

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
Rusk WWW: Part 1 of 2
Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas J. Schoenbaum
1985 May

The complete interview also includes Rusk XXX: Part 2.

RICHARD RUSK: This is May 1985 and we're interviewing Dean Rusk on the Middle East and the Six Day War, beginning with the Suez Crisis of 1956 and his years as Secretary of State. Tom Schoenbaum and Rich are doing the interviewing.

SCHOENBAUM: The first part of this interview was about a month earlier. The first question, just one question on Suez. Let me resume basically what happened. In 1956 Egypt seized in full the Suez Canal, excluding Israeli ships. On October 23rd, there was a joint command formed of Jordan, UAR [United Arab Republic], and Syria. There were various raids into Israel and a buildup, but Israel struck first against the Arabs, and struck successfully against the Arabs. Great Britain and France gave the fighting parties an ultimatum to stop. Israel agreed and the Arabs said no. Great Britain and France intervened. Later on, Great Britain and France were humiliated when the U.S. [United States] and the U.S.S.R. [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], using the Uniting for Peace Resolution of the U.N [United Nations] Assembly, basically compelled Britain and France to cease their intervention and required the parties to disengage, and U.N. forces were stationed on the border. At that time, [Dwight David] Eisenhower made some statements that Dean [Gooderham] Acheson voiced disapproval of. He said that there was no right of self-defense on Israel's part as a result of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, and that basically Israel, Great Britain, and France were acting illegally and they had no right to engage in military action. This whole action also exposed certain weaknesses in NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the United Nations. Although you, Mr. Rusk, were not, of course, involved in the decision making, you must have kept close contact. What was your reaction to Acheson's criticism of Eisenhower and Eisenhower's conduct during that time?

DEAN RUSK: I think Acheson was a man who would instinctively support Britain and France as our North Atlantic Allies. He was upset. My impression of that whole episode was that Britain and France, at some point, refused to keep in close touch with the U.S. government, they did not take Washington fully into the proceedings, and that the actual invasion by Britain and France, more or less caught Eisenhower by surprise. And this rather angered Eisenhower because he and John Foster Dulles had been very busy working on this Suez problem at the time. The element of surprise caught Eisenhower flat-footed. Added to that was, the judgment I would make, that Britain and France did not present a theory of the case which people could support. They did not come up with a strong case rooted in international law around which people could rally. Now, looking back on it, it seems to me that if Britain and France had come to the United States and said to Eisenhower and Dulles, "Now, we're not consulting you and asking for your agreement, we're simply telling you what we think we have to do. Now, let's put our heads together and see if we can work out a theory of the case on which we can get strong international support." They did not even give Washington that chance. There were a number of factors in it. This is

something that is nowhere on the public record. I visited John Foster Dulles about ten days before his death in the hospital. He knew at that time that he was dying and we talked about his papers and various things that had been on his mind. At one point he said, "You know Dean, I would not have made certain decisions that I made about Suez had I not been sick at the time." Well, he didn't elaborate, and under those circumstances I was not going to say, "Well, gee Foster, which ones were those?" because here was a dying man. But I have always been intrigued by that remark. Indeed, I went back to the Rockefeller Foundation and we gave some thought as to how we could study the connection between ill health and top responsibility among high officials, study that connection. After all, there was [Thomas] Woodrow Wilson, and maybe Adolf Hitler would have fallen into that category. There was [Winston Leonard Spencer] Churchill, [Robert] Anthony Eden, [John] Foster Dulles, Eisenhower, and others. And we got a group together to see if this factor could be studied. And the group looked at it pretty carefully and decided that there was no way to single out that element of health from all the other factors going into decisions, and therefore any such study would be speculation. It would not be worthwhile.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you keep notes of the--or did you produce anything at all from those discussions within the foundation?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know whether any pieces of paper--probably not.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you remember who was involved in that?

DEAN RUSK: No, I forget the details now. But anyhow, it is just possible that John Foster Dulles' aching gut might have had something to do with the way we acted in that situation.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you think he regretted--He must have regretted the weakening of the NATO Alliance?

DEAN RUSK: Well you see, Foster Dulles had a problem that I'm not sure he himself was fully aware of. All but about nine of our Secretaries of State have been lawyers, out of the sixty. Now, the lawyer trained in the Anglo-American system is used to the adversary system. An American lawyer will leave it up to the lawyer on the other side to take care of himself in regard to the fine print. Now, Dulles was very adept at working out various formulae to try to bridge over a problem and find some subtle way out of it. But he had been a long time corporate lawyer at Wall Street and he more or less left it up to the other side to understand the fine print and take care of their own interest. Well, in diplomacy you have got to be very sure that the other side understands the fine print exactly as you do, otherwise there is no meeting of the minds. So that led to a few cases where John Foster Dulles was accused of deviousness, a trickery of some sort, and that fouled up his relations with Anthony Eden. And I think Foster Dulles never bridged that gap completely between the common law adversary system and the need of the diplomat to guarantee a meeting of the minds.

