

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk ZZZZZ: Part 2 of 3

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

1986 February

The complete interview also includes Rusk YYYYY: Part 1; Rusk FFF FFF: Part 3.

HOLBROOKE: They would rather have--at the end it came down, they had only two choices left. The third choice, which was to turn over a successful effort in Vietnam to the successors, was not available to them. So the only choices they had left were to dismantle the war effort and begin to concede that it was hopeless or to hang tough and turn it over to their successors, whether their successor be [Richard Milhous] Nixon or [Hubert Horatio] Humphrey [Jr.], I think they would have made the same choice, but particularly when they knew it was going to be Nixon. They were going to, rather, turn over to Nixon the effort intact, with the bombing stopped of course, but otherwise intact rather than dismantled. Now if Humphrey had won, as a favor to Humphrey, they might have moved a little further to take some of the heat on themselves so that Humphrey wouldn't have to do it.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad has said that he thought that if Hubert Humphrey had won, that he would have moved quickly to an end of the war.

HOLBROOKE: That Humphrey would have?

RICHARD RUSK: Yes.

HOLBROOKE: Yes, and I think it's very possible that Johnson and Mr. Rusk would've have assisted him in doing that. But under the circumstances, I think that they did the only thing that was left to them which was not to allow their presidency to end with the defeat in Vietnam, but to pass the catastrophe and all its difficulties on to their successor.

RICHARD RUSK: From Dean Rusk's point of view, accepting that argument, was he right to take that position in October, November, December of 1968?

HOLBROOKE: In October, after the election, there was nothing left to do. That was it. The South Vietnamese were certainly not going to participate in negotiation when they thought Nixon would be nicer to them than Johnson would be. And so we sat around arguing about the shape of the table.

SCHOENBAUM: Does this explain something we talked about yesterday? Check me on this Rich. Dean Rusk has told us, and if I haven't misunderstood Dean Rusk, the idea that in March of '68, basically that is what he identified as the key time as a change of heart--

RICHARD RUSK: A turning point in the war.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, a turning point, and for him personally.

RICHARD RUSK: And for him personally. That's what he says now. That's what he says in 1985.

SCHOENBAUM: And this has always puzzled me. Why, if you turn around in March of '68, why then--

RICHARD RUSK: Why do you maintain the position? Dick, I'll let you comment on this.

HOLBROOKE: But my point is that what was too late to be done in October was not too late to be done in March. Had they wished to really turn around in March, instead of take this ambivalent policy, they might have done it. They might have been able to do something. Ten months might be long enough to negotiate an end to something. And we could have negotiated a much better deal in '68 than Nixon negotiated in '72. And twenty thousand Americans and an unknown number of Vietnamese would not have died.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

HOLBROOKE: Let me make clear Rich, include it on your next point, in regard to Tom's, that there was a prevailing phrase in Washington in the sixties which you hear a lot less of today, which was, "You've got to keep your options open." You've got to keep your options open. The policy which Mr. Rusk supported in March of sixty-eight was one that did keep his options open in his own mind. A limited bombing halt could fit either an attempt to rebuild American support for the war because we were trying or if, in the unlikely event the North Vietnamese responded, it could lead to the beginning of negotiation. As it turned out, we got caught in the middle because the Vietnamese response was calibrated to match the action. That is, our limited action got a limited response. So we then wasted ten months getting to the point which we should have gotten to in March. And I do not understand to this day, why, with all this endless retrospection on this traumatic event of March, people haven't focused in on the simplest point, which was that it was another tragic half-measure.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right, that's right.

HOLBROOKE: Just like our--we should have either done it or not done it. As it was, we got the worst of all worlds, with a momentary euphoria which cannot be imagined now: the excitement of the opening of those talks in Paris. The world was watching. [Walter] Cronkite was there; [David] Brinkley was there. The whole world press, thousands of people congregate in Paris, and we walked in the room at the Majestic Hotel on the Avenue Kleber and we and Hanoi read to each other face to face, the same kind of garbage we've been saying to each other through public statements for years. And then we tried to get secret talks going and the Vietnamese said, "Hey, you want to talk in secret? Fine but we're only going to talk about the bombing." And we said,

"No, we want to talk about the infiltration, we want to talk about the government and Saigon." Nothing. Mr. Rusk's position in that period was absolutely no movement during the summer. He would not move until after the Democratic convention. Hanoi's position was similar.

RICHARD RUSK: You remember him saying that?

