

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

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Dean Rusk interviewed by Dennis Dean Farney and David Ignatius [*Wall Street Journal* reporters] [note: the reporters were not distinguished by name when the interview was transcribed]

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WALL STREET JOURNAL: The article I have to do is the lead-off one in the series and it will attempt to assess what Vietnam did to America. That's obviously impossibly broad, so I am going to focus on two principal themes. First, what it did to the foreign policy in lead of the country as it existed when the war began. Second, what it did to the military and the way in which those effects can be seen in our foreign policy today. So, in part I'm writing about the Vietnam syndrome and whether this country is over it or not. And I would like to ask you to begin by describing what the foreign policy or establishment looked like to you at the time that you became Secretary of State in 1961. Tell us what that world was like.

DEAN RUSK: When I first joined President Kennedy, I was a part of a generation which had been given pretty heavy responsibilities during and following the war, and therefore had had a good deal of training through experience in international relations--a generation that is now leaving the scene through old age and death. But we belonged to that generation of students who had been led down the path into the catastrophe of World War II, which could have been prevented. There were several stages at which decisive action could have been taken during the 30's which could have prevented the outbreak of World War II to begin with. So that was a very sad story. Many of us were fed to the teeth about that story even though we did our duty in World War II.

Now we came out of World War II thinking that collective security was the key to the prevention of World War III because we had seen the effect upon war and peace of the absence of collective security during the thirties. After all Secretary of State Henry [Lewis] Stimson thought that the Japanese invasion of Manchuria was a very serious matter. He was very anxious to do something about it, but President Hoover pulled on his coattails. So he had to settle with the so-called Stimson Doctrine, that we would not recognize any situation brought about through an illegal use of force. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and the League of Nations was considering sanctions on Italy, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would not even let Cordell Hull make a statement saying that if the League of Nations imposed sanctions upon Italy, we would not frustrate those sanctions by insisting upon our right to trade as a neutral nation. We didn't even let him go that far. So that was a pretty sad story.

Now collective security was written very simply and strongly into Article 1 of the United Nations Charter. You might want to dig it out and read it. And it was reinforced later by NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] across the Atlantic, the Rio Pact in this hemisphere, and certain treaties across the Pacific. Now I think we would have to say that the idea of collective security has been eroding for perhaps two reasons. One is that a new generation is now arriving on the scene that cannot remember the things we remember or take for granted the things we

took for granted when we built the United Nations: the [George Catlett] Marshall Plan, NATO, and things of that sort. So they won't take these answers automatically from an older generation. The second is that the American people have taken something like 600,000 casualties in dead and wounded since the end of World War II in support of collective security, and it has not been very collective. We put up ninety percent of the non-Korean forces in Korea, eighty percent of the non-Vietnamese forces in Vietnam. And so if my cousins here in Cherokee County, Georgia were to say to me, "Look, if collective security means 50,000 American dead every ten years and it is not even collective, it doesn't sound like a very good idea." I have profound respect for that reaction but that still leaves us with the question, if not collective security, how do we propose to prevent World War III? And we are not even discussing that issue.

Now, I have no doubt that the Vietnam experience helped to erode that general support for collective security. We had on our desks every day an analysis of public opinion during the Vietnam affair and this used much more diverse sources than almost anybody else uses. And we had pretty good support at the grass roots for Vietnam despite some of these campus protests and things of that sort until the first half of 1968. It is my own impression that during the first half of 1968, a majority of the Americans at the grass roots finally came to the conclusion that if we could not tell them when this struggle was going to end, we might as well chuck it. But that didn't occur until fairly late in the business.

However, these protests had another effect. I don't want to sound bitter at this point, but in retrospect the North Vietnamese never had any incentive to negotiate on any reasonable basis. Up well into 1966, I think they really thought they could accomplish their purposes by military means. But by 1966 we had established a position out there, a military position, which they could not possibly have overrun, regardless of what they did. But then in late '66, '67, '68 they began to hear all sorts of sounds out of the United States. For example, if we had heard of 50,000 people demonstrating around the headquarters in Hanoi calling for peace, we would have thought the war was over. And we might have been right. Well they could see 50,000 people demonstrating around the Pentagon in Washington and it was very difficult to negotiate with people who are quoting your own senators back at you; some of your own senators, a few of them. So I think there were a good many voices in this country who, whatever the words and whatever the motivations, translated into a message to Hanoi, saying, "Just hang in there fellows and you will get what you want politically even though you cannot win it militarily." I think the North Vietnamese came to that decision, made that judgment. And they proved to be right because in due course both the American people and then after that the American Congress dropped their support for Vietnam. Now, the big question is what effect this is going to have on the entire structure of collective security. And that is something only a new generation can answer for itself. They won't take the answers from old duffers like me. And it is right that they shouldn't because each generation must find its own answer to that question. But this time there is a tremendous difference. Throughout human history it has been possible for the human race to pick itself up out of the death and destruction of war and start over again. We probably won't have that chance after World War III. So at long last the human race has reached the point where it must prevent that war before it occurs. And that is going to take a lot of thought, a lot of doing, maybe some sacrifice. But at least it is going to require some attention to the question.