SCHOENBAUM: So he should have--you think what he regretted is not making an approach to Britain and France in that situation?

DEAN RUSK: No, I think there developed a lack of trust between Anthony Eden and John Foster Dulles. It had a bearing on the attitude in London and Paris as to whether they would take us into their confidence.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you ever talk to Eden?

DEAN RUSK: No, never did. You see, one example--and I think you should be a little careful about this because one of the principals is still alive. Anthony Eden was in Washington on a visit and we were coming upon the Japanese Peace Treaty, and John Foster Dulles had worked out a letter from Prime Minister [Shigeru] Yoshida stating that he would--that the independent Japan would recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan, rather than the People's Republic of China. Well, one night Foster Dulles went over this letter with Sir Oliver [Shewell] Franks, the able and distinguished British ambassador. Then we met the next morning with Anthony Eden, and we on the American side just assumed, took for granted that Anthony Eden knew about this Yoshida letter. But when Anthony Eden got back to England from that trip, he apparently first heard of the Yoshida letter in the newspapers, and he was furious at Dulles for not having told him. What happened apparently was that Sir Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador, did not report to Eden on that Yoshida letter. But that was an incident where Dulles got the reputation for deviousness, which he had not earned, because we had in fact gone over this letter with the British ambassador.

SCHOENBAUM: Were you called at all for your advice on Suez?

DEAN RUSK: No.

SCHOENBAUM: Is there anything else you wanted to say on Suez before we go to--

DEAN RUSK: I don't think so.

SCHOENBAUM: Then turning to the period--

RICHARD RUSK: There is one follow up--did Suez ever enter into any of the considerations that were faced, at least with policy?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was [sic] strained relations between London and Washington and Paris and Washington for a time after Suez, but that had pretty well worn off by the time the Kennedy administration came in. At least London and Paris did not hold the Kennedy administration responsible for whatever irritations there might have been over Suez.

SCHOENBAUM: Moving on to the Kennedy administration. There were some new--at least the perception is that there were some new departures with respect to the Near East Policy shortly after Kennedy took office. One of those was that in 1962, the commentators say, a new era began with Israel, with the sale of Hawk missiles to Israel at that time: the first significant advance weapon purchase that the U.S. allowed Israel. Also, there were some decisions to try to open a dialogue with [Gamal Abdel] Nasser's Egypt. These seem to be two twin prongs of Kennedy policy on the Middle East. What was your role in these two decisions?

DEAN RUSK: Well first, we felt that Israel ought to be strong enough to fend off an attack from the Arabs, who had never accepted the very existence of the State of Israel, and that deterrence of an Arab attack was a very important thing. There is another reason why we gave strong political support to Israel. That is that if we appeared to be weakening in our support for Israel then the Arab price would go up. They would take advantage of that, and unless there was assured U.S. support of Israel the Arabs would demand the very extinction of the State of Israel, going back to the bitter feelings of 1948. But we never gave Israel all that Israel wanted by any means. We felt that Israel had a military superiority over its neighbors, and our Joint Chiefs were of that view, and therefore we did not want to help build Israel up into the kind of an armed camp that would threaten the entire area. Another thing that was involved here, the Arab side expressed to us continuously their fear of Israeli territorial expansion. And with a full knowledge of successive governments in Israel, we did our best to persuade the Arabs that their fear of Israeli territorial ambitions was illusory. There was nothing in it. This was not true. This came to be a rather bitter point later on because after the June War, I reminded Abba Eban of this and he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, we've changed our minds." And by that one remark, he turned us into a twenty-year liar, because for twenty years we had been trying to persuade the Arabs that they need not fear Israeli territorial expansion.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, can you set the circumstances of that remark?

DEAN RUSK: That was in the late summer of 1967 following the Six Day War.

RICHARD RUSK: In Washington?

