

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk YYYYY: Part 1 of 3

Richard [Dick] Holbrooke interviewed by Richard Rusk and Thomas Schoenbaum

1986 February

The complete interview also includes Rusk ZZZZZ: Part 2; Rusk FFF FFF: Part 3.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, maybe we can get you to comment in general, based on your readings of the transcripts we've done for this Dean Rusk oral history, on Vietnam and its emphasis on the events of 1968, particularly the Tet Offensive and the post-Tet policy and review period. Maybe we could get you to comment on where you think my dad is with his thinking on Vietnam and what suggestions you might have for us on further interviewing. What are some of the questions we might ask again or rephrase, or questions that we missed altogether? And just comment in general on the project from what you've read so far.

HOLBROOKE: Incidentally, it seems to me, looking at the transcripts you showed me last night, that he is becoming increasingly willing, perhaps under the pressure that you all have put him under, to agree that there were some profound errors in the way the Vietnam War unfolded. I don't think he's ever going to be critical of the two Presidents he served because that would violate the central principle by which he's conducted his public life, and I don't think anyone should expect him to be critical of [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy or [Lyndon Baines] Johnson. I think it's also very difficult for him to criticize directly any of the senior participants he worked with: [Robert Strange] McNamara, [William Childs] Westmoreland, [Walt Whitman] Rostow, [Clark McAdams] Clifford, [William Averell] Harriman, all people with whom he had either explicit or implicit disagreements. But he doesn't want to talk about those. On the other hand, when you detach them from personal comments, it seems to me clear that he is now much more reconciled to the fact that the American public rejected the war in 1968 and that this necessitated a shift in policy. And implicitly, he is admitting that there was something wrong in the way the war was conceived and conducted. Now the transcripts you showed me did not cover, and perhaps this is on other transcripts, the specifics of why the policy was rejected by the American public. Was it a strategic misconception in Vietnam? Was it simply that the war went on too long? Was it that the American public was misled by the press? Was it that Congress wasn't supportive enough? This kind of question ought to be explored with him if he's willing to do so.

RICHARD RUSK: Right. He has said that basically the American people are impatient about war and we couldn't tell them when the end was in sight. The influence of all the body bags coming back to the little towns around America, the influence of that war being fought on television, the press coverage of the war, the policy of gradualism--

HOLBROOKE: Of course--

RICHARD RUSK: And the Administration's refusal to beat the drums of patriotism and deliberately try to drum up support for the war. He identifies those as the cause of this lack of

support.

HOLBROOKE: It would be interesting to know if he thinks that the war could have been won. What would it have taken to win the war and how would he have defined victory? I think that in fact, the American public was quite patient with the war in Vietnam. It lasted twice as long as the Civil War, and given the fact that very, very few Americans ever understood what we were doing there they were quite willing to follow the commander-in-chief for a long, long period of time. So I think that his feeling that the American people were not patient enough may mask a deeper failure in terms of explaining to the American public why we were there. Depending on how you date the start of the war and the end of the war, we were there in a significant way for at least ten years, '63 to '73, and centrally involved as a foreign policy crisis issue from at least '61 to '75: fourteen years. And that is not a short period of time for any country to be engaged in a war. Very few countries in the history of the world have sustained wars for as long as we sustained that one. And so I wonder about the issue of patience. As for his comment which he makes to you and has made many times before that he underestimated the North Vietnamese, the question then on that issue is: why the underestimation? And here I think that there ought to be more systematic exploration of the information he received from Bill [William Putnam] Bundy and Tom [Thomas Lowe] Hughes and George [A.] Carver and Dick [Richard M.] Helms and the embassy in Saigon. That happens to be the precise issue on which, as I described to you in my earlier interview, he and I had our first substantive discussion ever, in 1965 when I was back and staying with your brother David [Patrick Rusk]. And he called me on that Sunday, which I described, and even on that day which I remember so vividly now over twenty years later, he said with some agitation that the Vietcong were not ten feet tall. So why was he under the impression that they could be bent to our will if we used force? Was it simply that he thought that since we were the most powerful country on earth and the Vietnamese were clearly anything but the most powerful country on earth that our overwhelming firepower, even though not used, would be sufficient? Or was it a miscalculation about the nature of the North Vietnamese? It's a very, very important point. Now let me add another point. He had lived through the involvement in North Korea of the Chinese in November of 1950, and he had known that had the war in Korea been confined only to a battle between the U.S. [United States] and our South Korean allies against the North Koreans that we would have won. In fact, we had won. [Douglas] MacArthur was at the Yalu. And the reason we were pushed back was the involvement of an outside force coming across from sanctuary. In 1965, the same thing began to happen. This is not to say that we had won the war in the south against the indigenous Vietcong, but you could make a case that if the North Vietnamese had not entered the war with main force units, that we could have at least held our own with American support of the South Vietnamese. But in 1965, just as in 1950, a new element entered the equation. Unlike 1950 where it was clear-cut and dramatic and the Chinese Communist Army caught the U.S. Eighth Army in the Chosen river in that disastrous and tragic battle, the North Vietnamese were much subtler. They began simply to infiltrate in small units. They had long been sending political infiltration into the south in the form of individual soldiers or individual cadre. Now they were sending small units. They were darting back and forth across the border into Laos or Cambodia. It was still many years before they began sending regular main line regiments and divisions. But nonetheless, the same general thing seemed to be happening in '65 as it had in 1950, and you need to explore in your discussions with your father why he thought that under these circumstances the United States