On a lesser scale you get the same question with regard to NATO. It is ironic these days that when you mention NATO the next word that comes to mind is "disarray" despite the fact that NATO has brilliantly achieved the purpose for which it was organized. No member has been subject to aggression since 1949. But this younger generation cannot escape the question, "If not NATO, then what?" Now NATO did not come down off the mountain in engraved stone. It was created by living, breathing human beings. Maybe there is something better than NATO; if so, let's look for it. But if we look for it and don't find anything that seems better or as good, then maybe that would result in a renewal of attachment and loyalty to NATO. But these are very large questions in which Vietnam played a part. And some of the questions are not being actively discussed and we are not seeking for fresh answers to them.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: At the time that you came into the Kennedy Administration there was a view, a consensus if you will, that did come out of the experience of World War II and the aftermath, and you described the fundamental premise of it. But there were other aspects to it. There was a network of institutions, people in institutions, that gave this world view: people who were exemplars of a kind of organizational enmity which we call the establishment. And I think that's accurate. I think in that time there was an establishment. Do you find anything that has replaced the world view that you described coming out of the second world war, a new way of thinking about it? Then, sir, do you think we are just left with a kind of disorientation?

DEAN RUSK: Well, since we are not engaged in a new great debate on these issues, I don't think there is a broad, new world view emerging in this country. I think the greater danger is that we will simply drift back into, through inattention, drift back into that combination of pacifism and isolationism and indifference which led my generation of students into the catastrophe of World War II. So it is important that these questions be at the front of people's minds. This new generation is not going to buy our answer automatically, but they cannot avoid the questions and they have got to find their own answers to them.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Do you find in talking to students here that they are inclined I'm talking about the more thoughtful ones--Are they inclined to engage in this kind of questioning or is it is something that is almost academic to them?

DEAN RUSK: No, I think they are interested, but the pressures of time upon students these days is such that not very many of them put any systematic amount of time to it. Here and there you will find a few who are working pretty hard on it. But this has to be broadly based. Among other things there should be more of this kind of discussion in the media, and not in the overtones of pessimism. One thing that really bothers me these days is that our young people are being hammered on all sides with all sorts of doomsday talk. They get it from those who are trying to support massive increases in the defense budget. They get it from a lot of those on the other side who are trying to organize various peace movements: doomsday. And it is having an impact. Studies from around the country are showing that. The simple truth is something that you fellows in the media have ignored, and that is that on last August 9, we put behind us thirty-nine years since a nuclear weapon has been fired in anger, despite the many and serious crises we have had since 1945. Now we have learned through that experience that the fingers on the nuclear trigger are not itchy. We have learned that the Soviet leaders have no more interest in destroying Mother Russia than our leaders have in destroying the United States. And I challenge anyone to put their

finger on a real situation in the real world today that is pointing toward nuclear war. Now anybody can throw all sorts of words together and generate the most horrifying scenarios, but I don't see a real situation that is pointing toward nuclear war.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Mr. Rusk, let me ask you a related question. Some of this doomsday talk, if you read through the pages for *Foreign Affairs*, is coming these days from people who were part of the administration you served in and had that same world view. And it's something that I think has struck many analysts of foreign policy as interesting and anomalous. And I wish you would speak to that: not necessarily dealing with individuals, but dealing with members of this post-World War II generation who may have seemed to lose faith with the world view they started with.

DEAN RUSK: Well, some of them-- For example, George [Frost] Kennan has just become very pessimistic and gloomy in his old age and there may be some others. Some of this may be the tendency among a good many people as they get older [to think] that these younger people don't know how to run things: sort of a lack of confidence in the next generation. I am not one of those myself. I think we have a great bunch of young people coming along these days. But I am not sure that their world view has changed to the extent that your question suggests. If we had some more real crises in the areas and on the issues that they have considered vital all along--For example, a serious threat to Western Europe, a real challenge to NATO--things of that sort. Now there are some in this group who never did pay much attention to little brown men, the black men, the yellow people around the world. They were, in effect, interested in the great power relationships in the North Atlantic situation--and Dean [Gooderham] Acheson was one of those--so that problems in other parts of the world don't stir them up to the same degree that problems would if they were right in the heart of the areas which have always been their primary concern. If we had a real crisis as between the Warsaw Pact countries and the NATO countries, I have no doubt all these older people would go right back to their general world view of a generation ago and feel very strongly about it.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: But some of these people can't seem to learn lessons or take lessons from the Vietnam experience which led them to question some of the premises.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think that would have to do with things they would consider to be on the periphery. I don't think their attitudes would apply to issues that are at the heart and core of Western--