DEAN RUSK: In Washington, yes. Now, the other point you raised was, the Nasser side--Well, when President Kennedy took office we deliberately tried to improve relations with Nasser in Egypt, [Ahmed] Ben Bella in Algeria, [Kwame] Nkrumah in Ghana, [Achmed] Sukarno in Indonesia, and some others, Sekou Toure in Guinea. We made a real effort because we felt that wherever there was country which was secure, independent, concerned about the needs of its own people, reasonably cooperative in world affairs in places like the United Nations, that there was a situation in the interest of the United States, that we didn't need a world filled with allies. We could live with neutrality on the part of most of these smaller countries. Well, we didn't succeed because some of these fellows just turned out to be rascals. But in the case of Nasser, we made what, for us, was a major effort. I remember we had a three year, several hundred million dollar food aid program for Egypt during the Kennedy years. At one point, I remember, we--I was told that we were feeding forty percent of the Egyptian people during that period. Now, we didn't want Nasser to get up before those big crowds and bow and scrape and lick our boots and say, thank you, thank you, but he wouldn't even be silent about it. He would get up before those big crowds and get carried away and blast us right off the face of the earth. He would shout such things as, "Throw your aid into the Red Sea." And he did this so much that he persuaded Congress to do just that. And our food aid program came to an end. So, our interest in improving relations with Nasser came not just from a Middle East policy, but from a general attitude from the Third World. Now, I have to say that when you had a private talk with Nasser, either through our ambassador or with private citizens who might be going by, such as John J. McCloy or Eugene [Robert] Black and people like that, you'd find yourself talking to a reasonable man.

Well, then when he would get up in front of those crowds he would lose his head and would say the most outrageous things, swept by the emotions of the crowd. So, he was a pretty difficult fellow to deal with.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you ever meet or deal with him?

DEAN RUSK: I never met him personally.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you travel to the Near East at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Let's see, while I was Secretary I went to Turkey, stopped briefly once in Saudi Arabia, but I didn't really visit the principal Middle Eastern countries.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, did John Kennedy agree with your concept that neutrality was, I guess, maybe something in our interest?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, that was very much in line with his own thinking.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you encounter any real pocket of resistance to that, either then or--

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was some who were worried about the impact of this approach upon our allies. For example, an even-handed policy between India and Pakistan very much annoyed Pakistan, who was a member of the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization]--not a very good member, but they were members. So a few of our so-called allies rather resented this approach to the Third World because they wanted to play upon the Alliance for special considerations and special favors to them as allies over against these neutrals, you see.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you encounter any resistance within the American domestic--

DEAN RUSK: I don't remember any particular resistance on that.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you remember your specific role. Do you remember any meetings where you and Kennedy discussed this? This was definitely a new initiative; there must have been some discussion.

DEAN RUSK: By and large, during the Kennedy Administration, the relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors were relatively quiet compared to other periods. We weren't looking for trouble. We did not go out there with an American peace plan, for example, try and sell it to all sides, and get ourselves kicked in the shanks by both sides. I had a good deal of experience with that in earlier years. But it was relatively quiet up until the months just preceding the June '67 War. Now, we always had a money debate with the Israelis, at least every second year, meaning an American election year. Their price would go up and we had to bargain with them pretty hard at times on their demands, because they simply looked upon us as having the residual responsibility for whatever Israel needed. So the pressure on that was pretty hard at times.

SCHOENBAUM: In April of 1962, the U.S. voted in the U.N. Security Council to condemn

Israel because of a retaliatory raid against Syria. A book that I was reading on the Middle East says that you, [Adlai Ewing] Stevenson, and [McGeorge] Bundy convinced JEK to cast this vote. Is that true?

DEAN RUSK: It may well have been true. Certainly we recommended it, but that was because the Israeli retaliation was so disproportionate to the original offense against which they retaliated. We felt that that was a way to start things down the road to a general war out there. You see, Israel by and large has not consulted the United States very much on questions of Israeli policy. They seem to have thought, maybe still think so, that they can go their own way and whatever they do, somehow, at the end of the day, the United States is going to follow along. They were relying too heavily on the maybe pro-Israeli lobbying in the United States.

SCHOENBAUM: At one point that leads us into another question. Didn't we move... is it too strong to say that, especially under LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson], growing out of the first Kennedy decision to sell Hawk missiles, then there was a very interesting LBJ treatment to [Ludwig] Erhard to get Erhard to deliver German tanks to Israel? And then when that was discovered and there was a furor, then we sold Patton tanks and Sky hawks to Israel. Was this not a move toward an informal alliance with Israel?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I have never used the word alliance as a kind of figure of speech as far as Israel is concerned. Every President, beginning with Harry Truman, has affirmed our support for the independence and territorial integrity of Israel, and it's clear that those affirmations have had full support in the Congress. But an alliance comes about through a Treaty of Alliance and it is my impression that the Israelis have never been much interested in a Treaty of Alliance because that would imply an obligation upon Israel to try to coordinate its policy with us. I think they rather--that they were willing to gamble on their doing it their own way, and that we, of necessity, would have to follow along. Now later we discovered during the Begin period that that was simply not true, and that those Israelis and supporters of Israel in this country who thought that the United States was a satellite of Israel were bound to be disappointed. (unintelligible) mentioned in passing--that is that every President and every Secretary of State, beginning with Truman, have dreaded a great debate in this country on the issue of as to whether the U.S. is a satellite of Israel. They've done so because they've known that in such a debate all sorts of mean, dirty things would come out from under the rocks that ought to be left lying there: anti-Semitism. And it would be a very ugly and divisive debate. And so the United States government has shown, at least publicly, a fair amount of patience with Israel, at times when behind the scenes we were objecting to them very strongly because we did not want this to become an eye-gouging debate here in the U.S.