HOLBROOKE: No, no, no but I do think that was his position. Hanoi's position was also no movement until after the convention because they wanted to see if somebody like Eugene [Joseph] McCarthy might get nominated. They didn't understand as clearly as we did, of course, that Humphrey had to be the nominee. They had no understanding of American politics. To this day, Hanoi doesn't understand American politics.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, you earlier said that my dad's position was to find out from the North Vietnamese what they were willing to agree to, in exchange for a total halt of the bombing. I think it's tied to that.

HOLBROOKE: Yes, but they wouldn't agree to anything.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right.

HOLBROOKE: Your father's position had always been: "Tell us. We want to know what you will do if we stop the bombing." Hanoi's position had always been, "You stop the bombing and then we'll talk about everything else."

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, you raised the point that March of 1968 was a turning point, not only in the war but in Dean Rusk's point of view. I think it's fair to say that there's a lot of continuity in my dad's thinking. A lot of it has remained constant over forty or fifty years. But there are some differences in his thinking on certain matters, and March 1968 is one of them. What he is saying in 1985 today about March 1968 is really somewhat different than how he believed back at the time.

HOLBROOKE: Well, it's the most important month of his public career.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right.

HOLBROOKE: And he knows it. He knows it is important and he is clearly thinking about it although he doesn't like to. We're forcing him to think about it. I think he realizes more clearly now than he did then what was happening. You have to understand that the people who were trying to make the government work in those months and weeks were operating under tension so enormous that they, no matter how intelligent they were, they were not detached. They were bone tired. They'd been in office seven years. They were fighting for their lives and for the Administration's survival. They were deeply--they were under unbelievable siege. It was tough, you know. And the Secretary of State had his son calling him from Cornell. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: On top of all of it.

HOLBROOKE: On top of everything. And the Secretary--

RICHARD RUSK: You're durn right I did.

HOLBROOKE: Well you called him after [William Childs] Westmoreland's request for the two hundred, six thousand troops and that story came out in late February. And everything seemed to be coming apart at the seams for these people who had been presiding over America's destiny more or less continuously since the nineteen forties, with some brief exceptions. And everything seemed out of control; everything. And you've to to understand that the impact during this period of things, like [Martin Luther] King's [Jr.] death and the riots in Washington and Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy's death, were also very great. You can't separate what's happened at Columbia University, and in the streets of Paris, aflame with students seizing power, almost overthrowing [Charles Andre Joseph Mario] de Gaulle, who did in fact leave power within a year in a situation which emanated from this. There are certain years in world history--1848 was one of them, '68 was another--where things happen. And the revolutionary fervors reach high pitches. They always receive, there's always a reaction. In 1848, there was a well-known reaction. Nineteen sixty-eight had a well-known reaction which is still going on. But before they recede, they leave wreckage. They sweep things away. That's what was happening in '68. And while the purpose of your study is to focus on Dean Rusk, he has to be understood in that context. The Warren [I.] Cohen thing you showed me this morning hardly mentions that. And yet that is the sea in which he was trying to swim to safety.

SCHOENBAUM: Good point Dick.

RICHARD RUSK: Right, yeah. Back to the Paris peace talks for a minute. My dad would not discuss the fall-back position.

HOLBROOKE: He wouldn't even let on--

RICHARD RUSK: He wouldn't even allow you to have one?

HOLBROOKE: He wouldn't allow us to bore him with--

RICHARD RUSK: Discuss it with him or even one with each other in Paris.

HOLBROOKE: Or much more, he would not allow us to send cables or suggestions on when to make concessions if at all. He said he would decide on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Because of fear of leaks and premature disclosure.

HOLBROOKE: And pressure on Johnson which he thought would backfire.

RICHARD RUSK: Was he right about the leaks and disclosure?

HOLBROOKE: Probably. Although--

RICHARD RUSK: Would they have come from within your delegation?

HOLBROOKE: We kept the secret negotiations secret for a long, long time. When the leak finally came on the negotiations, you know where it came? It came in Canberra. [Edward] Gough Whitlam, or [J.G.] Gorton, I can't remember. I think Gorton was the prime minister. You can check. Either Gorton or Whitlam leaked it. We had briefed our ambassador. Canberra briefed him and he leaked it. There was no leak in Paris. There were widespread accusations of leaks. There was one member of the delegation that everyone suspected of being a leak. And as it turned out, he didn't leak. I remember seeing, for example, Rich Smith, Hedrich [Laurence] Smith, who was the New York Times reporter covering the talks early on in the negotiations. Smith was a friend of mine and early on in the negotiations; he and I went out to dinner in Paris. And I said, "Rich, I gotta tell you something. These negotiations are quite different from anything else I've been involved in the government. And I've never lied to a reporter, but I just want to tell you now that I'm not gonna deal with you if things get tough. And don't expect me to be completely straight with you if you push me because the stakes are much too high."