WALL STREET JOURNAL: So they remain Atlanticists at heart?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. Now there is another thing here. Here I have a little reservation myself. At the end of World War II, we were the only major power that had come out of the war physically unscarred. We had an extraordinary productive capacity that was rapidly converted to other purposes at the end of the War and we were able to bring together enormous resources with which to bind up the wounds of war and get the world started again, particularly in Western Europe. At that particular time, say during Dean Acheson's time, American leadership was taken for granted, was instantaneous, was automatic, no question about it. But now the Western world has recovered; they are their own nations again. And we have seen an explosion of states

[become] members of the international community of nations. There are now 159 members of the United Nations itself and incidents are going to occur in various parts of the world which are really not our business. And yet a good many people have a habit of thinking that wherever there is a problem, it's our problem. I think that is a mistake. One example fairly close to home: during the sixties the Spanish and the British began quarrelling again about Gibraltar. Each one of them came to us asking us to take their particular view on that issue. And we said to both of them, "Look, you fellows had diplomacy long before the United States was born. We had nothing to do with this one. Now just go away. We are not going to touch it in any way, shape, or form." And both of them went away annoyed with us. One of the principal questions about any question which arises is, "Whose question is it?" And we should not assume that every problem that arises in the world is a problem for the United States. With the communications explosion, and the intense interest of the media, and things of that sort, there is a tendency that somehow we have to deal ourselves in at every table. In a good many of these situations I think we should simply take a few steps backward and not take it on. So in that sense, I tend to sympathize with the tendency of what you call the establishment to concentrate pretty heavily on the vital North Atlantic relationships. Now we are a two-ocean country and we have to be very deeply concerned about what happens in the Pacific, and with Japan, and the People's Republic of China, and things of that sort. But not every little dispute between any two nations somewhere is a matter for us.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Just to follow that up, I have tried to ask everybody that I have talked to, a number of officials, to briefly summarize what they concluded are the lessons of the Vietnam War for them. And I want to ask you to do the same thing.

DEAN RUSK: I am not sure we have time for it. But a primary question has to start with the conclusion of the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] Treaty in the mid-1950s during the Eisenhower-[John Foster] Dulles period. While we were building NATO in the late forties there was considerable interest in the Congress in a NATO in the Pacific. So we looked at that at the staff level in the Truman administration, and with regard to Southeast Asia we decided against it. We thought it would be a mistake for the United States to go in there and ally itself with some, but not all, members of the region, and allow the relation with the United States itself to become a divisive element within Southeast Asia. We thought it would be better to wait until the region developed its own security consciousness as a region and then we could stand in powerful support of the region as a whole.

Well that attitude changed during the Eisenhower administration and we concluded the Southeast Asia Treaty. And that itself was done rather casually. If you look back, there was very little public discussion and very little discussion in the Senate, actually, when we concluded the Southeast Asia Treaty. Well, it becomes a very serious matter for us to enter into a security treaty with anybody because that instantly makes that treaty a part of the structure of collective security in the world. And one of the things that John F. Kennedy had in mind, very much in mind when he made the basic decision to intrude our forces in Vietnam, was concern about what other capitals would think our attitudes toward NATO and the Rio Pact would be if we did not act under the Southeast Asia Treaty. And bear in mind that when he made the decisions to increase our forces in Vietnam, he had very much in mind two terribly important questions. What would have happened had Chairman Khrushchev not believed President Kennedy over the Berlin Crisis of '61-'62. After all, at Vienna in June '61, Khrushchev said, "Now we are going to do the

following. And if the West interferes there is going to be war." Whereupon Kennedy had to say to him, "Then, Mr. Chairman, there is going to be war. It is going to a very cold winter." And the second question, even more important, was what might have happened had Khrushchev not believed President Kennedy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Now there are a good many situations where the reputation of the United States for fidelity to its security commitments is a principal pillar of peace in the world. It's not just a question of empty face, and prestige, and things of that sort. And so the conclusion of the Southeast Asia Treaty linked Vietnam with this general structure of collective security. And that was a very important element in both Kennedy's and Johnson's minds.

Now, there are a good many questions about Vietnam that have to be asked. I'll just mention a few because this could take a book. For example, when Kennedy first decided to put some American armed forces into Vietnam--up to about 18,000 --would it have been better for him to have put in a real stack of blue chips at the very beginning, say 100,000 men? By the gradualness of our response to escalation by the North Vietnamese, we might have always left it open for the North Vietnamese to decide, "Well, maybe if we do more, the Americans won't." And so that is a matter that needs to be given some serious thought. Now if, God forbid, we ever have to face one of these situations again and we decide to go in at the very beginning with a much larger scale of force, then we have to take into account that that may lower the nuclear threshold. So this is not all that easy or simple. Nevertheless, that is one of the facts.

Another question: Were we right in deliberately deciding not to build up a war fever in the United States? You will notice that we didn't have military units parading through cities, and beautiful movie stars out selling war bonds at factories, and things like that. We decided that in a nuclear world it is just too dangerous for an entire people to become infuriated. Now, in effect, therefore, what we were trying to do in Vietnam, we were trying to do in cold blood here at home even though the fellows on the firing line had to do it in hot blood. That makes it very tough: tough on the fellows in uniform, tough on the home front. So that is a subject which needs review.

