of course it does. That's exactly what we have in mind." And I said, "I know that the Suez crisis happened." He said, "I didn't mention the word 'Suez'." So we agreed we wouldn't meet every day, and I told Mr. Rusk about it, and he laughed, and we went ahead, and I kept as close as I could to them, you know, without making it overt and formal. But he would explore, he would think of every possible approach and explore them all, all in the interest of building a concert among the nations about the policy to be pursued. And, of course, the essential feature of this, I told him one day, just before the Six-Day War, I said, "I don't know if you realize it, but there are an awful lot of people in this building who are just itching for war." He said, "Oh, but our business is to keep the peace." I said, "I know, I'm just telling you that they're almost exploding with tension." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Were you one of them?

ROSTOW: No, no. (laughter) No, no.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. That's an unfair question.

ROSTOW: (unintelligible) they congratulated me once on handling some of this stuff after the Six-Day War broke out. And I said, "Oh, but we failed; the war came." No, no, I didn't think it was in the American interest for that war to happen.

RICHARD RUSK: Maybe I can get you to comment on Dean Rusk's performance as secretary of state during that Six-Day War and immediately before and in the aftermath. How good a job did he do? I take it you were heavily involved in that and heavily involved with my father on that.

ROSTOW: Yes (unintelligible)--huh, you were?

RICHARD RUSK: No, I say you were.

ROSTOW: Yeah--(unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: How involved was he? How involved was Dean Rusk specifically in the Six-Day War?

ROSTOW: He was very much involved, and he knew all about it. He'd been through the background of it earlier, and he was a decisive figure in the evolution of policy there because he was not in the least, you know, sentimental about Israel.

RICHARD RUSK: No, no. We know that.

ROSTOW: --Personally involved that way, but he was always polite and more than polite to the Israelis, but it was, clearly, it was not an emotional thing as it was for some people.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: Uh, he never got confused as to what our job was and where our interests lay, but he was the man, really, who was decisive in determining the structure of Resolution 242.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: Because he knew the background of it and the arrangements that were made in bringing the crisis in 1957, the Suez War in 1956, to an end in 1957. And we had intervened, we were the broker between [Gamal Abdel] Nasser and the Israelis along with the British and the, and [Dag] Hammarskjold, to get the settlement made, and the terms of the settlement--they were really quite funny in a way because there was no formal document--Nasser wouldn't deal directly with the Israelis--so the agreement was embodied in a series of statements people would make before the UN General Assembly or to the press and so forth.

RICHARD RUSK: Uh-huh.

ROSTOW: And I had, I think I still have a copy that was given to me by Don (unintelligible) Fergus at the time of the Six-Day War, Fergus, F-E-R-G-U-S, who was a foreign service officer much involved in these things, and Don gave me this book with a lot of paper clips in it, and those paper clips represented the agreement. Golda Meir would say something, and the Egyptian would say nothing, and so on. And Dean Rusk's view of it was that we made those arrangements for the Egyptians and for the Israelis and got the Israelis out of the Sinai at that time in exchange for a long series of promises. And then the Egyptians broke those promises, and, uh, all of them, including the closing of the straits. And when, Rusk said that when they closed the Strait of Tehran, they cut our throat from ear to ear. And he made that statement several times during the period to, not only to me, but to diplomats. And that's the reason why Resolution 242, which is still the basis for all these negotiations, says the Israelis don't have to retire one quarter of an inch until the Arabs make peace. They double crossed us then, and we're not going to press the Israelis to make any withdrawals whatever until this peace agreement.



RICHARD RUSK: Was he involved in the actual drafting of 242 or just the ideas, giving us those ideas?

ROSTOW: Well, the ideas, but he had, we passed the draft--

RICHARD RUSK: To him?

ROSTOW: Got his approval, oh sure. He was always very active. And then there was one episode I remember when, I've forgotten what it was about, but Arthur Goldberg got into some sort of trouble in New York, and he was up there and helped straighten it out. Ah, no, no, he was deeply involved and knew all about it. And I remember once he went up--this was in September of '68--we kept on working at the thing until the very end of the administration. There was a big effort in the fall of '68 at the time of the General Assembly meeting. And he had a big meeting with Mahoud Riad, who was then, I guess, General Secretary of the Arab League or maybe he was still Egyptian foreign minister--I've forgotten which.