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

HOLBROOKE: And then in the fall, in September and October when the secret talks began out in the suburbs and we had virtually no contact with reporters, I remember one day passing Smith in a corridor of the Crillon Hotel. And he saw me. I think I was with John [Dimitri] Negroponete. And in mock despair Smith covered himself up with his trench coat to pretend he was hiding from us because he knew we had, by now, stayed away from them. But he didn't get the story. Nobody got the story. Charles Collingwood was there for CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System]: a very close friend of [William Averell] Harriman. He didn't get the story. Stan [Stanley] Karnow was there for the *Washington Post*, a very close friend of mine, then and now. He didn't get the story. We kept the security end of it. So was your father's fear justified? Well, it's a legitimate fear. It's one that, as you know, your father's had in every aspect of his Secretary of Stateship. The press was a central concern of his. He distrusted not only the press but he distrusted colleagues who had friends in the press like Chester [Bliss] Bowles. But that fear was not the real fear. I think his main purpose in this case went beyond the press. He didn't want pressure to build up on Johnson for unilateral concessions.

SCHOENBAUM: What date was that conversation? That was the conversation you had with Rusk?

HOLBROOKE: No, he called in the whole delegation.

RICHARD RUSK: At the very beginning, before you went to Paris.

HOLBROOKE: The very beginning.

SCHOENBAUM: So it must have been the beginning of May, because we went to Paris around the seventh of May. So probably--check it. You have his appointment calendar.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Dick, my dad has a reputation for reticence, for not truly informing his colleagues what was in his mind. To what extent did that quality of his complicate your efforts over there in Paris?

HOLBROOKE: Well, you know I was a very junior member of the delegation. So this was below my threshold.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you remember Harriman saying--

HOLBROOKE: Have you talked to [Cyrus Roberts] Vance?

RICHARD RUSK: No.

HOLBROOKE: You've got to put Vance down on your list. Ask these questions to Vance. That's a very good question. I cannot answer that question.

RICHARD RUSK: Had we forced South Vietnam to the negotiating table, just flat out forced them or gone ahead with the negotiations without them if it had come to that, what would the practical consequences of that have been, say, in October 1968 when it became an issue? In other words, had Dean Rusk sided with Harriman and Vance and was able to prevail with that position with Lyndon Johnson, what would have been the consequences?

HOLBROOKE: Once we reached the last few days before the election, it was impossible for us to get [Nguyen Van] Thieu explicitly to agree to come to the table prior to the election. We had lost any leverage we had over there. But we're talking about four or five days now. You can always find ways to stall for four or five days.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

HOLBROOKE: Had this battle broken out earlier, we would have had plenty of leverage over Thieu, and then he would have had to come to the table. We could have said, "You know, we're going to cut down our aid." The Vietnamese government held us in sufficient awe for what we were capable of achieving politically just as the Filipinos hold us today.

RICHARD RUSK: Turn off the spigot. I mean that was the major point of leverage.

HOLBROOKE: Yeah, just the threat. And that could have been--but I want to stress that you can't do things when your messenger is incapable of delivering the message effectively. And my view, which I suspect I'm going to be the only person to say this to you, is that [Ellsworth]

Bunker wasn't up to it. And that's going to offend people I've been associated with. But that is my honest feeling. No one is--

[break in recording]

[Interview continues with Holbrooke reading Rich's questions, in a car traveling to the Atlanta airport.]

HOLBROOKE: The first question was whether I had any connections with Dean Rusk through the Peace Corp service. And the answer is: none. Those are unrelated issues.

The second question is what I felt the significance of the seventy-fifth birthday party for Mr. Rusk was in 1984. Had it ever been done before? I'm not aware that it'd been done before. I felt the significance of it was very symbolic: that you had a Republican administration honoring a Democratic Secretary of State, that you had sort of a reconciliation following the long struggle over Vietnam policy, and that you had people coming together to pay their respects to a person whom they admired for his integrity and sense of honor, even when they didn't agree with everything he had stood for in regard to one issue which had swamped all others.

RICHARD RUSK: You don't recall any kind of similar function on that scale for a retired American Secretary of State?

HOLBROOKE: I'm not aware of any, but you never know.

When joining the Foreign Service, why did you choose Vietnam? Well, I didn't choose Vietnam; Vietnam more or less chose me. I spoke French. They needed to send me to a French-speaking post. I was assigned to Vietnam because I spoke French, because I was unmarried, and because they were looking for people for an experiment of (unintelligible) Foreign Service officers to A.I.D. [Agency for International Development], and I was one of two officers chosen for that experiment in 1962.

