

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk ZZZ: Part 2 of 2

Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas J. Schoenbaum, and Robert E. Clute

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The complete interview also includes Rusk YYY: Part 1.

SCHOENBAUM: Referring to McGeorge Bundy's view that basically the covert action is counterproductive because of his experiences in the Kennedy administration, he advocates that if we find that we need to do something in Central America, for instance, we should rely on our Navy and not resort to covert action. What is your experience with covert action, particularly in the developing world? Do you agree with McGeorge Bundy that the experiences in the early sixties were counterproductive?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think there are very sharp limits on the proper use of covert action, and one should always look, as in the Bay of Pigs or in the present situation in Central America, as to whether whatever we do should simply be overt and not pretend to covert activity. I do think we have to maintain some capability in the covert field because there may be situations where covert action is the principal alternative to war. And I would prefer covert action to war. I think the capacity of the United States in covert action has been exaggerated. For example, I looked into the circumstances of the return of the Shah [Mohammed Reza Pahlavi] in Iran: well, the action that was taken was taken by local Iranians. When they stepped forward to put their lives on the line, the United States is a long way away and there is nothing we can do to help them in that situation. And I think the role of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] in Guatemala was greatly exaggerated. Now, when it was all over, there is a tendency for these people to beat their breasts and say "Oh, look what we did with our cloak and daggers," particularly for the benefit of the appropriations committees of Congress. But, I think there is a limited capacity. I think that we do have to be alert to certain kinds of things: for example, counter intelligence and disinformation programs aimed at the Third World in a way that injures the United States. We turned up in the sixties, for example, a couple of cases where the most crude forgeries had been planted on African leaders trying to persuade them that the CIA was out to get them. And we were able to sit down with those foreign leaders, with experts on both sides, and demonstrate that these were just very crude forgeries possibly planted by the KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoye Bezopastnosti]. I don't know. But, no, I think we have to handle covert operations very carefully indeed. Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy used to be very much interested in this kind of thing, and there were times when I had to veto him. For example, he proposed on one occasion that we organize American businessmen in a lot of these countries to develop the capability of culling out pro-American demonstrations as a counter to the anti-American demonstrations that were turning up here and there. Well, I told Bobby that that was a foolish idea because in the first place these businessmen didn't know how to do it, wouldn't want to do it, that their business was business; but secondly that the local governments would in no way tolerate such activity on the part of American businessmen located in their countries. Well, he pressed it, and I wouldn't have it. And I spoke to President Kennedy about it and he said, "Well, let Bobby play around with some of these things because he's interested in them, but if he gets in your way, just speak to me

and I'll take care of it." But, it's easy to think of all sorts of little tricks that are nothing but a fly on the water buffalo in terms of impact or result. And I just don't think we ought to play those penny ante games in most places most of the time.

CLUTE: Well, how would you compare our intelligence, our covert intelligence or our intelligence collection, in the days of the Johnson and Kennedy administrations and now? I realize that CIA has had to be cleaned up, that some of these reforms had to be made, but do you think we threw the baby out with the bath water in the process? Do you think we have a decent collection?

DEAN RUSK: Well, bear in mind that more than ninety percent of the information we gather around the world, should try to gather, is in the public domain. It's public information. But there is such a blizzard of that information falling in on the world; it takes a very considerable effort to try to keep up with it. But, then there's another five or six percent or so that comes from technical information: satellite photography and listening to people's broad casts and things of that sort. Then there's another three or four percent that might come from a little dash of espionage. But, human espionage techniques have dwindled away because of the impact of technical sources. We do not have the capability in the old-fashioned spy system that we might have had. We perhaps ought to give more attention to developing a little bit more of that. But, normally speaking, most of the information you need is in the public domain. The problem is getting at it, understanding it, collating it, trying to interpret what it means.

CLUTE: Well, of course, public domain for us in an open society is one thing. In Russia, in a closed society, that public domain isn't quite as rich, is it?

DEAN RUSK: That is correct, but nevertheless, there is an enormous amount of information in the public domain in the Soviet Union for those who are willing to gather it and look at it. But, it's true that you don't get nearly as much from them as they get from us in such matters. And you can't rely upon many of their official reports about various sectors of the economy and things of that sort. And many things they simply do not report to the public, such as details of their military expenditures and things of that sort.