RICHARD RUSK: That potential is always here?

DEAN RUSK: Always there. It's always there just under the rocks. It would be a very serious thing if it should ever develop.

SCHOENBAUM: But wasn't there at this time, at least in the military sense, a kind of strategic approach to strategic planning? Wasn't this the beginning of a kind of military cooperation between the U.S. and Israel: joint strategic planning in any way against the Soviet Union?

DEAN RUSK: There might have been some discussions here and there, but nothing very serious, because in that kind of a situation Israel would play a very minor role. I mean it was not a major factor.

SCHOENBAUM: Now, another policy initiative that turned out again not to be successful, unfortunately, was the refugee issue in the United Nations. In 1961, there was a new initiative with Joseph [Esrey] Johnson, the President of the Carnegie Foundation, who was to--

DEAN RUSK: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

SCHOENBAUM: That's right, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. And as I understand it, he was to undertake negotiations with Israel with the view toward perhaps allowing or resettling the Palestinian refugees, or a certain number of Palestinian refugees, and terminating the refugee camps, which of course still exist. What was your role in that, particularly initiatives?

DEAN RUSK: I was fully involved with it. And Joseph Johnson was a very able fellow and he gave it a good college try, but he ran into a complete blockage on the Arab side politically, so that that did not leave us with much leverage on Israel. I had a thought about the Palestine refugees that I discussed with two or three Arab foreign ministers; that is that you let the Palestine refugees in these various camps be interviewed completely confidentially by some international authority, under the conditions of the confessional booth. You would put to them the question, "Where would you like to be living ten years from now?" Now there is no Palestine; there's Israel, there's Jordan. And on the list you'd put Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Brazil, the United States, Australia, whatever, and let these refugees on an individual basis indicate where they would like to be living. And my hunch was that the Palestine refugees who would elect to live in Israel would be in such small numbers that Israel could readily accept them. See, we knew that Israel would accept a certain number. We didn't know exactly. We never worked out the final number, but two or three hundred thousand anyhow. And you might be able to resolve the problem by letting the Palestine refugees individually make such choices. And you could have mobilized enormous amounts of money to assist in their resettlement in the places that they had chosen. Well, that did not get anywhere because I was told by my Arab friends that if that were the choice, these Palestine refugees would simply be told in their camps that if they elected to go anywhere except to Palestine, that is to their homes in Israel, that they would have their throats cut. And such consultation simply would not work. But that was another initiative, if you like, that did not get anywhere.

SCHOENBAUM: So Johnson's mission basically failed, as you see it, primarily because of the Arab requirement to return to Israel?

DEAN RUSK: Well, the Arabs were unwilling to accept any figure for a return to Israel that was within the reach of Israel and Israel's willingness or capacity to accept.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you find Israel fairly cooperative?

DEAN RUSK: They might have been if the figures had gotten down to--

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BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

RICHARD RUSK: They might have been if the figures had gotten down to two or three hundred thousand?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, I think so. I think Israel might have been willing to accept that many.

SCHOENBAUM: At this time too, you testified in Congress numerous times about the Near East and you opposed the cut-off of aid to Nasser's Egypt. Can you cast some light as to why you opposed it?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I thought that it was a useful thing for us to have a friendly presence in Egypt, that even though Nasser might shout these crazy things from rooftops, the Egyptian people would understand and would have a more favorable attitude toward the United States than would otherwise be the case. I remember once talking to one Arab foreign minister who said, "You know, as far as the Arab government is concerned we have very strong and almost violent views about this Israeli question. But if you want to know what the ordinary people, grass roots in the Arab world, think of the United States, think of those schools, think of those hospitals, think of that American university in Beirut, it's that kind of thing, that sort of people-to-people relationship between Arabs and the American people which are very strong. And we should not suppose that every Arab hates the United States."