RICHARD RUSK: How do you spell that last name?

ROSTOW: Riad. R-I-A-D. And he came back--it was late Saturday afternoon--and he called me up when he got in and I went down there and had a drink and, uh--oh, I remember: he'd run out of scotch. (laughter) So I had to produce some scotch in a hurry. My stock was out, too. (laughter) And we sat down, and I asked him how the conversation went up in New York. He tried for, I don't know what, I couple of hours, I guess, and he had a seven-point plan, six-point plan, seven-point plan, something of that sort about the situation in the Sinai. And Riad turned it down flat, and his judgment of it, and you can get some sense of his control of the details of Middle Eastern life and politics, he said, "They're out to kill Hussein [Ibn Talal]." That was his judgment about the Egyptian position.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: And, then, of course, I had to cool off the Israelis about this plan, this initiative that the secretary of state came up to New York. They were a little worried that he'd given away the store, but when I got through explaining it, they were very happy (unintelligible). So, uh, no, no, he was deeply involved, and I never had the slightest difficulty with him in terms of instructions. Not at all.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you in favor of his influence and his initiatives during that period? Did he do a good job of articulating legitimate American policy interests in that work (war?)?

ROSTOW: I thought so, and, of course, you know, I had considerable input, too. It wasn't just taking instruction. We, he was very easy to talk to (unintelligible), and so I guess, I guess I was the fellow who put the word "peace" into a--in the middle of the night when the Six-Day War broke out, we were all assembled in the Communications Center in the State Department. We were preparing a statement for the president to make the next day at noon, you know, what our position was, and I wrote the draft, and I put in the sentence that our position in this war now would be not to restore the armistice but to move for peace, which in the context of the history of

the Arab-Israeli dispute was a very big move indeed, and he was there, and he approved of it, and he never budged from that (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: I understand at one point you had a plan to form an international force to forcefully reopen the Straits [sic] of Tiran.

ROSTOW: Oh, yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, I think it's been reported my dad was doubtful of that plan, didn't think it would work or wasn't worth pursuing. Would you care to elaborate on any of that?

ROSTOW: Well, he backed it thoroughly. Oh, no, no, I remember--(laughter) no, I remember a lot of funny things about that. He, uh, this was a British plan originally.

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ROSTOW: Yeah, well, as the Six-Day War approached, the British raised this idea with us of an Allied naval escort, naval convoy system to take vessels through the Strait of Tiran. And I remember the day the British came in with it, we started to examine it and discuss it a little bit, I got a call on the open line, from Wally Barber, our ambassador in Tel Aviv, and I'd never met him at that point, but he, of course, knew who I was and had gotten a sense of my role in the thing from the cable, and he called me on the open line, and he said, "Look, unless there's a new idea in this situation, I don't think I can hold it for more than another day or two." I said, "There is a new idea, and I'll send it to you this afternoon." So we wrote up a cable describing this British plan, got it cleared and sent it out to him, flagged, you know, which is a super speedy method of communication, and Wally afterwards said to me, "Well, anyway, you postponed the war for a couple of weeks." (laughter) So, uh, no, oh, no, Rusk was an enthusiastic believer in it. The president was very hot for it. And we worked up the thing, and it, I'll go to my grave, and Golda Meir told me that she was convinced that the saboteurs, that the president was all for it and wanted to do it and would have done it, and, but it got, my own conviction is that [Robert] McNamara sabotaged it. You know, this was the middle of the Vietnam War (unintelligible) another war, and McNamara was very very much opposed to it.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, and so Rusk was, was didn't have a firm position on it, then or?

ROSTOW: Oh, no, he had a firm position. The president had a firm position, and he had, therefore had a firm position.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I see. Yeah, yeah.