RICHARD RUSK: Pop, I have a question that relates to Tom's, and I'll just read it to you. It has to do with the superpower rivalry and its effect on our policies toward the developing world. What extent do American policies and principles come into conflict regarding our policies toward the developing world? You yourself have commented as Secretary upon our unfortunate tendency to ally ourselves with weak allies, less than legitimate regimes, governments not wholly interested in progress or a social justice. Yet we often do this because of the superpower rivalry and in the name of fighting communism. What did you do to try to break us out of this mold?

DEAN RUSK: Well, the principal thing that one must try to do is to give these Third World countries a feeling that so far as we are concerned they are not just pawns in the struggle between us and the Soviet Union. They want us to look upon them for their own worth. And so you have to be careful about that. But also, and I'm thinking particularly now about Africa, I've found it interesting that black Africans seem to be very resistant to outside ideological penetration. I think

we learned it; I think the Russians learned it; I think the Chinese learned it. Black Africans seem to be able to listen, smile and then go on and do it in their own African way. Now, they are strongly in--even the Soviet Union has found that its influence in certain areas has been proved to be rather temporary. They have been thrown out of a good many places and they have their ugly Russians just as we have our ugly Americans. But, I think it would be--of course, when we are talking to the Congress there are some of them who almost have to be, would vote on this issue, on this basis. But you see, you don't buy the policy of a country with foreign aid. It's very rare that our foreign aid to any country was more than one percent of its own gross national product. Now there are certain ways in which that one percent can galvanize much of the rest of the economy. But what happens to the ninety- nine percent of their economy is really the important thing as to what happens in that country. So, you know, countries don't sell themselves for one percent or two percent of their gross national product, no more than we would. And so I think we have exaggerated the aspect that foreign aid buys us friends in different parts of the world.

CLUTE: But, since you've mentioned that and that it is a very small percentage, when you were Secretary of State, you greatly changed the focus of our aid program to switch from, you know, these spectacular projects to things like education and agricultural production, and so forth. How did you achieve this, how did you go about trying to--

DEAN RUSK: Simply largely by actions taken in Washington to try to change the emphasis of the aid program. And that could be done fairly smoothly and fairly quickly. Now sometimes the recipient countries didn't like some aspects of that. [Achmed] Sukarno wanted a huge stadium, for example, in Indonesia. Well, we turned that down. I don't know, I think maybe the Russians finally built it for him.

CLUTE: The Chinese liked this kind of project, too.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: A football stadium, was it?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, a big athletic stadium and--

RICHARD RUSK: Well, we ought to be able to understand that here.

DEAN RUSK: But there were times when some of the Third World leaders would make it very difficult for us to go ahead with aid programs. For example, I mentioned that several hundred million dollar three-year food program we had for [Gasmel Abdel] Nasser's Egypt during the Kennedy administration. Well, we didn't expect Nasser to get up before those big crowds and salaam to us and thank us all over the place, but he wouldn't even be quiet. He would get up before those big crowds and scream such things as, "Throw your aid into the Red Sea," that kind of thing. And he persuaded the Congress to do just that. And the aid program came to an end. And so it isn't easy for us to get Congressional support for continuing aid programs for people who are trying to gouge us in the eye all the time. Now on the whole, however, we thought, both when I was at the Rockefeller Foundation and in government, that if you are trying to help the

people involved, there are times when you have to look around, or look over, or look below the government and take its own shortcomings in stride in order to do something for the people who actually should be the object of our effort.

RICHARD RUSK: Good point. And let your mind reflect on that a bit. Can you drag up some examples of--a classic one of course is Lyndon Johnson's approach to India during their various famines when Lyndon Johnson insisted that certain changes take place within India before he would continue with our food program. Can you think of other instances in which we had an influence on a country's internal policies?

CLUTE: Incidentally, I'm citing that story in a paper I'm giving in Rome at the SID [Society for International Development] conference on African food crisis. Do you mind if I do that?

DEAN RUSK: No.

CLUTE: Okay.