Another very important question to which I do not pretend to have an answer derives from the fact that the Vietnam struggle was the first war that was fought on television in everybody's living room every day. One can only speculate as to what would have happened in World War II if Guadalcanal, and the Anzio Beachhead, and the Battle of the Bulge were on television here every day and the other side was not doing that. It could have had a profound effect. So again, if the Congress ever has to turn its attention to a situation and the use of armed forces, my guess is that they are going to have to give some thought to what they do about censorship from the very beginning--Again, I don't have any clear answer to it--but at least [to] the kind of censorship we had in World War II. Because war is the principal obscenity on the face of the human race, and it is hideous in any degree. And to have this exposed to everybody on television regularly, daily, hourly, creates some very special problems.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: There were other lessons on your list? Those were all very interesting things.

DEAN RUSK: Well, there is a question which I think needs more attention. No president can pursue a policy of this sort for very long without the understanding and support of the Congress and more broadly, the American people. Now toward the end of the Vietnam War, Congress tried to get out from under it in various ways. It rescinded the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. That was after I left office--1971, I think. They passed the War Powers Act over the President's veto. But if you ask the question, "What did the President and the Executive Branch of the government have the right to believe was the view of the Congress as a corporate body on Vietnam at all stages?" you would get some surprising results. My friend Barry [Morris] Goldwater, with whom I disagree on some questions, speaks forthrightly on these matters. I think it was about 1973 [when] he got fed up with all this whining around the Congress. And he got up on the Senate floor and made a speech in which he spelled out the involvement of the Congress in Vietnam at every stage, citing chapter and verse. Now after all, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed with only two dissenting votes in the entire Congress. In 1966 Senator [Wayne Lyman] Morse put in a motion to rescind the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. On a motion to table it, he only had a total of five senators supporting his view of the matter. Now, we did consider asking the Congress for a fresh vote every year on Vietnam along the lines of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, but the Congressional leaders told Lyndon Johnson that he should not do that--he should not ask for a fresh vote--because he would get his favorable vote but with a reduced majority, and therefore, he should live with the resolution he already had. My guess is that probably was a mistake. We should have held to the fire the feet of Congress to this matter every year so that we could have a stronger sense of confidence that we knew what the views of the Congress were on this matter. But you see, sometimes people forget that the powers of Congress are given to the Congress as a corporate body and that although a [James William] Bill Fulbright, or a Frank [Forrester] Church, or a Wayne Morse, or whoever else might be speaking out and raising all sorts of hell, what is important is the view of the Congress. And if you look at the question as to what the corporate views of the Congress were on this matter throughout, you would get quite a different impression.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: I want to get back to this central question. Suppose we had won. Would the talk about the erosion of the belief of collective security, would that not be the problem today that it is?

DEAN RUSK: Well, had we won, and I mean by that denied the North Vietnamese a chance to overrun South Vietnam by force, in effect we would have restored the status quo ante. I would suppose that had we succeeded in our mission out there, that Vietnam would still be divided along the lines of the two Koreas and the two Germanys. Cambodia would probably still be under the rule of Prince [Norodom] Sihanouk, who, however unpredictable and strange he was, had a deep concern for the Cambodian people. Laos might have been under considerable communist domination unless some special arrangements were made at the time of any Vietnam settlement. But in their own Laotian kind of way, they are kind of muddling along. Thailand would have probably been pretty much the same. We would not have had the hundreds of thousands of refugees out of Vietnam and Cambodia to cope with. And we would not have had, I think, to the same extent, the erosion in the idea of collective security. And I think also that that North Vietnam that would have survived would not have been such an active point of controversy between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. So, I think the situation would have been reasonably stable. And although the American people would be

licking their wounds, as we did after Korea, I think we would have recovered from the experience much more rapidly than in fact we did. After all, at the time of Korea everybody said, "No more Koreas."

WALL STREET JOURNAL: The point of view of the devil's advocate and pure counterargument to what you just said, I guess, is that the dominos haven't fallen. In some ways Thailand perhaps is stronger today than it would have been had we prevailed. And they were counting solely on us. Europe probably is happy that we got out of Vietnam and once again focused on NATO, and that the whole bottom then would be that the whole question of resolve that we thought was so important then has turned out not to be so important after all. We lost, but people still--

DEAN RUSK: Well after all, certain dominos have fallen. Ho Chi Minh used to make it clear that he not only wanted to reunify Vietnam under his control, but he also wanted to have Laos and Cambodia under his control: all of what used to be French Indochina. Now Laos and Cambodia are under Vietnam control for all practical purposes and the Laotians are not Vietnamese, the Cambodians are not Vietnamese. So, Vietnam now emerges as one of the, perhaps the, strongest military powers anywhere around Southeast Asia. So we don't know yet what the future will hold about a country like Thailand, whether there will be other problems. I think the formation and steady increase in solidarity among the ASEAN nations-- Association of Southeast Asian Nations--has been a plus in this period; and that has helped. But the more important question is whether Vietnam has so infected our own and other political systems that this "no more Vietnam" kind of thing has created some paranoia about problems that might arise in other parts of the world, including Central America and all the way around to the Middle East. So potentiality is serious, even though we haven't seen them completely unfold. And it may be that they won't unfold in a way that theoretically they might.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: You are inclined to believe that the "no more Vietnam" syndrome has infected us to some degree.