could persevere. Now, as I read the transcripts, I get the impression that he wanted a political settlement, but you have not defined what he meant by political settlement. He has said in one of the interviews with you, and I completely agree with him, that the kind of deal [Henry Alfred] Kissinger and [Richard Milhous] Nixon made in '72 could have been made by Johnson, Harriman and himself in '68 on better terms because we had five hundred thousand troops in the country then and they were negotiating chips. I agree with that; but what you haven't asked him yet is why he didn't try to do that kind of deal. Why there wasn't a more serious effort made to negotiate. And this in turn leads backward to the decisions of March of '68 with an important intermediate stop in October of '68. In March of '68, what were they trying to do with the partial bombing? Were they trying to get the Vietnamese to the table? Or were they trying to build up public opinion for a continued war? Or were they not sure? Were they just under the tremendous assault of those sixty days between the Tet Offensive and Johnson's speech? Were they simply trying to find ways to prevent the complete collapse of public opinion? You have to explore what he thought he was doing.

SCHOENBAUM: By the way, last night I looked up in the transcript one of the questions we asked him yesterday on that particular point on the origin of that bombing, and according to the transcript of his interview at the Johnson Library, Dean Rusk was the proposer of that bombing in March of '68 and he was the originator of that.

HOLBROOKE: I believe that. And that's why I said to Rich when he was in New York last summer that I didn't accept the Townsend [Walter] Hoopes thesis. I think you'll find in the transcript that I say that although I respect Clark Clifford a great deal, I think the thesis of that book is wrong. I agree that Rusk proposed the limited bombing: that we would stop bombing north of the twentieth parallel. What is still not clear is what he thought he was accomplishing. I have a vague memory of Bill Bundy saying at the time that the chances were less than twenty percent that the North Vietnamese would agree to anything as a result of this. Yet we went ahead and did it. And then the Vietnamese did agree, in return for limited bombing, to limited talks in Paris: talks to be limited only to the issue of stopping the rest of the bombing. Now, I go to a very central point here which connects politics and foreign policy. I want to stress that I worked on the speech with Harry [C.] McPherson [Jr.] and Nick [Nicholas de Belleville] Katzenbach. I was probably the junior member of the group that was involved even peripherally in the speech. I knew that a bombing halt--

RICHARD RUSK: You're talking about your involvement with the non-group in the Department of State?

HOLBROOKE: Yes, but also directly with Harry McPherson.

SCHOENBAUM: Now what speech specifically?

HOLBROOKE: The March 31st speech.

SCHOENBAUM: LBJ's

HOLBROOKE: Yep. I had worked on drafts. And I saw the evolution of that speech from a more aggressive speech in its early phases to the kind of speech that finally evolved just as it's described in your interviews with Clifford and with Mr. Rusk and I hope with McPherson whom I feel you must go and speak to. However, none of us knew that Johnson was going to withdraw from the Presidency. Now I know that your father says that he had known for a year Johnson might pull out and he knew at the end that there was that extra paragraph. Harry McPherson tells a very similar story. But that begs the point, which is this: Johnson planned to withdraw in the same speech in which he did something dramatic in Vietnam. Had the people arguing over what to say in that speech known this, it would have profoundly affected the substance of the speech.

RICHARD RUSK: In what direction?

HOLBROOKE: Because the speech was being given on a Sunday night before the Tuesday primary in Wisconsin after the debacle in New Hampshire where McCarthy almost beat Johnson. Now, everyone working on the speech believed that they were working on a scenario for a president running for re-election. Even people like your father who knew he might withdraw did not know for sure that he would withdraw, and on that night. The limited bombing halt which LBJ did announce that night fit the scenario of running again. But had people known that Johnson was ready to sacrifice the remainder of his career in order to, as he put it, walk that extra mile to try to bring peace in Southeast Asia, in that eventuality some senior people would have gone to Lyndon Johnson and said, "Look Mr. President, you are going to become a lame duck the minute you make the speech and you will then have less than ten months in office remaining. If you really want to change the situation in Indochina, you can't just stop the bombing north of the twentieth parallel. You've got to stop it all." Instead, Johnson's advisors were operating without the critical fact, which was that they now had only ten months to go instead of ten months plus a possible four years. In that framework, they did not give him the advice he deserved. And he did not get the advice he deserved. This is not yet understood, but I am convinced of it.

SCHOENBAUM: You're talking about a total bombing halt, north and south?

HOLBROOKE: No, no, no, no. I'm not talking about nothing to do with the south. I'm talking about North Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: From the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] on up. Yeah, okay.