ROSTOW: There was any doubt about it, and he was very active on Thursday of that week, the week before the Six-Day War broke out. The British military attaché came in, an admiral named Henderson, and said this is being sabotaged in the Defense Department. He was very exercised, and he said the people who should have been in the tank working out the details were out playing golf. And he went up the hall to see the secretary, and he jabbed (unintelligible) the phone and called up McNamara and went right after him, and McNamara said, "No, no, there's no sabotage." (laughter) Nonetheless there was delay, and McNamara didn't want to move until there was a new congressional resolution. And, well, of course, there was a congressional resolution already, one of 1958, the Eisenhower Doctrine Resolution, which would have permitted the use of force if necessary, but somehow or another it got sabotaged. And there was another episode. The press and the books on the subject reported that we really gave the Israelis a green light to go ahead. And Rusk and I have been over that, and neither one of us knew anything about it, if it ever happened. And my brother, too. It may have happened somewhere else (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall Dean Rusk having any influence in getting the United Nations to delay its call for a cease-fire?

SPEAKER: Richard, Mr. Rusk, excuse me, I'm going to have to go for just a while because somebody came in my office, but I hope to get on in a little while.

ROSTOW: All right.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. (Hangs up)

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall my dad's position on the UN cease fire? In understand it was only declared after the Israelis had consolidated most of their gains.

ROSTOW: Oh, yes. Yes, well, there wasn't much delay. It's the usual pattern, the same thing that happened in '73. When the Russians decided that the jig was up, why they moved for a cease fire, and we held it off until the Golan Heights operation was completed but then put a lot of heat on the Israelis to accept, a lot of heat.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: And, uh, they didn't want that. See there was sensitivity about the, their reaction when the war was suddenly moved up to the Golan Heights and the Israelis attacked the Syrians. The tone of Soviet communications changed.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. The Middle East is a difficult area for any American secretary of state. Do you think my dad struck the appropriate balance between our interests over there vis-a-vis the Arabs and Israelis?

ROSTOW: Oh, I think so. I think, you know, it would have been, I think, from our point of view perhaps better if the war had never taken place, but it happened, and he made the best of it, and he handled it very well. I think it was a masterly handling of the diplomatic side of it and on a

very large scale, a world scale. I remember asking one friend in the State Department when [Henry] Kissinger was secretary whether Kissinger could, was running the whole orchestra of American foreign policy the way Rusk did during the Six-Day War and afterwards, and the fellow smiled and he said, "With Henry, it could never be more than a string quartet." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: That's funny. I'll be darned. Umm hmm. Anything further about my dad and you and the Six-Day War that comes to your mind of significance?

ROSTOW: Well, it went on, of course, all through the rest of the administration--the struggle first to get Resolution 242 and then the struggle to implement it and carry it out. And he was active and profoundly interested, and he knew that time was not working on our side, and he wanted to get it settled, and, of course, it couldn't be done--(unintelligible). The Arabs didn't want to make peace, that's all.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Would our pol[icy]--this is kind of hypothetical--but would our policy in response to that Six-Day War had been any different had Dean Rusk not been the secretary of state? Another way of asking that same question is, did he really put his own personal stamp in a dramatic way on the handling of that conflict?

ROSTOW: Yes, I think so. I think both in substance and in method. I think the substance of it was the commitment to peace as a goal rather than another armistice or a renewal of something short of peace. That's the only issue now, and that's what prevents any change in the situation, and I think it's absolutely right from our point of view. And the second thing was that in method his comprehensive and active handling of every strand of diplomacy with our friends, with our allies, with our adversaries, and so on, and with the neutral nations, showed his command of the system and his knowledge of the history of the conflict. He knew it all, you see. And he was very, very good at it.

RICHARD RUSK: You've spoken in very favorable terms about Dean Rusk. That's the kind of book I'll be writing, incidentally, as a member of the family, but I feel obliged to ask you a question, what were some of his problems as secretary? What were his weaknesses? Surely he had his share of problems as does any mortal human being.

ROSTOW: Oh, sure.

RICHARD RUSK: How would you comment on that?

ROSTOW: Well, you see, in the areas where I worked with him closely, the NATO area, the nuclear arms area, the food for, the whole Indian food project, you know, that I worked on quite a lot, all the relationships arising out of the Six-Day War, the monetary stuff, of course, I handled pretty much alone with Joe Fowler [Henry "Joe" Fowler?] I always informed him about it and he'd grin, but he didn't care much about it. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Great. That's true. He tried to defer all the economic questions, I think.