SCHOENBAUM: At this time too there was the Yemen War. And the books say that, and they mention you specifically, "at Rusk's urging that the United States supported Egypt and the Republicans in the Yemen war against the Royalists." And this led to a complicated problem of a fear of war between Nasser and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia being royalist and supporting the royalists in Yemen. The war dragged on despite a mediation effort by the United States and by Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker. Is your role correctly portrayed in the history books on that? You supported--the United States supported Nasser. And if so do you regard this--

DEAN RUSK: Well, publicly we tried to put the brakes on Saudi Arabia and Egypt a bit, which meant that we would not bang the table and demand that Egypt get out. But privately we urged the Egyptians to get out. What we did not want was a war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia because Saudi Arabia was so fragile. They did not have the capacity to defend themselves against a concerted Egyptian effort. We knew that the Saudis were giving under the rug support to the royalist factions in the Yemen and so forth. There was no way we could have prevented that in any event. But our principal concern in there was to try not to let the Yemen problem result in a war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

SCHOENBAUM: Was it--you regarded it as mistake, in hindsight, to have recognized the Nasser faction in Yemen so quickly?

DEAN RUSK: Well, in general it is a pretty good idea for your recognition policy to stick to the facts. And we violated that for many years in connections with the People's Republic of China, and we are still violating that in the case of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia in the Soviet Union. But, we thought that at least that might result in a stabilizing factor there, and would also assist Egypt in withdrawing its own forces. We wanted to get the Egyptian forces out of there privately. We did not bang the table publicly on that. But the Egyptians suffered a good many casualties down there and they were not all that enthusiastic about that adventure themselves. So we were, as part of the process of weakening the Egyptians out of the Yemen--

SCHOENBAUM: The war dragged on, though. There was nothing that--

DEAN RUSK: Yes. No, it was a painful business. Now, coming up to the months preceding the June '67 war, on the Arab side they stepped up their Holy War propaganda against Israel. They were encouraged to do so by the Soviet Union. They organized a joint command among the Arab armies. An Egyptian general came to Jordan, for example, to take command of that sector of the joint Arab command. Nasser moved forces into the Sinai, substantial forces into the Sinai, and called upon U Thant, the U.N. Secretary General, to withdraw U.N. forces along a certain sector of the Sinai border. U Thant made a very great mistake at that point. He made two decisions on his own without reference to the Security Council or to the General Assembly, both of which had authorized the presence of these U.N. forces. His first decision was that the U.N. could not have its forces in any country against the objections of the government of that country, and secondly, that if he withdrew a portion of these U.N. forces he would have to withdraw all of them. And so he did.

RICHARD RUSK: He did this unilaterally?

DEAN RUSK: He did this without any reference to the Security Council or the General Assembly.

RICHARD RUSK: He had that constitutional authority in the U.N.?

DEAN RUSK: He claimed he had, and his own legal advisors supported him. But he--You see, if that had gone into the U.N. Security Council, at least you'd have had several weeks of palaver and you might have been able to stabilize the situation and work something out. I mentioned this business about withdrawing all of them if you withdrew any of them as far as the U.N. forces were concerned because later on Nasser told us privately--who knows what to believe?--that he didn't have in mind the withdrawal of all the U.N. forces, that he just wanted them withdrawn along that common border along the Sinai there. But he said when the U.N. units left Sharm el Sheikh there, at the tail of the Gulf, then he had Egyptian forces there. He said, "What could I do? There were Israeli ships passing through that Strait. I couldn't let them pass by. There I was."

RICHARD RUSK: How did you come to know Nasser's views on that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was a private talk with him, and I forget now just who our representative was, but--

RICHARD RUSK: Is this in the public record?

DEAN RUSK: I think you might find it if you dig deeply enough. But anyhow, he closed the Strait of Tiran. Well, when he did that, that put him head on against what Israel had declared would be a casus belli. And also it ran into a commitment made by President Eisenhower at the time of the Suez affair back in the fifties--the commitment to Israel about keeping the Strait of Tiran open if Israel would withdraw its forces from the Sinai. So it was also a U.S. commitment involved there, not just an Israeli casus belli. Then the Soviets began circulating false rumors about Israeli mobilization among the Arabs and the situation got to be very tense indeed. We, in trying to defuse the situation, first took on the question of the passage of the Strait of Tiran. We consulted with fifteen or so of the principal maritime powers to ask if they would all join in a joint declaration that the Strait of Tiran was an international strait through which international shipping could move. A good many of them said they would, although some of them were quite lukewarm about it. We realized that such a declaration standing alone would not mean very much to Mr. Nasser. So we looked at the question of forcing the Strait of Tiran by putting our own naval and other forces through there. So we consulted some of the maritime powers about who would be a member of that party if we had to force the Strait of Tiran. The volunteers were very few. Maybe the British might have. The Dutch might have. But there was very great reluctance on the part of the maritime powers to join in any such activity.