HOLBROOKE: Sure. Look, I'm not sure I'm being clear. Let's be very clear on this. The North Vietnamese had said for years they would not talk about the issues in Vietnam unless we stopped bombing the north. We had said we wouldn't stop bombing the north unless we knew what would happen afterwards. So we went through all these arguments about all these code name processes, the San Antonio formula and stuff like that, all of this. And we'd had a thirty-seven day bombing pause which had not resulted in anything because it had been limited. Now we come down to March of '68. Your father and Clifford, for different reasons, both advocated a limited bombing halt.

SCHOENBAUM: The twentieth parallel.

HOLBROOKE: From the twentieth--you all understand why the twentieth parallel--because the bulk of the population in North Vietnam lives north of that parallel. And south of it was not as heavily populated--well, not jungle but lowlands. We were still bombing in Laos, in Cambodia. That narrow neck of North Vietnam from the twentieth to the seventeenth parallel had many infiltration routes: central, very important infiltration routes. And we wanted to bomb that area because you would put more pressure on them so they couldn't build up against the American troops at Khesahn and the DMZ and Quang Tri and all these vulnerable forward positions of the Marines which were taking very heavy casualties. So the tactical reasons for continuing to bomb that area were understandable. But my point is this: because Johnson doesn't tell his advisers that he's going to pull out, his advisers are giving him advice based on a fallacious premise. It doesn't matter that your father says now and Westmoreland says and Harry McPherson says that they all knew that Johnson was thinking of resigning and they weren't surprised. It doesn't matter. They spent two months battling over a speech without knowing what the speech's real point was: that Lyndon Johnson was ending a thirty-year public career and over Vietnam. And had they known, there's little doubt in my mind that the Katzenbachs and the McNamaras and the McPhersons and the Cliffords and indeed Mr. Rusk would have pushed for, might have pushed in Rusk's case, certainly would have pushed for in everyone else's, for a full bombing halt. So what happens? March 31, a limited bombing halt. April 3, the North Vietnamese say we'll talk but only about stopping the rest of the bombing. April 4, we accept. Paris in May. Then June, July, August, September: nothing. We sit in Paris. I was part of that delegation. And we exchange public attacks on each other and the election campaign begins. And then finally in the fall of 1968 a negotiation begins with [Cyrus Roberts] Vance conducting most of it in the suburbs of Paris, a very secret negotiation. But it is limited, just as Hanoi had always said it would be, only to the issue of stopping the bombing halt. Therefore, we come down to the week before the election with the Russians now heavily involved and everybody is going crazy. [Ellsworth] Bunker is trying to slow things down at Saigon. Harriman and Vance are desperately trying to speed things up in Paris to help [Hubert Horatio] Humphrey [Jr.] who was closing in very fast on Nixon. And Anna [Chan] Chennault and John [Newton] Mitchell get a hold of Bui Diem, the South Vietnamese ambassador in Washington, and tell him to tell [Nguyen Van] Thieu to stonewall to help Nixon. And as we all know, Nixon wins by a hair. Perhaps this was the decisive issue. But my point is that we wasted the whole summer, never talking about real issues because the limited bombing halt had created this dilemma. It might even have been better in retrospect not to do it. I mean, I would simply say that we got the worst of all worlds. We put ourselves in a negotiation in Paris in which we ended up yielding under the maximum glare of publicity, then arguing publicly with our Saigon allies. We had to give up in the second phase of the negotiation in Paris the thing Hanoi had demanded from the beginning, a full bombing halt. What did we get in return for the full bombing halt? The only thing we got was a meeting in Paris with both Saigon and the NLF [National Liberation Front] present. And that meeting we could have had in May, or anytime once the bombing was stopped. So for that critical summer of '68, a summer in which Martin Luther King [Jr.] and Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy were killed and in which the streets of Chicago went wild during the Democratic convention, we're still bombing. The American public has given Johnson no credit for stopping the bombing of the populated areas north of the twentieth parallel because we're still bombing and Americans are

still dying. Indeed, they're dying in the higher numbers than ever because the Vietnamese Communists have launched several offensives which have taken American casualties up even higher. So in retrospect, Johnson should have either, in my view, increased the pressure in Hanoi after the Tet Offensive using more military force--which probably would have been politically impossible--or alternatively, and this would have been my preference, stopped the bombing all at once and got real talks going with ten months left in power. Now either process was a very dangerous one. The Vietcong had been hurt militarily, although helped politically by the Tet Offensive, and they were ready to negotiate under the growing pressure of the Presidential campaign of '68. But I cannot stress too strongly the complete failure of the sixty days from the Tet Offensive to Johnson's speech. It was total failure and heartbreakingly so. And I don't blame anybody except Lyndon Johnson here. It's certainly not the fault of Mr. Rusk or Clark Clifford or any of the other people who were under enormous pressure to figure out how to move. Mr. Rusk, in fact, was heroic in that period in moving the President inch by inch as far as he thought the President could go under the circumstances.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, you've seen the number of accounts written of that period. You've seen Warren [L.] Cohen's Dean Rusk and I believe you're familiar with Herbert [Y.] Schandler's *The Unmaking of a President*.

HOLBROOKE: I never read it but--

RICHARD RUSK: You saw it, huh?

HOLBROOKE: Wasn't Schandler about '65?