ROSTOW: He told me in the beginning. I had the title, I could pick under the statute either the title of undersecretary of state for political affairs or economic affairs, and he said that neither he nor [Nicholas] Katzenbach cared a damn about economics, (laughter) and I did, so I would have it. Which title did I want? I said, well, in view of the complexity of the relationships with Europe, that the fellow who dealt with economic problems ought also to have the political problems, and unless I were dealing with NATO and nuclear stuff and so on, I wouldn't have any clout on the economic affairs, and so that's the way it was.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: I was undersecretary for political affairs, but on all the OECD (unintelligible) [OEEC? Organization for European Economic Cooperation] stuff and so on, his, he was, you know, kept informed and supervised and he had opinions, but basically I was on my own there, along with the Treasury people, but, and with the Federal Reserve people, and that was a very active front, all kinds of things. This was the period of the FDI [Federal Deposit Insurance] and the creation of the monetary (unintelligible)--you know, the IMF (unintelligible). And so that that was a pretty busy part of my life, and then I had the, he got me the, he insisted that I take the assignment of chairman of the president's task force on communications policy.

RICHARD RUSK: Sir, can I interrupt just for a minute. If there's any way you could raise your voice a slight degree--I think we might have trouble recording some of this. Try it, try it and I'll try to be briefer with my questions. (laughter)

ROSTOW: I was, I was chairman of the task force on communications policy, which was a very hot affair, and while he didn't follow it in detail, I kept him informed, and toward the end there was a great deal of pressure on the president to get us to, not to go into the domestic side of the industry. We felt we had to do that, and it was out of all that discussion that the recent turbulence in the communications industry emerged. And at the very end all this pressure on the president to get me to kill the chapter. I went in to see him one afternoon, and I said, "This is what's going on. And I don't really want to do it" and the position I've taken with my brother [the president got my brother to call me] always to report very carefully. And I said that I thought it would be a great mistake for the president to kill that chapter at the instance of the industry, and before any such position was made, I'd like to discuss it with him.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: And I told Dean Rusk that, and he grinned, and he said, "I don't see any reason for you to be the goat in this affair." I said, "Okay, that's all the instruction I need." (laughter) That was that, and I stuck to my guns, and we got the report out. That's how it was. That's exactly how, what working for him was like. I'd tell him what had developed and where the crisis was, and he immediately reacted, and this time with a grin, and said, "I don't think you ought to be the goat here." And that was all, the whole story.

RICHARD RUSK: It seems to vary from colleague to colleague, the extent of their relationship, the success of their relationship. Some people found him a very reticent type of man and difficult to follow. Other people did not, and I guess you're one of those.

ROSTOW: I certainly did not. I never was in any doubt where I was; I never had any surprises on that front, and I think I can say that he never had any surprises from me.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: I hope not anyway.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. In terms of critiquing his overall job as secretary or any specific aspects of it, if he had problems, in what areas would they be?

ROSTOW: Well, I think it was the basic problem of the administration, which was not winning the Vietnam War. And whether in that respect his advice to the president on that subject should have been much firmer about firing generals and getting a winning team, I don't know. That wasn't my beat, you know. I worked on some of the peace initiatives, which were pathetic, for him, but I never did-- like the initial one I was talking about where I had all those talks with [Anatoly] Dobrynin.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: But the day to day work of the Vietnam War I did not work with him, and I heard some discussions with the president on that subject, but my critique of the administration on that, and it was fundamental to the history of the tragedy of the administration, really, was that they didn't win.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: And they didn't go out and fire the generals until they found Sherman and Grant, you know. But that wasn't his primary responsibility. That was McNamara's primary responsibility, but if there were any criticism I'd make, he shared in that.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: He talked about it later on. I never, I never tried to intervene there while I was working with him; he had enough troubles.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: I mean we'd talk about it in the evening when we had a drink, which was, as I say, or on trips and so forth, but it would not be so specifically pointed as that.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Did you find him approachable regarding your views on Vietnam?

ROSTOW: Absolutely.

RICHARD RUSK: He did solicit your opinions on various matters relating to that war?