The third question is about Americans learning to speak Vietnamese and who were the Vietnamese experts in the early sixties. I think that's a very important point. Normally you'd expect in the government--that is as people get more senior, they get more expert. For example, in Soviet affairs, the most expert people in U.S.-Soviet relations were also the most senior: [Charles Eustis "Chip"] Bohlen and Llewellyn [E.] Thompson [Jr.]. In this case however, in Vietnam, it was exactly the opposite. The more senior, the more ignorant. No senior officer spoke the language, only a few junior officers. And nobody knew anything about the country, the region. There was no tradition of academic studies, maybe no more than one or two people in the whole United States, maybe three--Joseph Butinger, Ellen [Joy] Hammer, and Bernard [B.] Fall--had ever concentrated in the area. A handful of journalists had covered the Indochinese war, but they weren't experts on the region and anyway they were journalists. And so we didn't have any expertise. You mention in your notes here Ed [Edward Geary] Lansdale. He certainly didn't speak Vietnamese. He was not a Vietnamese expert. He had had some experience in the

Philippines.

RICHARD RUSK: He was considered the expert at the time.

HOLBROOKE: He wasn't an expert on the culture or the political situation. He did know some of the leadership quite well.

RICHARD RUSK: Dick, was any effort made at any time during the sixties by any high level official, especially my father, to go back and restudy once again, or perhaps even for the first time, the roots of our involvement? Going back into the forties, and the fifties and the Geneva Accords, was that effort ever made?

HOLBROOKE: No, I'm not aware of any such effort that was made to study the roots of our commitment. That would have been considered by people at the time a diversionary and academic exercise.

Any contacts with Dean Rusk when he made his one trip to Vietnam is the next question. Well, he came over with Harriman in early '66. Is that the trip you're referring to?

RICHARD RUSK: No. There was an earlier one in, I think it was '62.

HOLBROOKE: I was not there in '62. I didn't get there until the spring of '63. I remember very well the '66 trip. I remember him and Harriman and [Henry Cabot] Lodge [Jr.]: three legendary senior figures, all had known each other for so many years, discussing the problems. But I don't remember the substance of the discussions and indeed I don't think I was present for any of those. Would more field trips have helped his understanding? Without any question. It is inexplicable that in a period of eight years as Secretary of State, a person would make so few trips to the region which was so central. And you cannot rely under any circumstances on official reporting through the chain of command when so much is at stake. It just can't be done.

Despite his experiences in CBI [China-Burma-India Theatre], did Dean Rusk really understand what was going on in Vietnam? Well, I don't know. CBI was not the same situation as Vietnam. I think he understood what was going on through the prism of his values and his experience in Korea. But the central dilemma of building up support for the South Vietnamese government against the Indochinese communist insurgency was very tricky. And if he didn't understand how deep the communists were into the fabric of Vietnamese society, if he didn't understand how fragile the South Vietnamese government was, it's not his fault in a sense because of poor reporting from the field.

RICHARD RUSK: You've referred a couple of times to the bad reporting from the field and the inadequate intelligence my dad was given; and yet in your article, you thought that INR's [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] intelligence reporting was very good. Can you elaborate on that? Was he truly misinformed? Did he allow himself to become misinformed?

HOLBROOKE: Well, INR had better analysis than many other elements of the U.S. government but they were not the primary source of insight or analysis for the Secretary of State and the President. That came from the embassy and from the Pentagon.

RICHARD RUSK: Any contact with Jack Foisie?

HOLBROOKE: Yes, I saw him once in a while, but Jack was very, very, very careful not to mix up friendships and his professional responsibilities. And I had never known Jack that well. I'd known Phil [Philip Manning Foisie] very well, and I really like Phil. But Jack I hardly know.

Did my relationship with Dean Rusk ever help or hinder me in any way? Well, I don't think it really hurt me at all, but it never was of any major benefit because Mr. Rusk was determined that it not be.

RICHARD RUSK: What kind of job did the Marines do in Vietnam?