DEAN RUSK: Well, let's take a look at Nicaragua and El Salvador. There the administration faces a real problem of credibility as to the facts. They have not made a strong factual case as to what Nicaragua and Cuba are actually doing in El Salvador. I am told by some in the administration that one of the reasons is that to do so would compromise some of our intelligence sources. We had a similar problem of credibility beginning in the Cuban Missile Crisis until we decided to make public the actual air photographs of the missile sites in Cuba, and that problem of credibility disappeared. At that time there were some in the intelligence community who were opposed to making these air photos public, but Kennedy simply took the view that this other problem was overriding; so we made them public. It may be that the administration is going to have to brush aside some of these intelligence nuts and establish a stronger base, factual base, for what they allege Nicaragua has been doing in El Salvador.

Now, if it is true that Nicaragua and Cuba are in fact sending arms and men into El Salvador, then it is clearly prohibited conduct under international law, under the Rio Treaty, under the charter of the Organization of American States. And that kind of aggressive conduct triggers El Salvador's right of self-defense. And in exercising its self-defense, El Salvador has a right to call

upon anybody else who is willing to help them in that self-defense. That also deprives Nicaragua of the right to claim that its own territory must be a sanctuary while it is carrying on such depredations against its neighbors. And so a great deal turns upon this factual case from which one starts, you see. But the infection of the Vietnam syndrome has been pretty severe and although the circumstances are very different indeed from almost every point of view, the "no more Vietnam" attitude toward the Nicaraguan-El Salvador affair has made its impact, clearly. I have had a lot of telephone calls asking me about this comparison, so it's there.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: How much damage has been done to the confidence that other nations have in the predictability of America, American response? I mean that was what we talked about at the beginning of this conversation.

DEAN RUSK: I would prefer you not put this in my own mouth because I won't mention an individual, and I determined long ago never to write memoirs. You stand back at it and look at it: The great United States of America went half way around the world, took 50,000 dead, 200,000 casualties and wounded, to make good on its promise under the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] Treaty "to take steps to meet the common danger" if those protected by the Treaty were endangered. Now, De Gaulle gave us hell over Vietnam but had we done nothing under the Treaty as France did, and Britain did, and Pakistan did, [Charles Andre Joseph Mario] de Gaulle would have been one of the first to shrug his shoulders and say to his colleagues in Europe, "You see, you cannot rely upon the Americans under a treaty." And people still have to bear in mind, including people in Moscow, that if they are thinking about some fresh adventures, one question they have got to think in their mind is the possibility that those damn fool Americans just might do something about it. If that is translated into a conviction in their minds that we would not do anything about it, then hold your hats, you are off to the races again.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: You don't feel it has gone that far?

DEAN RUSK: No, because even though the result was not favorable from our point of view, the effort that was made has to be taken into account by other capitals.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: You spoke of the Acheson generation with their orientation toward Europe, and Europeans certainly have an orientation toward Europe. Would you agree that probably from a European standpoint this was, on balance, a happy outcome in that we are out of Vietnam?

DEAN RUSK: I think the end of the war itself was a relief to our friends in Europe. But I think they would have been pleased to have seen it come out more favorably from the United States point of view because there were a good many western interests there in the kind of world out there that would have existed had we succeeded in reestablishing the status quo ante.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: We talked about whether a new consensus is emerging. I guess we are speaking more among democratic thinkers. But do you see the Reagan administration as forging a new consensus on foreign policy and the use of force, or are they simply getting by?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it is a little hard to say because I don't want to sound too partisan. Mr. Reagan was not my candidate, but he is my President and I wish him well in his foreign policy. We are all in this canoe together and we'll come through these turbulent waters together or go down together. No one can have an interest in the failure of his President in foreign policy. But I don't have the impression that he himself has personally dug deeply into these matters and is taking charge of his own administration. And so you get some erratic views now and again out of the administration that makes it a little difficult to give that solid bipartisan support that our foreign policy generally has had in this postwar period. And there are certain issues like this Star Wars proposal which will split the Congress right down the middle and will be a very decisive matter within this country. And whether it will be possible to shake Mr. Reagan off of that, I don't know. Or whether we can get any agreement with the Soviet Union about arms in space, I don't know. But we certainly ought to make the effort for reasons that have been eloquently set forth by a lot of people.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: If we had won, do you think our relations with China would be as far along as they are? Would that be a big irritant?