ROSTOW: Yes. He, you know, he didn't wear his heart on his sleeve. I remember once a long meeting in this room on some Middle Eastern question, and I'd written a memo, and we discussed it, and he reached a conclusion. He said to me in the group, he said, "You know, you can always take this higher if you want." And I said, "No, no. I know I can do that, but I won't." I never did.

RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: (unintelligible) appeals to the president--

RICHARD RUSK: Were you involved--

ROSTOW: But he, uh, as we were going out the door, he sort of gave me a little grin and said, "That's a good memo." That's the only way you'd get a compliment.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: But it was a relationship in which I was entirely comfortable from the working point of view--absolutely no complaints.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you involved in the policy review after the Tet offensive?

ROSTOW: No.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, okay. What about that last year, 1968?

ROSTOW: Well, uh, of course--

RICHARD RUSK: My, uh, I remember my dad as being pretty tired during that year. Did you notice any real changes in the man from 1968, say, from the time that you first started to work for him, uh, what was he like in that last year of office? That was a hellish year for--

ROSTOW: A hellish year for him. Uh, (sighs)-- his, it was still, I think, the same spirit and atmosphere in the office. I was, I had two ongoing assignments that never flagged. One was that communications policy thing, and the other was the Middle Eastern affair, which kept grinding away, you see, right to the very end, and he participated in the Middle Eastern meetings and was very active, encouraging us to keep pressing the Soviets to get a positive response. Yes, of course he was tired, but he kept his spirits, at least so far as we were concerned.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Mmm hmm. There were three or four significant arms control treaties negotiated during the Kennedy and Johnson years. From your own experience, did my father play a leading role in those negotiations. What would you say?

ROSTOW: His relation to arms control was very important. The only one I got into in any detail was the NPT, the Nonproliferation Treaty.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: And the reason I got into that was that he and Foster wanted some help in persuading the NATO people, and especially the Germans, to go along. It was a big issue for the Germans and the Italians to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty and forgo nuclear status. And so I got to know something of the relationship between Rusk and Foster [William C. Foster?] in that period and the way he handled it. And it was very much in my mind when I had the active job in the early '80s. Now, what, uh, your father was very very much interested, as you know, in arms control and in the arms control process, [the] possible potentialities for it. And his work with Foster and Fisher [Adrian Fisher?], who was Foster's deputy and a very close friend of mine, was just perfect, you see. He had a meeting every Saturday morning, I think, when he could, of principals only. I think they met in his office, but Foster presided. And you could not have any deputies, and they, and he told me, both Foster and he told me about that practice, and I tried to get it started and resumed. Haig didn't want to, but finally (unintelligible)--

RICHARD RUSK: And the purpose of that meeting was specifically arms control.

ROSTOW: Arms control.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: Brainstorming and talking about the issues, not about particular, it had no agenda, you see.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: And it was a Saturday morning meeting of principals only, and I never could get it created. Ken Dan (unintelligible) tried to move along those lines, but the center of gravity was in his office and not in the office of the director of (unintelligible). Of course, Rusk never worried about such things, and, uh, and so his relationship with Bill Foster and Butch Fisher was fine, and I was asked to take on the job of persuading the Germans to go along, and I did that at some length, both in Washington and in Europe.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: Working with Foster. Talking to him about it, but working with Foster.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I see on the appointment books that Foster and Fisher [were] in to see him all the time. That was a very close working relationship, I guess.

ROSTOW: Yeah. for the purposes of an oral history, anything that we haven't touched upon?

ROSTOW: Well, [pauses] I would say, like to convey to you and have your book convey his greatness of heart, the way he handled the work and the way he handled his relationship with us and with the president is entirely compatible with the way I've seen him during these last years,



trudging around the country making speeches to students. I had him up at Yale a couple of times, and he was a little, you know, hesitant about, he didn't want to have a demonstration and all that (laughter), and I, uh, said it would be all right. And it was perfect.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, what years would this have been?