HOLBROOKE: I visited the Marines up in the Third Marine Amphibious Force Area, south of Danang for a week in 1966. I wrote a report in which I was extremely critical of them, although I was deeply moved by their bravery. I felt that they were following a strategic concept which was completely wrong. They had manuals which they had brought with them, including the Marine manuals of pacification of Nicaragua in the 1930s. I still have one they gave me which simply didn't apply to the Vietnamese situation. They viewed the area south of Danang as a beachhead which they would establish and clear and secure and then move on. The problem was that you couldn't do that because the Vietcong were in among the people. So as you move forward building schools and infirmaries, which the Marines did with great gusto and the best of good intentions, the Vietcong were sitting right in the middle of your position waiting or you either to move on or waiting to ambush somebody behind you. I remember going out on a field trip once with Lieutenant General Lou [Lewis W.] Walt, who was the U.S. commander of the Marines. We went to a little village which was being pacified or developed by a company of the First Battalion of the Ninth Marine division. This was a Ninth Marine regiment, I stand corrected, the first of the Ninth. The Ninth Marine regiment had fought at Iwojima and Tarawa. It had battle streamers from some of America's most glorious days in battle, and here they were in this little village; doing all these wonderful things. But a day or two before we'd gotten there, two Marines had been blown up and severely wounded by a Claymore mine which had been set off electrically, apparently by some kids. And the Marines couldn't understand this. General Walt couldn't understand it. And I remember vividly General Walt squatting down in the sand in the village square and showing how the Marines were going to push the Vietcong out of the area like you push sand in front of your hand. And he pushed the sand in front of his hand. And I found myself unable to explain to him, having been in Vietnam now for two and a half years at the time of this incident, but being still twenty-five years old--I found it impossible to explain to this hero of the Pacific campaign of World War II that this just wouldn't work, that this just wasn't the way things worked. I knew it. I knew he was wrong, but he was a very senior and distinguished person and I was just a kind along for the ride on an embassy field reporting assignment. But I wrote up a long analysis of the Marine strategy which, unfortunately, I have lost. Maybe it's

somewhere in the files; maybe it's disappeared forever. It was both very sympathetic to their motives and admiring of their bravery, but also critical of their chances of success. And I remember calculating that at this rate, the Marines would need half a million men just to pacify the Province of Quinhon. And I gave this report to Lodge, who was still ambassador, and to Westmoreland. And Westmoreland was vastly amused because he didn't like the Marines anyway and he felt that--

RICHARD RUSK: Although he was following the same strategy--

HOLBROOKE: Well, he was following a modification of the same strategy. But he was amused at the rash young kid who was criticizing the Marines. Lodge read the report with astonishment, and it was clear that he didn't think this was the right kind of thing. And Philip [C.] Habib read it. He was the political counselor. And everybody read it in Saigon, but they decided they better not send it to Washington because it would cause problems and wouldn't solve anything.

RICHARD RUSK: Was Dean Rusk responsible for this blockage in communications flow, by his own attitudes toward intelligence, toward the way he conducted his office? Where does he figure in on this intelligence failure?

HOLBROOKE: Well, I don't think Rusk was responsible for the failure at all, but he was the victim of it. The system was supposed to provide him with information and then he would make policy decisions. The system did not give him good information, so it was harder for him to make policy decisions. It remains for you to establish whether a different information and access system would have resulted in him making different policy recommendations. But I want to stress it was not his fault this thing broke down, but he was the one who was most--he and Lyndon Johnson were the ones who were most hurt by it; and [Robert Strange] McNamara. McNamara was much more responsible for it than anyone else, except perhaps Westmoreland.

Did I or any of my colleagues ever consider confronting Dean Rusk on Vietnam? And the answer is that Nick [Nicholas de Belleville] Katzenbach and George [Wildman] Ball did. And so--

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

HOLBROOKE: --that I had any problem in getting my views up to policymakers. I was 24, 25, 26 years old. I was working directly for Ambassador Lodge, or an Assistant to the President, Robert [William] Komer, or Undersecretary of State, Nick Katzenbach. All of those men were gracious and listened to my views. So there never was the slightest problem for me in making my views felt. And therefore, I didn't feel that there was a necessity other than that. The only person

I never got a chance to talk to directly who was involved in the process was President Johnson. And that was because Walt [Whitman] Rostow did not want that kind of meeting to take place.

RICHARD RUSK: Your office was right down the hall from my dad's. He knew you had been in Vietnam for two or three years and knew as much about it as anybody. And then you tell me that he rarely if ever used you. Why?

HOLBROOKE: I think the reason for that was that Mr. Rusk had a very strong sense of what was right and what was wrong and did not want to cross formal chains of command except on the rarest of occasions: to talk to a junior officer even if there'd been a personal connection.

Next question. By the late nineteen sixties, what were the effects of this war on the State Department and the Foreign Service? Well, the answer to that is that it had the same effect on the State Department and the Foreign Service that it did on the rest of the nation. It split them very badly. And the effects of that exist to this day.