RICHARD RUSK: Did Suez play a role?

DEAN RUSK: This would have been a major military problem because it was on the wrong side of Suez. We couldn't bring the sixth fleet in the Mediterranean directly to bear on it very well because they were in the Mediterranean and we couldn't expect Nasser to let them pass through the Suez Canal for that purpose. So we were faced with going all the way around Africa and coming up through the Indian Ocean. Then a naval task force trying to do something of that sort against land-based aircraft would present a terrible military problem and probably mean that you would have to do a lot of bombing of air fields and things of that sort to insure the safety of your naval force. Now, in the middle of these discussions, Bob [Robert Strange] McNamara and I went down to meet with eighty or ninety senators and congressmen. Mostly senators were at that meeting. Somewhat to our surprise, they were unanimously and strongly opposed to any effort to open the Strait of Tiran by force. They said this ought to be left to the United Nations. Well, the U.N. didn't have any force. Indeed, then Senator Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy came to Bob McNamara and me at the end of that meeting and said, "I don't know what you fellows in Washington think about the attitude of my Jewish friends in New York, but they don't want any part of this."

SCHOENBAUM: They didn't want U.S.--

DEAN RUSK: They didn't want any part of a U.S. effort to force the Strait of Tiran.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you think Bobby Kennedy was accurate in presenting the opinions of his

Jewish friends--?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know. I know he was very clear about it in his own mind. My guess is he was more right than wrong. But I mention this because one thing that the Israelis have is good intelligence. There is no question that they knew all about the fact that there was almost no response among the maritime powers to the matter of forcing the Strait of Tiran. They also, I am sure, had immediate and direct information about the general attitude among that congressional group that Bob McNamara and I met with. So this, I suspect, helped to convince the Israelis that they were on their own; they were alone.

RICHARD RUSK: Ever wonder who the Israeli mole might have been, Pop, that penetrated the--?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, there are several of them. They get--if any other government had us penetrated like they did we would break relations with them.

SCHOENBAUM: So we never seriously considered unilateral U.S. action in that instance?

DEAN RUSK: No. No. Because it didn't get to that point. We saw these rapidly mounting tensions there in the Middle East and we knew that the Soviets had been egging on the Arab side. Then about two or three weeks before the June '67 war the Russians became greatly concerned about the outbreak of major fighting there. It may well be that their own professional military had given them the same military advice that our Joint Chiefs of Staff were giving us. Namely, that if there were war, Israeli forces would prevail over the Arab forces. So the Soviets and we began to discuss the business of how to cool off this tension that was developing there. The Soviets thought that they had a commitment from the Arab side not to make the first move and we thought we had a commitment from the Israeli side, at least for some time to come, not to make the first move. And we and the Soviets exchanged these assurances with each other. Just before the outbreak of the war, Abba Eban was in Washington.

SCHOENBAUM: It was May 25th.

DEAN RUSK: Lyndon Johnson told him Israel would not be alone unless it goes alone, and urged restraint upon Israel. Well, Abba Eban went on back to Jerusalem and, by divided vote in the Israeli cabinet, they decided to launch these military operations of June '67. Those caught us by surprise because we thought we had had assurances from the Israeli side that we had more time to try to work out this Strait of Tiran thing.

RICHARD RUSK: What were the nature of those assurances, Pop?

DEAN RUSK: That Israel would not move for a period of time and that they would consult with us about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Who gave you those assurances? In what form?

SCHOENBAUM: Did Abba Eban give LBJ directly those assurances? It was May 25, not 26.

DEAN RUSK: I think probably it was Abba Eban, but it might have been also our own ambassador in Tel Aviv that talked over these things with the Israelis. We were caught by surprise by the sudden Israeli move just as the Arabs were. Immediately the Soviets lighted up the hotline. This was the first use of the hotline between our two capitols. It took a little doing for us to persuade the Soviets that we were as surprised as they were.

SCHOENBAUM: The Soviets initiated the hotline.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. TS - Who talked on the hotline? Was it--

DEAN RUSK: Well, when the hotline is there, our President and the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense are on the Washington end of the hotline and their top people are on the other end.

SCHOENBAUM: [Aleksei Nikolaevich] Kosygin and--?

DEAN RUSK: [Nikita Sergeevich] Khrushchev was--

SCHOENBAUM: Was Khrushchev still there?

RICHARD RUSK: '67? Good God, Pop!

SCHOENBAUM: He was gone.