DEAN RUSK: No, I think that the Chinese, now in retrospect, would have hoped that we had won.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Because Vietnam it is their traditional enemy?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. But--No, you see it probably took a Republican President to go to Peking. Had a Democrat President gone to Peking, the Republicans would have cut him to pieces, including, I suspect, Mr. Nixon. It is a little bit like it taking a Charles de Gaulle to get France out of Algeria. No, I think that has been a long time coming. During all those years when we supported the Chinese government on Taiwan, they imposed upon us an impossible burden; and that is their myth that they were the government of all China, and that they were going to get back to the Mainland, and so forth. And on that point we steadily lost support, including the support of every member of NATO except ourselves, when it came to a crucial vote in the United Nations. As late as the middle sixties, there could have been strong international support for a two-China policy, but that was the one thing that both Chinas strongly rejected. And so I supported Mr. Nixon's visit to China and the normalization of relations with the People's Republic, because at some point it had to come. As Napoleon said, "Let China sleep. For when she awakens the world will tremble."

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Mr. Rusk, I just wanted to ask about something. You have spoken about the structure of collective security, the treaties that need to fulfill treaty responsibilities, and spoken of collective security approach as one that people today should pay more attention to or should at least deal with. Yet you also said that, in talking about the lessons, that maybe we shouldn't go chasing every fire in town. I forget exactly what your words were, but the idea was that maybe out in the periphery away from the heart of our alliances that we didn't have to be quite so careful in protecting the structure of collective security; we should disengage from it some. And I just wanted to ask, which is it, in the end, that you think?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think it should be pointed out that the general concept of collective security that is found in the United Nations Charter does not mean that the United States is the world's policeman. Now, we have undertaken some specific responsibilities with regard to collective security through various treaties. And I think, myself, we should take those very seriously. But that does not mean that we are responsible for whatever happens anywhere in the world. The Security Council of the United Nations is, and over time the Security Council has, weakened in its primary responsibility which is the maintenance of international peace and security in the world. Here is a war going on between Iraq and Iran. [The] Security Council ought to be meeting at least once a week on that subject, but it doesn't do it. I think the Security Council should somehow come back to its primary Charter responsibilities and really work at these things much more than it has done. Now there may be a good many things which it can't resolve but it might be the focus for turning up some ideas which can get things started, or give the Secretary General a role as a mediator, and things like that. And there have been a number of places where the Security Council has been useful in peacekeeping forces and things of that sort. But, no, I don't think that the notion of collective security for the world as a whole means that the United States carries the burden everywhere. We can be more selective than that, as we have with our treaties. And I am very strongly of the view that we should not enter into a security treaty without a full recognition of its consequences and without a full determination on our part to take it seriously. Otherwise, we weaken the entire structure of our mutual security treaties. So I am not in favor of broadening the scope of our treaties. But I hope we could invigorate international organizations to be much more active than they have been in recent years in at least worrying about these situations of violence, whether it is in the Chad, or whether it's Iran and Iraq, or whatever it might be. The Security Council ought to be a very hardworking institution. Now, there is one thing that has made a difference here. I mentioned all these newly independent nations that have come into the U.N. Most of them don't--Well they don't remember the things we remember or take for granted the things we took for granted. They weren't there when the Charter was drafted. And many of these Third World countries simply do not address themselves to these broader issues of war and peace. They will only speak out on those things that affect them directly and that may have weakened the ability of the United Nations Security Council to take up some of these issues and work at them. You see, back in the days of Dag [Hjalmar Agne Carl] Hammarskjold, his coffee table was a famous institution. If two nations got into a dispute, he would get the representatives of those nations in there at his coffee table and he would sweat with them, and scold them, and press them, and induce them, and try to work out some solution. And sometimes he would get the two nations there at his coffee table at the same time, and he worked at it. You don't have that kind of activity today. So we do need some rethinking, not just in this country or in Western Europe, but we really need to rethink the structure world society as a whole.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: May I ask whether it's painful or difficult for you to talk about Vietnam or reflect on that?

DEAN RUSK: No. I have been offered several opportunities to present a mea culpa on Vietnam. I have never done so. But there is nothing that I can say now which would diminish in any way my share of responsibility for the events of those days. I thought that the principle decisions made by President Kennedy and President Johnson were right at the time. They are not here to speak for themselves and so I will just live with it. I do hope that the events of the next twenty

years or so will be so positive and constructive in the direction of a durable peace in the world that future historians will be tempted to say that President Kennedy and President Johnson and those fellows [Dean] Rusk and [Robert Strange] McNamara overdid it--that what they did was not necessary after all. No one, at the risk of sounding a little corny, no one could possibly want the justification that would come from a few miserable survivors looking at each other saying, "Gee, those fellows were right." Now, I do think that the universities, the public, the war colleges, State Department, Defense Department should look at a lot of these questions that arise from the Vietnam experience and give some serious thought to them because it might have a considerable bearing on how we think about problems that might arise in the future.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: You are obviously concerned that not much thinking is going on at a number of levels or at--

DEAN RUSK: I don't see much thinking going on in the central question, "If not collective security, how do we propose to prevent World War III?" And to me that is the fundamental question for all of mankind.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: And the fact that we are sort of drifting--This is one of the legacies, you think, of the defeat in Vietnam? I mean that's sort of--

DEAN RUSK: And the absence of a fresh answer to this question of collective security: either a new idea or ideas or a rededication to collective security. Because we simply cannot avoid the question.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: If we had won, do you think we would have freed up energies to address this question?