RICHARD RUSK: He was there. He was working--

HOLBROOKE: I thought Schandler's book was about 1965. But anyway, let's go ahead.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, you've read Hoopes's account [Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*]. You've seen a number of these accounts.

HOLBROOKE: I haven't read any of them in a while though.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Who came closest to best explaining Dean Rusk's role do you think and why?

HOLBROOKE: I don't know. I don't think any one book has yet captured it, and you'd have to ask him that. But having read Cohen's this morning, I'm more familiar with it than with the others and it strikes me as substantially correct. But it's very sketchy and it leaves out a lot of detail. I think the best way to do this, in my view, would be to take out a huge blackboard and write down for every one of these days what each one of the witnesses says: Harry McPherson, Cohen, the oral histories, this book by George Christian which I think you ought to find, *The President Steps Down*; and I think you ought to just see what each person says and you will triangulate in on the truth bit by bit. I also think, by the way, I think there are at least three key

interviews you've still got to do: McPherson, George [Wildman] Ball, and Lady Bird Johnson.

RICHARD RUSK: Lady Bird?

HOLBROOKE: You've got to see Lady Bird.

RICHARD RUSK: Why Lady Bird?

HOLBROOKE: She is probably the reason he didn't run again.

SCHOENBAUM: She's probably the only person he told before--

HOLBROOKE: She believes that he would not have survived a second term because of his health. And I think that's probably true since he died in '73, as it turned out. So even without the presidency, he died just after the four years would have ended, and I think she was always against him running again. Secondly, I think she admired your parents very much and she probably understood intuitively, if she's willing to speak, a great deal about it.

RICHARD RUSK: Would she have advised Lyndon Johnson on the war in Vietnam?

HOLBROOKE: I doubt she'd give him specific advice on the tactics but I think her role would be instrumental. I would absolutely go and see her.

SCHOENBAUM: Now, there's one thing you said yesterday afternoon that I'd like to repeat on the tape and that is the line-up on the March bombing halt. There were certain people in favor of the twentieth parallel. You said there were really three line-ups in the March bombing halt. Did I get that right?

HOLBROOKE: Well, I think you're confusing two things. I think I was talking about the line-up for what to do with Thieu in the Paris Peace Talks with the three options we had in March. In March, we could continue the bombing, we could stop it all, or we could do a limited bombing halt. I didn't list the line-up there because I'm not quite sure about it. I think it was a shifting thing. But in October there were clear line-ups. And there was an extra-ordinary movement when these four very senior people, Bunker and Rusk and Rostow, clearly supporting the Bunker position; and Harriman and Clifford, as supported by [Paul H.] Nitze and Katzenbach, supporting what I would call the Harriman position. This group included Cyrus Vance. The Vance-Harriman position was always to get the bombing stopped and get into the negotiations. Katzenbach and Nitze and Clifford supported that. The Bunker position, supported by Rostow and Rusk, was certainly not to do things to Saigon which would unduly create a crisis with them. And I think that Ellsworth Bunker, notwithstanding his very distinguished career and the great respect and deep reverence that a lot of people held him in, did a very poor job in Saigon in 1968. He did not report accurately to Thieu what was going on in Paris even though he had every cable. His conversations with Thieu were one-sided and he failed to find out where Thieu really stood. And he, in the end I think, virtually sabotaged what Vance and Harriman were trying to do in Paris. Now, a kind of a fraternity of good fellowship has sprung up in recent years, but at the

time there was great bitterness. Ellsworth Bunker lived until last year. He was ninety years old when he died. He was an extraordinarily gracious gentleman and nobody wanted to criticize him. Averell Harriman is ninety-four now and everyone respects him, and so people have mellowed in their feelings about him. And the same thing is happening finally to Mr. Rusk. I'm glad for all that. I don't want to continue forever the bitteresses of the sixties but if you're doing a historical discussion, we might as well try to be relatively honest about it. And the fact is, I remember vividly that in September and October and November and December of 1968, Vance and Harriman were furious with Bunker: specifically, furious at him for his failure to bring Thieu along. I was there with them in Paris and their feelings about what he was doing were unconstrained, particularly Harriman. Harriman and Bunker had gone to Yale together in the nineteen-tens, although Harriman was a little older than Bunker--I think two years older--and they'd known each other for a long time, and Acheson had known them both. He'd been to Yale too. But the fact is that--

SCHOENBAUM: Do you remember any specific incidents?

HOLBROOKE: I don't remember the details. I just remember cables coming in from Saigon and upsetting people very much.

RICHARD RUSK: Hold on for a moment. Dick, perhaps you can talk in greater detail about the Paris Peace Talks and Dean Rusk's role as you best perceived it in Paris.

HOLBROOKE: Well when the North Vietnamese accepted the idea of a meeting with the United States, the first phase--

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

HOLBROOKE: The North Vietnamese and the United States were proposing all sorts of different venues--

RICHARD RUSK: Hang on. Okay.