DEAN RUSK: Well, then it must have been [Leonid I.] Brezhnev. Check that point in your--and [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko, of course. Anyhow, I think the Russians came to believe that we actually were surprised and did not hold us directly responsible to than for the outbreak of the June '67 war. But President Nasser then accused the United States of participation in these air attacks against Egypt by our forces in the Mediterranean and broke relations with us. And many other Arab states followed suit in breaking relations with us. I think the explanation to that was that the Israeli planes were flying four and five sorties a day and Nasser had never seen so many planes. I'm quite sure the Russians told Egypt that they had their own vessels alongside of our aircraft carriers and in fact our aircraft carriers were not launching planes in this episode. But it took quite a few years to get over that particular point.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you remember the circumstances when you first heard that the Israelis had attacked the planes on the ground, and then they moved their troops?

DEAN RUSK: Well, the Israeli air force knocked out the Egyptian air force in the first twenty-four hours.

SCHOENBAUM: How did you first get the word and what was your reaction? Do you remember having--that must have been a shock?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, a combination of diplomatic traffic and news reports. Sometimes the news

reports were a little ahead of diplomatic traffic.

SCHOENBAUM: Were they in this instance, do you think?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I think so. Another important item that surfaced there: on the first day of the Israeli operations, Prime Minister [Levi] Eshkol went on Israeli radio and said that Israel had no territorial ambitions. Later in the summer when I reminded Abba Eban of that, he simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "We've changed our minds." But when this fighting started we started immediately to try to get an immediate cease-fire. We tried to persuade King Hussein of Jordan not to become embroiled in the fighting, but he said, "I am an Arab and I have to take part." Now had we gotten a cease-fire on that first day, the Egyptian air force would have been destroyed and the Israeli forces might have been forty or fifty miles into the Sinai, but there would have been no fighting with Jordan, no fighting over the old city of Jerusalem, nothing in the Golan Heights. But for some strange reason the Arab side and the Soviet Union wanted to attach a lot of conditions to a cease-fire: in effect, to settle the Middle Eastern problem along with the cease-fire, you see? And that was wholly unacceptable to Israel. So they stalled a cease-fire for about eight days.

SCHOENBAUM: The Arabs and the Soviet Union?

RICHARD RUSK: Do you think a cease-fire would have been possible from the Israeli point of view that first day?

DEAN RUSK: The Israelis were willing to accept one.

RICHARD RUSK: Really?

SCHOENBAUM: Even without taking over the old city of Jerusalem?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah.

SCHOENBAUM: They were?

DEAN RUSK: But, when the Arab and Soviet side delayed this cease-fire for eight days or so, then the Israeli forces were at the Suez; they had the old city of Jerusalem; they had the West Bank; they were into the Golan Heights. The Arabs badly served their own cause by complicating an immediate cease-fire issue.

SCHOENBAUM: There's this famous--do you remember that famous telephone call from Nasser to King Hussein that the Israelis monitored and they have it on tape today. Nasser, in effect, lied to King Hussein and said they were winning; jump in--"We're winning the battles in the Sinai. You do your part now." Do you remember that?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. I remember there was such a message. But Nasser was in a state of shock at that point. His whole air force had been wiped out on the first day. Now one thing that Israel taught the Arab world was the value of a first- strike with conventional forces. And given Israel's

geographical situation they are more vulnerable to a first strike than the Arab side is. So I don't know where those lessons are lurking in Arab minds these days.

SCHOENBAUM: What is your view as to whether, under international law, that is justified under Article 51--a first-strike of that sort in the face of the.

DEAN RUSK: I have used the situation in which Israel found itself in June '67 as a test case with respect to preventive self-defense. Because there was a major Arab mobilization, movement of major Egyptian forces into the Sinai, formation of an Arab high command, a great stepping-up of the Holy War psychology, and that sort of a thing. If Israel had waited for a first strike, then Israel's situation could have been very tough indeed. So I think that that is a--I don't think much of preventive self-defense as a doctrine because it's too dangerous. It can be used for aggression too easily. But there's a pretty good case where if there ever is any justification for preventive action, this might have been a case for it.

RICHARD RUSK: I guess it was of some reassurance to you that the Americans and the Soviets had a decent relationship in that part of the world and were talking to each other, and in that sense were confident in the Middle East--

DEAN RUSK: Well, there was still some tension. After all, at this time when the Israeli forces were moving into Syria the Soviets warned Israel and us that if Israeli forces attacked Damascus that this could lead to direct Soviet intervention and LBJ had to tell the Soviets that this was a very bad idea and he moved the Sixth Fleet closer into the area where they would be in a position to help meet any such effort. So it was touch and go there for a time.

RICHARD RUSK: Who gave you that word? Was it [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin?