DEAN RUSK: Well, for example, in the case of Biafra during the civil war in Nigeria, many of the Ibos were simply starving. We had substantial numbers of food ships just off the coast with food to try to get to them. The colonel commanding the Biafran forces would not even allocate an airstrip to us by which we could get this food into the people who were starving. Now here was a case where the chief Biafran got in the way of our bringing food to the Biafrans. Well, that makes things pretty tough.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall what you did in that instance?

DEAN RUSK: We couldn't do very much.

CLUTE: Too bad we didn't know that. One of my students was head of the relief strip--really--from the University of Georgia!

DEAN RUSK: Now, remember one of the best examples of trying to do something despite its leadership had to do with Papa Doc [Francois] Duvalier's Haiti. Haiti was the cesspool of the Western Hemisphere: poverty, voodoo, [inaudible] brigands supporting Papa Doc Duvalier. And we tried directly through various aid, through persuasion, through pressure, through attempts to corrupt Papa Doc Duvalier in fact, to get something in there that would help the Haitian people. They were just miserable. We tried to get more of an OAS [Organization of American States] presence in Haiti. But when we would try to help out, Papa Doc Duvalier would usually come in and skim off what we were trying to do for his own treasury. I remember we set out to develop an airstrip there to international standards to help attract tourists, and things like that. Well, Papa Doc Duvalier simply took our trucks away from us and used them for his Ton-Ton-Macoute brigands. Well, it's pretty hard, you know, sometimes to penetrate a government that goes beyond a certain level, but we tried to take some of the shortcomings of these governments in stride in order to do something that could help the people. Bob Clute, let me ask you a question. We have a very large number of young people from the Third World countries studying in the United States each year. I wonder if we, in our colleges and universities, have given enough

thought about how best we train these young people for the circumstances in which they will find themselves when they go back home. For example, it doesn't do much good to bring someone over to the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University and teach them all about what miracles they can do with an electron microscope when they go home and find that there is no electron microscope, or to show them how great it is to produce a lot of food with a \$50,000 tractor and then they go home and there is no \$50,000 tractor. Have we given enough thought in this country as to how best we can help these young people for the circumstances that they will find when they go home? What's your reaction to that?

CLUTE: Well, I think this gets at the heart of general problems of transfer of technology. On the credit side of the ledger, I'd like to say that one of the brightest points in my life was when Dee Dee Clute broke her elbow and I was going to have to pack her in ice and fly her 5,000 miles to get it set. And my gardener said, "What's the matter, Pa, you got such a long face?" I told him and he said, "My son just returned from Mayo Clinic where he's been made a bone surgeon. He just came in on the plane today, and maybe he could do it for you." And the young man went down to the hospital where the blood was laying all over the floor where they hadn't even bothered to mop up the blood, and he did it. He operated on Dee Dee and did a marvelous job. So, these things do sometimes. But in the main, I think our mistake is, we shouldn't be educating these people here. We should be sending our resources and our professors to institutions there to develop their own programs along these lines, now, for two reasons: One, they don't go through the culture shock; two, the curriculum would be geared to their own problems and their own resources; and three, we'd stop the brain drain and they'd stay there and they wouldn't, you know, stay on in America. See, I'm a firm believer that we should do much--you know, what we're doing in Burkina Faso. Now, I agree with--I think this is the right approach.

DEAN RUSK: Right.

CLUTE: You know, I think we've done too much of the other. You know, if a young man comes over here and he studies horticulture in Indiana, what does he learn for tropical agriculture?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, well I must say I thoroughly agree with you on that point. At the Rockefeller Foundation, we soon recognized that training these young people in this country or in Western Europe would come nowhere near meeting the numbers of trained people that were required, and therefore they've got to improve their own capacity to train these people where they live. And that, I think, is a very important consideration. I do think we need some improved facilities of communication, particularly in the research field. I've traveled in a good many countries and listened to a good many research universities and laboratories and things like that, and sometimes it's been depressing to see that in their own efforts they were simply repeating some rather elementary kinds of research that had long since been done elsewhere, and that somehow we do not have an effective international center for the dissemination of information that would help them to start from what has already been done and go on from there.

CLUTE: Well, of course we're just in the process of starting that in, you know, the new center for--What is it? Bio--

DEAN RUSK: High tech biology?

CLUTE: High tech biology.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, I think it's a very important thing to do.