Next question. Why did your relationship with Dean Rusk cool after you talked with him on a Sunday in May '65, etc.? Well, cool might be a misleading word here. I saw him on that Sunday. I described it to you in the earlier interview. I left. I knew he wasn't happy with what I'd said, but he didn't change his friendliness toward me. And I went directly back to Saigon where I served another year and then came back and served in the White House. It wasn't so much that his relationship toward me cooled. It seems to me what happened was that he became increasingly pressured by the Vietnam issue and he had never set up a private relationship with me in which we'd talk substance. Rich, you've got to remember that I was twenty-four years old and he was Secretary of State. I was his son's friend. There was no reason that he needed to talk to me, even if it seems to you later that he should have talked with me more than he did.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me explain in terms of Johnson and Clark [McAdams] Clifford. They'd been life-long friends. But when Clifford came in as the new Secretary of Defense, and then began to get critical about the war and raised some tough questions about Vietnam, Clifford says that, "It was almost as if this Judas appeared" in between the President and himself, despite their long years of friendship. And he's referring to this impasse that had come between him and Lyndon Johnson because of his pointed questions about Vietnam. I just wonder to what extent my father was also a victim of that same phenomenon. In Johnson's case, it was probably an insistence on personal loyalty and that carried over into official loyalty. But how do you see it in terms of my dad?

HOLBROOKE: Well, I think it's true that Mr. Rusk did not welcome advice gratuitously offered from people not directly involved in the issue. That was also true of Cy Vance when he was Secretary of State. For example, in the Iran hostage crisis in 1980, I was very close to Vance but I never talked to him about that issue except once I made a sort of general comment about it to him. He had his circle of advisers in Iran. I was not part of it. I was part of the circle of advisers on China and other Asian matters, and in those matters he had given me full backing. I couldn't ask for stronger support. But on this issue of Iran, he wasn't interested in my views. I can

understand that.

RICHARD RUSK: It was sort of chain of command.

HOLBROOKE: Sure, he has his circle of people. And he trusts Bill [William Putnam] Bundy and he has George Ball, and he has an Undersecretary. He's got a lot of people ready, and everybody is at him the whole time on it.

Your next question is, "Based on your experiences with Dean Rusk, did he seem to disassociate from certain truths? He claims, for example, that he never heard much dissent from Robert McNamara. He claims that Vietnam did not drive Lyndon Johnson from the White House. He tends to underestimate what Vietnam did to this country. He says that he just doesn't understand the 'tenacity' of the North Vietnamese. Was he able to honestly face the most painful truths and facts about the Vietnam War?"

Well, that's a very sort of emotional and emotion-laided question. I guess that my view is that Mr. Rusk has lived with himself and what happened in Indochina, as well as the rest of his career, now for a long, long time. And while it pains him, he is not going through the kind of internal agony that McNamara is. And he's not going to, at this late stage in his life, to have a reversal, a mea-culpa. And above all, he will not be disloyal to the two Presidents he served. He was their first lieutenant, or their first mate, and he will not abandon them now, especially now that they're not alive. It would be, in my view of Mr. Rusk's value system, the ultimate betrayal. And because he is a man who is unconcerned about his own place in history, because he's devoid of personal egotism in that sense, he is willing to accept criticism by outsiders--academics, journalists, facile thinkers on the substance of his Vietnam policy--rather than do something which he would never forgive himself for and repudiate [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy or Johnson, especially Johnson. So I think that's the reason that he takes the position he does vis-a-vis the Presidents. I think in regard to McNamara and other secondary but very important figures, he's showing some willingness to now reconsider what they all did in light of what you're doing. And I think that's healthy.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, and I meant this question in terms of a trait in him that causes him to disassociate, to just not recognize certain things. And I tend to think it was a problem back then when he was in office, as well as a continuing problem twenty years later as an old man looking back. Would you have an insight on that?

HOLBROOKE: These issues which you feel that he refuses to acknowledge--

RICHARD RUSK: And I summarized them in the question.

HOLBROOKE: These issues which you feel that he refuses to acknowledge seem to me to be, almost without exception, a function of one factor. And that is, they are issues in which you are presenting to him new evidence which would require him to revise his judgment about people he worked with very closely, like Bob McNamara or Lyndon Johnson. And he won't do that. But it

does seem to me that he's beginning to agree to examine some of the secondary figures in a more critical way. Let's clarify one thing, although we've gone over it before.