HOLBROOKE: At one point, the North Vietnamese would suggest Warsaw and at another point we'd suggest something that they wouldn't accept. But I think everybody knew that the talks had to take place because after all, Lyndon Johnson said many times that he would go anywhere, anytime to talk to the North Vietnamese directly. And now for the very first time in the war, the North Vietnamese were willing to sit down in the same room with us. Harriman was designated as the head of the delegation. Perhaps he wouldn't have been Johnson's real choice. But he had mapped this terrain out for himself some years earlier when people did not think that there was a likelihood of any talks at all. And therefore, he was designated and Vance was sent along as his

deputy. Now I saw in one of your transcripts that Llewellyn [E.] Thompson [Jr.] was Mr. Rusk's preference for the deputy. I had never known that before because I thought that everyone involved had the highest regard for Cy Vance, that certainly your father did and Johnson did. And Vance had left the government only because of his back problems and he'd been called back to trouble-shoot twice already: the Cyprus crisis and the crisis in Detroit when there were the race riots. So your father had a high opinion of him. I remember your father talking to me once about the "establishment" which had played such a dominant role in American foreign policy in the forties, fifties, and sixties. And he mentioned [John J.] McCloy and Acheson and [Robert Abercrombie] Lovett and said that their natural successor in the next generation was Cy Vance. So I had little doubt that Vance was somebody he was very fond of. Johnson liked Vance very much. On the other hand, Harriman was a little suspicious of Vance at first. He regarded Vance as Johnson's spy in the delegation. But after a while, they worked their relationship out in a very friendly way. And to this day, their personal relationships are extremely close.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, what about the Rusk-Harriman relationship?

HOLBROOKE: Well, I never heard Mr. Rusk say anything about Averell Harriman at all of a negative nature. But Harriman always viewed Rusk with considerable suspicion, perhaps because Rusk held the job he had wanted so much to have himself, perhaps because of other factors. Their relationship had gone back to the forties. Harriman was virtually the only person in the equation who was substantially older than Rusk and came from an earlier generation. Harriman was the only person with direct links to the [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt era and he was of course, as we all know, born to this enormously wealthy family whereas Mr. Rusk came from a very different background. Curiously though, if they had ever gotten to know each other, they would have found that despite the difference between Arden House and Cherokee County they had both been brought up with the same respect for hard work and frugality. Harriman was very frugal with his money. He never--although he had an art collection worth millions and millions of dollars--he watched his pennies like they were going out of style. And if they'd gotten to know each other, they might've realized that there was less difference between them than their backgrounds provided. They both came out of the same value system and--

RICHARD RUSK: What about these other factors you talked about?

HOLBROOKE: Well, why talk about other factors? They had worked together in the Truman Administration. And Harriman had wanted to be President of the United States. And I don't think Dean Rusk had supported him even though he was governor of New York state at the time when Rusk was a very prominent Democrat in Scarsdale. I don't remember for sure who your father supported in '60 but I assume he supported [Adlai Ewing] Stevenson [III]. Yeah. And in '56 who would he support? Stevenson. And Harriman had sought the Presidential nomination in '56.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad's critics have said that he was kind of weak Secretary of State in terms of leadership, and people really didn't know what he'd think. Was that also the substance of Harriman's problems with my dad?

HOLBROOKE: I don't recall that. I recall only one incident where Harriman claimed with

considerable passion that he had had a talk with Dean Rusk prior to a meeting with Lyndon Johnson on some critical issue relating to Vietnam, that Rusk had told him that he would support him on this issue, and that they went in the room and when Rusk saw that Johnson was dug in, Rusk took a different position. And Harriman felt that this was contrary to their understanding and showed weakness. I am sure that both of you, since you're students of Dean Rusk's style and attitudes, would understand exactly what probably happened: that Dean Rusk went into that room, saw that Johnson did not want to be pushed, and just reverted to the first principle of his job as Secretary of State, made an instantaneous decision that he was not going to argue with Lyndon Johnson in front of a third party. And I'm sure this was a misunderstanding between Harriman and Rusk of the sort that is easy to talk about today but impossible to deal with at the moment it happens. Dean Rusk couldn't go back to Harriman afterwards and say, "I'm sorry I didn't support you even though I said I would but I'm not going to argue with Lyndon Johnson in front of you." And Harriman can't go to Rusk and say, "You betrayed me, you misled me." Two value systems clash. These are busy men. They rush out the door. Harriman gets on a plane and goes off to Paris or wherever. Rusk goes back to the Department and tries to deal with some other major crisis or get the Soviet Summit going or testify on the Hill. After all, the job of Secretary of State is extraordinarily demanding. And Harriman goes on and says that Rusk is weak, whereas what Dean Rusk did was in fact a function of his value system. I want to stress that I'm not going to be judgmental about these things. You know, you and your father asked me to come down here and talk frankly, so I'm giving you some vignettes of things that happened a decade and a half ago. These two men, whatever the reasons, these two men did not like each other. They just didn't. It may be that today, fifteen years later, Mr. Rusk has acquired a greater respect for Averell Harriman's tenacity and his longevity and his commitment than he held in 1968. But the fact is, they didn't like each other. And even when they traveled together--I first met Harriman in Vietnam when he came to Vietnam on a trip with Mr. Rusk. You know, there was always a rivalry there. Harriman was an extraordinarily aggressive man. He was, as I said once, the only ambitious seventy-seven year old I ever met. And Mr. Rusk was exactly the opposite: a person who never put himself forward, who was self-effacing, and served the President.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, there must have been a lot of tension between them prior to 1968, and yet Harriman was my dad's choice to head that Paris delegation. Evidently they managed to work things out.