CLUTE: I think so, too. But it's this kind of service that we can give, I think, rather than the general training of foreign students, I think sometimes is a mistake in some areas. It'll vary, but certainly when we get into areas like engineering, agriculture, this sort of thing--and then, too, we get into the politics of spreading around. Now, there's no reason in God's world why a young person from the Sahara interested in agriculture should go to Iowa. He should go to Nevada, or Arizona, or someplace that engages in dry agriculture. If he's from tropical Africa he should come to Louisiana or Mississippi or Georgia. But we don't tend to do that. In other words, we have our own specialties within our own country which we don't really use for foreign students.

DEAN RUSK: Right, right.

CLUTE: You know we can talk about peanuts here; we can talk about cowpeas. We can talk about all these things that an African student would be interested in. And be damned if they can at Iowa. I know, I'm an Iowan by birth.

DEAN RUSK: Well, you mentioned the culture shock. That is a factor that we have to take note of and be sympathetic to. I remember in the early seventies we had here an Ethiopian lawyer who came--that was during the regime of Haile Selassie. He came to the U.S. to take a Masters in law. The culture shock was too much for him. He said he just found it almost impossible to live in a free society, where he saw everybody criticizing the President when they wanted to and competing in that sort of a fashion. He said it was such a shock to him that he simply could not go back to Ethiopia, and he almost psychologically collapsed under the culture shock.

RICHARD RUSK: Wow!

CLUTE: Well, would you believe it, when I came back from Sierra Leone, I was very unhappy. I couldn't figure out why. I was very upset. Now, my children refused to talk about Africa at school. They just wouldn't ever mention Africa or talk about it with their classmates because of the Tarzan view of Africa which offended them.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah.

CLUTE: And, after about two weeks, Richard Long invited me up to Atlanta University to a conference. And I checked into Paschal's Motor Inn, had my dinner, talked a little bit, and realized this uneasy feeling was gone. I simply was not accustomed to living in the white world. So, culture shock is really a hard thing to deal with and, you know, has little to do with education or intelligence or anything else. And it's a hard thing to get around.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah, yeah. And there are special problems for anyone who is living in a society where he is in a sea of people of another race and culture. I've seen psychological studies on that

in my day, and this itself is a special problem. So when you bring Hindu women over here to study home economics, it's not easy for them.

CLUTE: And, you know, it's not a purposeful thing. It's nothing anybody does on purpose. I had a good friend who ran the dining halls at the university, and we'd had a strike over them. And I'd been instrumental in getting rid of the old person that had a [inaudible] hiring this new person. We were good friends. And she would often feed me when I was late to lunch, you know. And she'd sit down and eat with me and one day she said to me, "Oh, you look so good now." And at that time I was the color of that desk. I was just deep tan, you know. And I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "You know, this agrees with you. You like it don't you?" And I said, "Why do you say that?" And she said, "I can remember when you came how pale, sickly white you looked." And I said, "Don't you realize that what you're saying to me is dark is beautiful and white's ugly." And she was absolutely shocked and finally agreed with me. But, you know, many of these things--

DEAN RUSK: I'm not sure, Richie, I've told the story of a camping trip that some of us in my college at Oxford took during a vacation for a kind of reading party.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, we got that one. If you want Bob Clute--

DEAN RUSK: We were up in the hill country of northern England. We had a Hindu fellow with us. He turned out to be a little bit of a nuisance in the camping business because there were certain things that he could not even do for himself. We had to do it because it would be unclean for him to do it.

RICHARD RUSK: Crazy. But, some examples.

DEAN RUSK: We were sitting around the fire one night and one of my British friends turned to him with typical British candor, and said, "Eric, how do you explain this musky odor that you Hindus seem to have? It's a very distinctive odor." And my friend the Hindu said, "You have never had the chance to smell a meat-eating white man."

CLUTE: Now, I kid thee not, and this is the honest-to-God's truth: When I lived in Africa, I could stand in an airport, and I could know if a European or, you know, non-African were standing within forty feet of me. It is a very sickening smell that comes from eating meat. It's true, it really is.

RICHARD RUSK: That's funny.

DEAN RUSK: Well, Rich, should we call this off, it's twelve thirty. How do you turn that off?

END OF SIDE 1

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