ROSTOW: Well, in the '70s. But I used to go around and do the same thing, and, you know, there's a sense of obligation that people who've had this experience try to convey what it means. And I'd meet him, and sometimes we'd be on the same program, all over the country. And I know that that's what he was doing, and his health was terrible, and he shouldn't have been doing it, but he did it. And, of course, he spoke very, very well, and you had a sense there of, as I say, the greatness of spirit and the religious conviction. When I took the job, we went over, I had a long talk with him in his office, and he took me over to see the president to get the formal offer, and then I came back with him in his limousine, and I dropped him off at the State Department, and the car took me over to my brother's house, where I was to meet him and talk about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

ROSTOW: He got out of the car to send me on. He said, "You know, Presbyterians and Jews are the same. They're dominated by a sense of duty, and it's your duty to take this job." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: I'll be darned.

ROSTOW: And that, there he was, you know, with all that terrible heart trouble he had and other troubles, going around the country to small colleges. (perceived to be?) his duty.

RICHARD RUSK: He's doing it now.

ROSTOW: He's doing it now.

RICHARD RUSK: Still doing it, yeah. They, uh, he's like a folk hero down here in the South.

ROSTOW: Well, he should be.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. They all know him. He's been to about every small town in Georgia.

ROSTOW: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: Hmm. I understand you were one of the founders of the Committee for Present Danger (unintelligible).

ROSTOW: That's right.

RICHARD RUSK: What about my dad's role in that? I understand he was a member at one time. Is there anything there that, uh, worth commenting on?

ROSTOW: Well, he gave us every help he could.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: To get it started and do it. He said, you know, I don't sign petitions I haven't written and so on, but he signed that one for us.

RICHARD RUSK: He did.

ROSTOW: He stuck with it for a couple of years and then on grounds of health he couldn't come to the meetings and so on and faded out, but he didn't fade out because of any difference, but he helped us to get started.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: And we, I was on the phone with him a lot about those drafts, and I'd send them down to him.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. He didn't, uh, he told, let's see, he talked to you about why, he alleged to [sic] health problems, he talked about health problems for his noninvolvement with the committee.

ROSTOW: Well, he got out after a couple of years.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: Yeah. And it was just that, uh, and also his general allergy about signing up on statements that he hadn't written himself or participated [in].

RICHARD RUSK: Right. Right. Yeah, he's very reluctant to, he's not much of a joiner, he's not much of a joiner here.

ROSTOW: No. Well, I think that he made an exception, really, for the Committee on the Present Danger.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: And helped it on its way.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. Well, this has been a good interview. Any fleeting comments beyond what you already told me?

ROSTOW: No, I don't think so.

RICHARD RUSK: Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: If I, if something comes to mind that I ought to add, why, uh-- I'll tell you that comment he made getting out of the limo, I think that says it all.

RICHARD RUSK: (laughter) Okay. I understand you've written quite a number of books. I didn't go through those books prior to calling you, but are there any references or significant comments about my father in any of those?

ROSTOW: I, I'm sure there must be, but only in terms-- I don't write memoirs and reminiscences and I don't think I ever shall.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Yeah. Mmm hmm.

ROSTOW: So they'd be entirely factual or professional. There'd be no criticism about the Johnson administration in Vietnam, the general one I've made that they didn't win I made entirely just for the president.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Mmm hmm. Uh--

ROSTOW: (unintelligible) remember that--

RICHARD RUSK: They did remember that?

ROSTOW: Yeah, and, of course, you know, various people would help keep the memory green. (laughter) But (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: You, uh, were they still claiming him as one of their own at that time or was there too much dissatisfaction over this Vietnam War to, uh, poison the well, huh?

ROSTOW: They were very polite and punctilious about that, I know. After all, when I came there, I'd been appointed to that professorship before I went down to Washington, I guess.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

ROSTOW: And they put it off for a year, and, uh, or so, so that when I came after my period of working in the Johnson administration I was a pretty controversial character as a result of-- -- (laughter) But there were no demo--One of, the master of Balliol (unintelligible), or one of the senior fellows of Balliol, was a little concerned cause he'd heard, he wondered if there were any protests outside the lecture hall. (unintelligible) fellow who was a theologian and very much of a dove, but very correct. He certainly didn't want any discourtesy, so that's the way it was handled.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Mmm hmm.

END OF SIDE 2