DEAN RUSK: It's possible but I just don't know how that would have worked. You see a good deal of this turns on politicians of the day, the way the news media treats these questions, what issues the news media address themselves to.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: David asked you about your personal feelings. In retrospect, do you run into or see often some of your old antagonists on the other side, like Senator Fulbright?

DEAN RUSK: Oh yes, during those days we remained personal friends.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: I interviewed him in here a few days ago, and I was just curious.

DEAN RUSK: He and I could make some snippy remarks about each other but--

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Have you taken part in great symposia on this sort of thing--great debates? I'm sure you must have been in one or two.

DEAN RUSK: A number of times. The former Secretaries of State have met twice now in Atlanta.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: I saw that on TV. That was so good.

DEAN RUSK: Once last year and then we met again in November after the election this year. They are making another TV show on this year's discussion.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Will that be broadcast?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. But we met for a day and a half and had some very good discussion and they made one TV program out of it for Public Broadcasting.

[break in recording]

DEAN RUSK: [Most people are] --aware of the sad stories of the thirties which had so much to do with producing World War II. But most people have forgotten what happened just after V-J Day. We demobilized almost completely and almost overnight. By the summer of 1946 we did not have a single division in our Army nor a single group in our Air Force that could be considered ready for combat. The ships of our Navy were being put into mothballs as fast as we could find berths for them and those that remained afloat were being manned by skeleton crews. Our defense budget for three fiscal years, '47, '48, '49, came down to a little over \$11 billion. We were disarmed. Now Joseph Stalin sat over there and looked out across the West and saw all the divisions melting away so what did he do? He tried to keep the northwest province of Iran, the first case before the U.N. Security Council. He demanded two eastern provinces of Turkey, Kars and Ardahan. He brushed aside some of our wartime agreements about giving the peoples of Eastern Europe some say in their political future. He had a hand in the communist coup d'etat in Czechoslovakia. He supported the guerrillas going after Greece. He blockaded Berlin, gave the green light to the North Koreans to go after South Korea. Now this was a period when we were disarmed. It was not until 1950 we began to build up our armed forces in any significant way. So the revisionist historians can write until all the ink runs dry, but those were the events that started the Cold War. We were disarmed. Now, I think we might have contributed to those events for a different reason. I think we probably exposed Joseph Stalin to intolerable temptations through our own weakness. And so we have to be careful about that, and democracies have a special problem in that regard. Ordinary people in every country--Soviet Union, China, all the West--don't want war. They want peace.

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

DEAN RUSK: So I think we exposed Joseph Stalin to intolerable temptations through our own weakness and that is something we should not forget too lightly. But that does not mean the necessity for this insane race in weaponry. And we really ought to see what we can do toward

putting some limits on the arms race and if that works for a while, use the same kind of approach and bring about some real reductions. But it's a long story.

[break in recording]

WALL STREET JOURNAL: One obvious question I should have asked you. I asked this question of "What if we had won?" as if it were a totally hypothetical question. But that assumes that the thing was not winnable. Do you feel that it was winnable and was there a point when you decided that it wasn't winnable?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think I personally made two mistakes of judgment. One is, I think I underestimated the tenacity of the North Vietnamese. They took incredible casualties and still stayed with it. And I think I overestimated the patience of the American people. The American people are very impatient about war, thank God. And I think that the combination of these two, plus the encouragement that the north Vietnam got from important people in our own society, caused them simply to stick it out under incredible difficulties in order to win politically what they could not win militarily.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Given all that, was it ever winnable? I mean was it ever in--

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think the answer to that is yes, if we had been able to maintain greater solidarity on the home front here. After all, go back to March 1942, three months after Pearl Harbor. You are too young to remember. Suppose Franklin Roosevelt had gone on nationwide radio hook-up for one of his fireside chats and said the following: "My fellow Americans, I have some very serious things to say to you. Hitler's armies are smashing at the gates of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. Rommel is rushing through North Africa toward Cairo. Our intelligence people tell me," as they were at that time, "that Russia will be knocked out of the war in the course of the next six to eight weeks. We cannot build up our own armed forces except at a snail's pace because we simply don't have the arms and equipment for them. The Japanese have just destroyed the heart of our fleet at Pearl Harbor and they are rushing through Asia and we see no way to stop them. The jig is up." Now had he said that, measured by certain present-day standards of something called "credibility," he would have been telling "the truth." But had he said it, he would have been telling a profound lie because he, and Churchill, and Joseph Stalin, and millions of us built upon confidence, and hope, and necessity, and we defeated the Axis powers. Now, I can remember when the Allied forces in Korea were pinned down in that very small perimeter around Pusan at the southern tip of the peninsula. The Berlin Blockade was lifted by negotiation. The Korean War was halted by negotiation, pretty much on the basis of the status quo ante. I, myself, was hoping that at some point the North Vietnamese would realize that they could not overrun South Vietnam militarily, and therefore we would find some way to bring it to an end, more or less along the basis of the status quo ante. Again, they were encouraged to stick it out, and they got eventually what they wanted.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: This sort of implies that if it was winnable it would have to be fairly early: '66, '67?