Dean Rusk is not stupid. He's one of the most intelligent men and one of the clearest thinkers American foreign policy has seen in the last generation. He knows what American foreign policy is. He has clear principles on which he thinks it should be based and he knows exactly how to apply it in specific cases. So when he appears to refuse to come to terms with evidence you are producing in your interviews, it can't be because he's unable to grasp what you're saying. It's because he doesn't wish to change his views based on that evidence when those views relate to the quality of the administration. That is what has happened here. And you have to respect it and allow him to carry this view forward even though there is an internal inconsistency which I'm sure he's aware of, or else you have to try to confront him, which may be very painful. The question as to why some people labeled him as a secondary thinker, a view which, by the way I think is fading away, was primarily because of several factors. One is that he always used the same answers for everything, unlike Henry [Alfred] Kissinger or John F. Kennedy or McGeorge Bundy. When he went off the record, he was saying the same things he said on the record. Vance is very similar in my view. There's no difference in on the record and off the record. They don't believe in trying to manipulate their image by showing greater depth at one level than another. Secondly, he used very repetitive phraseology which in the sixties seemed to symbolize a refusal to consider alternatives. And not only did he use repetitious phraseology, but he had the additional burden of a considerable gift for memorable phrases and a certain eloquence. He was the man who coined so many of the most famous phrases of the sixties: "Eyeball to eyeball," "Leave your neighbors alone," all sorts of phrases which even today he still used verbatim without changing a word. Now if you compare him to Henry Kissinger, Kissinger is very richly textured in what he says about foreign policy. It has a great deal of nuance and a great deal of qualifications, and it dazzles people when they first hear it. But the problem with Henry Kissinger is that he doesn't say the same thing all the time. He keeps switching his positions around. That makes him a little more interesting perhaps than Dean Rusk because he's more elusive. But make no mistake about it, Mr. Rusk has the clearest vision of what the principles of American foreign policy ought to be and how they're applied. And if it weren't for Vietnam, if you could strip that one overwhelming issue aside, then his views would be very, very widely understood to have been those central values on which American foreign policy should be based still today, as it should have been in the sixties.

Your next question is, why did Dean Rusk underestimate the North Vietnamese? I just want to stress that historians are not going to find his mind second rate and I'm absolutely convinced that that perception is already fading. It's no accident that almost everyone who watched the PBS [Public Broadcast System] series with the former Secretaries of State regarded him as the most impressive of everybody.

Now you want me to square--you say how do I square--I don't understand the next question. The question is why things went wrong in Vietnam if the principles were the correct principles. I guess the answer is very simple: you can't win a war simply with principles. And our strategy, especially our Army's ground strategy, was profoundly flawed. The principles we were fighting

for were not flawed: to give support to a country trying to help itself, rescue itself from the communist aggression. That's a valid American objective and it proceeded logically from Mr. Rusk's principles and from those of a whole generation of American policymakers. However, that did not mean that you could apply those principles anywhere in the world with equal effect. Earlier this morning, Dean Rusk said that Henry Kissinger's problem was that he was looking for a global strategy to apply to 160 different nations. Well, in an ironic sense, we applied a strategy to the wrong nation at the wrong place and the wrong time. The South Vietnamese government was too weak. The North Vietnamese were too ruthless and too entrenched and too effective. Our advisory effort was too incompetent and ill-conceived. Our combat effort was even more tragically conceived. Our air efforts were very powerful in terms of tonnage dropped, but was of limited effect except in isolated areas. Domestic support for the war was by necessity limited in duration. And that combined to create a strategic concept for Indochina which couldn't succeed even if the principles it was trying to make effective evolved. That's all that matters. That seems quite clear to me.

The next question is whether Mr. Rusk's views were in tune with the world that he faced in the 1960s. Well, they were certainly in tune with the world when he became Secretary of State. The situation changed, and he made his choice.

RICHARD RUSK: You've been impressed with the continuity of my dad's thinking, but his views on a lot of important things have remained unchanged over twenty, thirty or forty years. Is that necessarily a good thing in a world that changes very rapidly?

HOLBROOKE: Well, it's tough to say. It's admirable that a man can live for the same principles as the world around him changes. But Dean Rusk is not a closed-minded person. And as I said, the principles themselves strike me as just as valid today as they were twenty-five years ago, so I am not objecting to the principles. The failure is not one over twenty-five years. It was a direct failure that took place in three years: '61, '62, '63. Well, '64, '65 also, a five-year period. And it was the failure to understand that the strategy as conceived couldn't work! It's very simple. And I cannot understand why all of this symbolic argument about whether the American public supported us enough, whether the press undermined us. We all failed to admit the central issue. I was on the ground at Indochina. We failed on the ground. Now people who don't know that are still reading the false reporting of General Westmoreland and his command, and of the embassy. Every one of those marginal improvements in the situation was simply temporary. For example, your father said this morning that after the Tet Offensive, they won a political but not a military victory. That's not entirely true. The Vietcong did not achieve their full military objective. They paid an enormous price for that Tet Offensive. But at the end of it, they had done immense damage to the South Vietnamese. They were also spent. They had died in large numbers but they had changed the world forever and furthermore. Upon conclusion of that particular phase of the war they began massive regular force infiltration from the north which could not be stopped either by our bombing or our ground troops or least of all by the South Vietnamese.