HOLBROOKE: They may have worked many things out together and now they may indeed deny there was friction between them. But I'm merely telling you what I remember. And you know, I'm sort of in an unusual position here. I gather I'm the youngest person you're interviewing. I was watching all of this from a very low level. I was in my twenties and watching the most senior men in the United States grappling with these insoluble problems. The tension was enormous. I learned a great deal watching them that shaped my subsequent conduct in public office and I have great sympathy for all of them.

SCHOENBAUM: Would it be fair to say that this intense relationship between Harriman and Rusk--and I think you're right--as I perceive it, it wouldn't be totally negative, it would be a complex one. Doesn't this have roots in the forties when Harriman and [George Frost] Kennan of

course were advisers and Rusk had his battles with Kennan? Rusk was a proponent of the legalism school of foreign policy, international law school, whereas Harriman and Kennan were components of the more "will to power," the more pragmatic school of foreign policy. And although they had certain things in common, they had some very fundamental differences in the forties. Is that a fair statement?

HOLBROOKE: I think that it's absolutely true that the roots of all this come out of the forties. These men, and you have to add Clifford and Nitze to the equation, had all served [Harry S] Truman; and now under Johnson their relationships were being tested. I don't think Harriman and Kennan were quite as close as you suggest. Kennan was Harriman's deputy in Moscow and there was a considerable respect between them at one level. At another level, everyone who knew George Kennan though he was a bit odd and that he was particularly uncomfortable in the exercise of power. Kennan, in your father's view, Rich, and certainly in my view, was always ambivalent about the role of the democracy and foreign policy; and in that sense, he was wrong. Dean Rusk has always stood very strongly for a very democratic approach. But the fact is that in the late forties, on most of these issues there were significant disagreements. The most important disagreement were over the creation of Israel in which you had Clifford on one side and Acheson and [George Catlett] Marshall on the other. And Dean Rusk was a Marshall man from beginning to end. Clifford was anti-Marshall and anti-Acheson.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, what came next after the issue of where we have the talks?

HOLBROOKE: Well, after we finally picked Paris as the site, Mr. Rusk met with the delegation in his little conference room behind the Secretary of State's office. Harriman had asked Katzenbach, who was then my boss, if I could be detached to go to work in Paris. I, of course, was delighted. I wanted very much to go to Paris. I didn't know Harriman well at the time, but Harriman wanted me to come and Harriman liked to have small delegations. And that suited Mr. Rusk just fine because he didn't want any leaks. Leaks were absolutely central to his concern. He was very worried when we went off to Paris. He was worried that the delegation would become a pressure point against Lyndon Johnson. His instructions to me, as I've told you before, not only to me but to the whole delegation, were that we would not discuss fallback positions. Not even internally! We were going to Paris to find out what the Vietnamese in Hanoi were willing to agree to if we stopped the rest of the bombing. There had to be a quid pro quo in Dean Rusk's mind. We were not going to stop the bombing of the rest of North Vietnam unless we got something in return. The North Vietnamese position was that you stop the rest of the bombing and then we'll talk about ending the war. From the beginning a lot of people believed--and I think Vance probably was in this group, Harriman was certainly in this group--that if we wanted to make progress fast, we would have to stop all the bombing. Harriman was the most political animal of the group, and for Harriman the cessation of bombing was important not simply because the war in Vietnam was, in Harriman's view, a hopeless proposition, but because it was the only chance to help Humphrey win the 1968 Presidential election.

RICHARD RUSK: Did Harriman bring all these concerns up, and the fact that he really wanted a full bombing halt to my dad, at that first meeting before you went off to Paris?

HOLBROOKE: He certainly didn't bring it up in my presence, but this was a formal meeting with the Secretary of State for the whole delegation. Harriman and Vance must have had a lot of private meeting with Dean Rusk and Lyndon Johnson at that time. And they went over to the White House and met with Johnson. I did not go on that meeting. Phil [Philip C.] Habib was at that meeting. I know because there's a photograph of them. Harriman assembled a very small and quite superb delegation including Phil Habib and Marshall Green, Bill [William H.] Sullivan, General [Andrew J.] Goodpaster at first as the military adviser, and later General [George M.] Seignious [II], General [Paul F.] Gorman, General [Fred C.] Weyand, all went on to very senior positions in the U.S. Army. And off we went to Paris. At that point, I commuted occasionally between Washington and Paris carrying messages. I've already told you about them. The most dramatic moment for me was when Mr. Rusk called me into his office in August or early September, and told me to tell Cy and Governor Harriman that under no circumstances were they to make any further recommendations in normal cables. Any suggestions for instructions should go back through the secure telephone lines to Ben [Benjamin H.] Read and Ben would type them up and hand them directly to Mr. Rusk. Now, what did that instruction really mean? In our last interview, Rich, we didn't get into what it meant, but I think it's very clear. Rusk was hoping to help the delegation in Paris put its positions forward before the President and he knew that if they came back in cable form, they risked leaks and they risked counterattacks from Bunker who would get copies. So once again, I think that Mr. Rusk was being very precise and very careful and a little bit ambivalent. On one hand, he was trying to be helpful to Vance and Harriman. On the other hand, when the chips were down a month or two later, he sided with Bunker. But I want to stress because it's been so obscured by the discussion of these issues that there was a titanic argument developing between Paris and Saigon with Dean Rusk right in the middle of it. And as far as I can tell, he ended up siding with Bunker. And that battle came down to whether we would stop the bombing, how we would stop it, and how we would then treat the Saigon government. In late October, we had in effect decided to find a formula under which we would indeed stop the rest of the bombing unilaterally, but we would state that it was with an understanding that certain things would happen after the bombing stopped. Circumstances that would prevail, a phrase which as my memory has it, Dean Rusk created. This--