DEAN RUSK: Well, when they reached the point in Hanoi of deciding that they could win it politically, then they were not going to come to the conference table in any real sense. The final agreements that Henry Kissinger worked out with them, were agreements that probably could have been worked out some years before and with the same results. The North Vietnamese always seemed to think that their problem was to find a face-saving formula by which we would get out and turn it over to them. We weren't trying to save face, we were trying to save Vietnam and we did not succeed. But I am convinced in my own mind that our fellows in uniform carried out the mission for which they were there. And it was not until they began to be pulled out and congressional support for South Vietnam slowed down to a trickle that the North Vietnamese got what they wanted. But you see, I personally deeply regret every casualty on every side of every war fought in my lifetime, and that begins with World War I. The problem is not just wanting peace and hoping for it. The problem is how to build it. And that is a much more complex problem. And if people don't like the answer we found at the end of World War II, they should look for another answer.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Well, that pretty much exhausts my supply of "what if" questions.

DEAN RUSK: One thing that is of pretty great importance and that is Kennedy's keen awareness of the importance of the question--I have mentioned this before--as to what would have happened had Khrushchev not believed him during the Berlin Crisis of '61-'62 and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: At that time Kennedy couldn't be, could he, certain that Khrushchev would believe him?

DEAN RUSK: No, you can never be certain about how any living, breathing human being will react to the circumstances in which he finds himself. For example, we did not think that Khrushchev would launch a nuclear war over Cuba, but we could not know it for certain. And therefore, we had to take that into account. So that means that some of these things get pretty edgy.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Looking back, wasn't Kennedy's concern in that regard excessive? Looking back, knowing what we now know about the relative strikes in the U.S., the Soviet Union, it seems bizarre that Kennedy was so concerned about his own credibility and that of the United States when it really wasn't in question.

DEAN RUSK: When a serious crisis is resolved without force, without a blow up, it is always easy to ask, "Was that trip necessary?" At the time we thought that the presence in Cuba of several hundred Russian missiles posed a major threat, both militarily and politically. From a military point of view they would be in position to knock out SAC [Strategic Air Command] installations with almost no advance warning. From a political point of view we thought that the result would be complete dismay and disarray both in the Western Hemisphere and in NATO Europe. And so the stakes appeared to be extraordinarily large.

Now in retrospect either one of those considerations could recede somewhat because now the Russians have submarines in the Atlantic that can lob these short warning time weapons at us. So

one can reduce the sense of the dangers involved in retrospect which were not there in the minds of the people who were having to deal with the problem. But I think both we and the Russians came out of the missile crisis somewhat more prudent and with a recognition that we should try to avoid such crises because they are just too utterly dangerous. But how long that impression will sustain itself as it passes from hand to hand, from one leader to another on both sides, is still a question and we will have to be careful about it.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: I'd like to ask just one more question. One of the interviews for this project--also on the record, so I don't think it's improper to refer to it--[Zbigniew] Brzezinski laid out an argument that he has made fairly often, both in private and in public, which is as follows: the Vietnam War broke the morale of the American foreign policy establishment. It made them doubt the rightness of their own mission to the point that they had to eventually go to foreign born Americans like me and Henry Kissinger to implement their policies because they lacked the resolve. Now I suspect he would exempt Dean Rusk from this wholesale criticism of the establishment, but I just would like to ask your judgment about this. Do you think that the establishment was demoralized by the--

DEAN RUSK: No, no. Some of them changed their minds about Vietnam in the first half of 1968, but those are not people who get demoralized by something like this. And they are certainly not people who resign from the field to the extent that we have to call on a Polish and German refugee to be Secretary of State or to be National Security Adviser. That's about the biggest bunch of nonsense I ever heard in my life. Brzezinski was in my Policy Planning Staff during my years in the State Department. There were times when I had to pinch myself to ask whether I was listening to an officer of the Department of State or to a Polish refugee. His glandular reactions are those of a Pole and one had to watch that. Some people watched it and some people didn't. No, there is just nothing to that at all. After all [Cyrus Roberts] Cy Vance was Jimmy Carter's Secretary of State, now Brzezinski didn't like him very much.

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Well, for this reason he would argue that. I think to Brzezinski - he said this in his memoirs--to Brzezinski, Vance represented the demoralized and weak, and we needed the rough, human Polish refugee to stand up for America.

DEAN RUSK: Well, you have started a new line of [country?] here. (laughter)

END OF SIDE 2