DEAN RUSK: No, I think it was on the hotline.

SCHOENBAUM: The idea to keep the Israelis short of Damascus was on the hotline?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: What was your impression of the hotline during this crisis? How'd it work out?

DEAN RUSK: Well, one change we made was to put a clock on each end of the hotlines showing what time of day it was in the other fellow's capital. Because the Russians would wake us at three o'clock in the morning. They did it on two or three occasions there. That was something of a bore. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: And you'd do the same for them, I hope.

DEAN RUSK: So we put a clock on the hotline showing the other fellow's time.

SCHOENBAUM: That's great. You have the same problem as you do when you'd call your

grandma or something--you'd call Alaska or something.

DEAN RUSK: But the hotline worked. Technically, it worked very well during this period. It was in effect a teletype conference kind of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, to what extent did American policy, perhaps in unintentional ways, exacerbate and otherwise encourage this period of escalation on the Arab side? Did we somehow--

DEAN RUSK: Well, that was inherent in the support we gave to the very creation of the State of Israel. You see, one must not underestimate in any way the deep sense of injury which the Arabs felt about the very creation of the State of Israel. They said, "The West has made us pay for the crimes of Adolf Hitler." They were very bitter about it. Because, after all, Arabs have been living there for centuries. This territory that we think of as Israel had been overrun historically by many people: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Ottoman Turks, the British. So the idea of going back two thousand years to find a land title for a State of Israel in the modern world was just too much for the Arabs to swallow. So they were extremely bitter about it. It has not been until the last ten or fifteen years that some on the Arab side have reconciled themselves that there will be an Israel there in the Middle East and that somehow one has to deal with it or take it into account.

SCHOENBAUM: Turning to the Six-Day War, there is a Resolution 242, which is a landmark of diplomacy, still the basis today of some efforts toward settlement. How was Resolution 242 evolved, and who--?

DEAN RUSK: Well this was negotiated during the summer and early fall of 1967. Arthur [Joseph] Goldberg was our representative at the U.N. at that time and handled the negotiations on that with great skill. Resolution 242 is not a settlement of all the issues, but it is an agenda for negotiation for a permanent peace. That is, the elements of a permanent peace are to be found in Resolution 242. Now there were some elements in it that seemed to favor the Arab side, some elements that seemed to favor the Israeli side. But it seemed to be a good balance at the time. When we finally negotiated 242 there was a reluctant acceptance of it by both Israelis and Arabs on the whole. The trouble is that the two sides have departed from Resolution 242 in important ways. On the Israeli side this has to do with territories. Resolution 242 stated that Israeli forces would withdraw from territories seized in the recent fighting. Now there's a lot of negotiation over whether that Resolution should say from "the" territories or from "all" territories. We wanted that to be left a little vague, subject to negotiation, because we thought that we ought to leave the way open for some rationalization of a west frontier of the West Bank where there were certain anomalies that could easily be straightened out with some exchanges of territories.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, did you identify Resolution 242?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. And we wanted a fresh look at the old city of Jerusalem. We wanted to leave open demilitarization measures in the Sinai and in the Golan Heights. So we said "withdrawal from territories." Not "all" territories or "the" territories. Now, there's been some dispute about that because when in the French version, which is equally authentic, it says

withdrawal "de" territory--from the, "de," or from "the" territories. So that deliberate ambiguity was obscured in translation into other languages. Anyhow, we never contemplated that there would be any significant move of territory to Israel as a result of the June '67 War. There we and the Israelis have, to this day, very far-reaching differences of view. And that could lead to some real trouble between us and Israel because, although every president since Truman has committed the United States to the security and independence of Israel, I don't know of any commitment that the United States has ever made to assist Israel in retaining the territory seized in June '67. So if another war breaks out over the territorial issue, then people in Washington are going to have to come to some very hard decision because we do not--and we have supported a special regime for the old city of Jerusalem since the creation of the State of Israel. As you know, we still have our embassy in Tel Aviv and not in Jerusalem because we have not accepted Jerusalem, theoretically, as a unified city and the capital of Israel. We felt all along that some settlement there in Jerusalem ought to reflect the interests of the great religions that have a stake there. It's ironic to realize that the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews all look upon Jerusalem as a very special city to them and their traditions. Yet they all confess that they worship the same God--the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Yet when we sit down to talk about the city of Jerusalem we start balling up our fists and get ready to kill each other. My own suggestion for Jerusalem, which I talked to a few people about in those days, was to create a situation in the old city which is so complicated, so loused up, that no one could understand it and know what to fight about; allocate the areas of the old city to the three religions on a general scale, including the support--

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