RICHARD RUSK: And I believe the circumstances were that there would not be another major attack on South Vietnamese cities--

HOLBROOKE: And they wouldn't fire on our reconnaissance planes, and that the level of violence would correspondingly decline and they would not attack or infiltrate directly across the DMZ.

RICHARD RUSK: Right, no major attack across the DMZ.

HOLBROOKE: Those were the circumstances that we said would prevail.

RICHARD RUSK: And it was your impression that that came from my dad?

HOLBROOKE: Yes. I can't prove it but I am fairly sure that that phrasing came from him. But, we had extensive talks in Paris and Washington with the Russians: Mr. Rusk with [Anatoly F.]

Dobrynin and Vance with the number two in the Soviet embassy in Paris, a man named Oberemko who was one of the most brilliant Soviet diplomats. He died of a heart attack a few years later. The Russians involved themselves very heavily at this point in the negotiations, putting enormous pressure on Hanoi to at least acknowledge the American position so that Lyndon Johnson would stop the bombing. Bunker's role in this--I'd have to review the cables to understand exactly what Bunker did. But my memory is that Bunker's parallel discussions with President Thieu in Saigon mislead Thieu. When we finally decided at the very end of October after around-the-clock sessions in Paris to stop all the bombing, at that point, Thieu told Bunker that he was opposed. And Bunker then came back to Washington with cables supporting Thieu's position. So Johnson announced the bombing halt on October 30 and said talks will begin in Paris on November 6 or thereabouts--I may have the dates wrong by a few days--which will involve the South Vietnamese "who are welcome to come if they wish," I believe that was the final phrasing. You see, the Vietnamese--we had all along said the South Vietnamese would come. And at the last minute, Bunker sends a cable back saying Thieu says he won't come. Johnson has already told Moscow and Hanoi. He's scheduled a speech. So they rewrite the sentence to say the South Vietnamese are welcome to attend if they want. There are now about four or five days left before the election. Humphrey has caught Nixon in the polls for the first time, closing a huge gap. And suddenly Thieu is going around publicly saying, "I'm not going to that meeting." And so the American public thinks it's a kind of political trick.

SCHOENBAUM: And Mitchell was involved in that too--

HOLBROOKE: That's when Mitchell and Anna Chennault made their contacts with the South Vietnamese.

RICHARD RUSK: Is that in the record? Has it been written down?

HOLBROOKE: It's in Sy [Seymour M.] Hersh's book on Kissinger. Have you read that? You ought to check Seymour Hersh's book--

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, you blame the responsibility for that breakdown more or less on Bunker's mishandling the negotiations with Thieu. To what extent do you think he was following Dean Rusk's instructions and therefore, my dad may have been implicitly involved in this?

HOLBROOKE: No, no, no way. Your father would never have wanted it to have happened. It was a catastrophe. For the second time in the year there had been another profound miscalculation, just like the one I mentioned earlier. This time the failure had been in Saigon. Your father was centrally involved in this discussion that was going to stop the bombing just before the elections and suddenly Thieu says I'm not part of this deal. And Bunker comes in--

RICHARD RUSK: On what basis do you think my dad was not involved in Bunker's mishandling of the situation?

HOLBROOKE: He was receiving these cables from Saigon. The only place where your father might be faulted is the place where everyone ought to be faulted: they didn't understand the

Vietnamese well enough to know that Thieu was never on board and that Bunker was doing a rather poor job, a very poor job. I know that this is maligning the memory of someone that everyone holds in highest regard, but that's my view. Bunker didn't do his job. When this exploded, however, Mr. Rusk had to choose between the Harriman position, which was essentially cram it down Thieu's throat, or the Bunker position, which was we can't do that to our ally. And he and LBJ sided with Bunker. Incidentally, this scene was replayed four years later, almost to the week, when Kissinger flew from Paris with an agreement he'd made with Hanoi to Saigon to present it to Thieu in the second week of October, 1972 and (unintelligible) well that comes right afterwards--the "peace is at hand" was his attempt to cover it up. He goes into Saigon on his plane and presents it to Thieu. His plan is that Thieu will sign it and he'll fly to Hanoi. Then a couple of days before the '72 election, he will emerge in Hanoi with an agreement, just like Johnson had hoped to emerge with an agreement in '68. He gets to Saigon and Thieu says this is my death warrant and throws him out. It's interesting that on the plane from Paris to Saigon, if you read Kissinger's memoirs, he says that only one person on that plane was prescient enough to see that Thieu was going to reject it, and that person was John [Dimitri] Negroponte. Negroponte, who is now Assistant Secretary for oceans, environment, and science, was my roommate in Saigon and was in Paris with me in '68. He had lived through the thing in '68. He saw clearly; it was identical. No one else saw. But it was exactly the same thing each time and the ambassador in Saigon each time was also with Bunker.

RICHARD RUSK: Why do you think my dad sided with Bunker rather than Harriman when it came down to that final decision as to whether we would make South Vietnam show?

HOLBROOKE: You'll have to ask him. I think that reason probably was that Johnson and Rostow were there as well, that the election was lost at this point, and he was not going to--or the election was out of hand. Actually, let me rephrase that, because part of this battle preceded the election and it certainly wasn't lost (unintelligible). Why would he side with Bunker? I think probably on the grounds that there was no way to bring Thieu to the table at this point. But you'll have to ask him.

RICHARD RUSK: We did, and he said it couldn't be done. You just can't make another government do something that they flatly don't want to do and refuse to do. In other words, he's saying that they weren't our puppet, that there was a legitimate government there and we always maintained that, and we couldn't abandon that position when push really did come to shove.

HOLBROOKE: Well, I think they weren't a puppet. I agree with that. But Bunker did not do a good job. See, everyone talks about this as though Bunker was merely a messenger. But Bunker was the American ambassador. We needed a more aggressive and alert ambassador instead of somebody who was already eighty years old, almost eighty. I knew Bunker. He had great bearing and dignity, but he was old. He was tired. He didn't have the muscle or the strength for this. He had immense dignity but he wasn't alert enough for this crisis. I think Bunker is one of the more overrated people in American diplomacy. I know your father won't agree with me. Show me an example of Bunker doing something truly skillful in this area. He might have been skillful earlier in West Irian Jaya.

RICHARD RUSK: You saw these cables that Bunker was sending and you were aware that that negotiation was being mishandled. Did you bring this to my dad's attention? And number two, if he was not involved in that particular break-down, should he have been involved as Secretary of State?

HOLBROOKE: I didn't bring it to his attention. I was in Paris. I was part of the delegation which was causing the problem as he saw it.

RICHARD RUSK: No, I don't mean you personally carried it to him in Washington, but surely your delegation reported--

HOLBROOKE: Harriman and Vance were very, very upset, especially Harriman, who saw this as the probable end of his government service.

SCHOENBAUM: And Rusk knew that they were upset?

HOLBROOKE: Sure. Ben Read knew. We were on the phone with--

RICHARD RUSK: Could he have gotten involved and tried to straighten out the Bunker-Thieu communication?

HOLBROOKE: It's very tough once you've got your ambassador in place and particularly if you think he's the best diplomat you've got in the diplomatic corps, which was everyone's view of Ellsworth Bunker, and when Lyndon Johnson has said, "This is my favorite diplomat." Johnson loved Bunker. And so you can't do anything about it when you reach late October.

RICHARD RUSK: In all fairness to Ellsworth Bunker, my dad has always said that realistically, he didn't think the North Vietnamese had any incentive to negotiate. Could the same argument be made for the South Vietnamese? Was there anything that Bunker could have done to deliver Thieu at the conference?

HOLBROOKE: Well, the South Vietnamese had decided that they had a better chance of survival if Nixon won than if Humphrey had won. And they were probably right in that at the time. Although, as it turned out, Nixon betrayed them and sent them to their doom with the '72 agreement four years later. But they got four more years out of it and Humphrey would've ended the war faster than that. So their judgment was not incorrect, but I think that--

SCHOENBAUM: What were the Russians doing at that time? Were they trying to manipulate the election?

HOLBROOKE: Yeah, the Russians, as I've said earlier, were trying to help Humphrey by pushing Hanoi into an agreement. But Rich, you've got to remember when you're talking about Hanoi, and it cannot be stressed too highly, that Hanoi's objective never changed from the beginning of the war to the last day of the war. They were going to take over South Vietnam. They were willing to do whatever was necessary. If they could do it with cadre and indigenous

Vietcong, fine. If they needed North Vietnamese regular units, fine. If they could do it in ten years, fine, they'd take ten years. If it took twenty years, they'd take twenty years. But their patience was limitless. Their willingness to fight and pay enormous costs was terrifying.

RICHARD RUSK: It exceeded ours. And my dad was aware of all that. And, really, for him to have sided with Harriman and Vance would have admitted, would have really meant the failure of our mission over there. He assumed from the beginning that there was no way to bring North Vietnam to a meaningful negotiation that would at all reflect the objectives of our policy.

HOLBROOKE: And I think that when he got down to the crunch at the end, he was more comfortable leaving office and turning the problem over to Nixon than for presiding at the very end of an eight-year period over the dismantling of the entire war effort--

END OF SIDE 2