Next question is how did it feel to be working within the government to turn the Vietnam War around, in violation of Dean Rusk's own personal code? Well, I'm not sure again what you mean

here. I've read the rest of the question. This is just for your--I'm not sure what you meant by this. To my mind, I was working to give my advice to Nick Katzenbach and Mr. Rusk, and that was that. And I did not resign from the government on an issue of principle. I did not think that my role merited that kind of melodrama. And I think that was correct.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, but Dick, there are some other things that you and a whole slew of people are doing in government to try to turn that policy around within the government. There was *The Pentagon Papers*. You were involved with Clifford's group, although on the periphery of that group apparently. And Clifford himself and the people he surrounded himself with were actively trying to turn that policy around. Did this kind of activity carry some kind of moral dilemma for you? Was it a situation where your own principle came into conflict such as a good many of them did with my father? That's the context I meant.

HOLBROOKE: Not at all. Let's be clear. I was a very, very junior member of the government almost accidentally thrust close to the seat of decision-making. I was privileged, in my own view at the time, to be that close to the policy makers. I never thought of resigning seriously at any point at all because I felt that I had access to these people and could make my views felt. Now, you mentioned the Pentagon papers. That was never an attempt to change things around. As I've told your father repeatedly, I was assigned to that project. It was supposed to be a secret study. It was not going to be for policymaking. Now, whatever the actual truth on that turned out to be, I had no idea at the time and I'm still a little vague now, although I have my theories. The fact is that I was not part of an organized effort to change things. I was working for Nick Katzenbach. And before that for Bob Komer. I was arguing the issues as I saw them at the time. I was not resigning on principle or part of a cabal. I would never have done anything to embarrass Mr. Rusk personally, in public or in private, for one thing. For another, I thought that I was in the position where I could do the most good from where I was. I was a very junior officer. A resignation might have made me feel good for a moment or two, but it would have proved nothing at all.

Your next question is about the Paris peace talks. The Rusk-Harriman relationship I think we discussed this morning.

The next question was, could Rusk have effectively taken action to force South Vietnam to the conference table? I think we discussed that this morning. I agree that you can't force a sovereign government to do something against its will. But after you've made that blanket statement, you then get into the question of what you can encourage a sovereign government to do when you have enormous leverage. By the last five days before the 1968 election, we obviously couldn't force Thieu to do anything because he was playing for a Nixon victory and he was going to wait it out. But had he exerted pressure on Thieu earlier, during the summer of '68, no question about it. And as I said before, I think the ambassador in Saigon, Ellsworth Bunker, despite the reverence in which he's held by so many people and despite the admitted fact that he was a man of enormous grace and charm and decency and was very nice to me personally, despite all of that, he did not handle those issues well in terms of his relationship with Thieu.

RICHARD RUSK: Was there really any possible way that the South Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese could have come to any kind of a negotiated agreement or formed any part of their coalition settlement, in view of the long history of warfare and the bitterness? Thieu said later in 1968 that, "You're asking me to sign my own death warrant." Was that true even earlier, say in the summer of 1968?

HOLBROOKE: October of '72, not '68, but I know it was a similar structural situation. No, I'm quite satisfied that I've answered your question already Rich. I think there's not much more I can add. You have to go back and look at the cables and decide for yourself whether you believe that Bunker really pushed as hard as he could've on behalf of the United States to get Thieu to agree to the deal that was being negotiated in Paris, or whether in fact Bunker was so hostile to the intent of Harriman and Vance that he didn't quite follow instructions. It's a very tricky call.

RICHARD RUSK: You definitely felt that there was a potential, there was a way that Thieu and his government could have been delivered at the first peace talks.

HOLBROOKE: I believe there was, yes, absolutely. It seems to me possible that Mr. Rusk doesn't want to acknowledge fully the degree to which there were deep splits within the Administration, even though it's been written time and time again. Now, why he takes this position, I'm not clear on. But perhaps it's that he didn't want to hear about them at the time because he thought they were silly and petty, and be yielding to gossip in Washington, something which he abhorred and which everyone else participated in. It reminds me quite a bit of the man who preceded him as his role model, George [Catlett] Marshall, and the man who followed him, living up to the same principle, Cy Vance. And what you had there with Vance, I remember vividly, were people like Hodding Carter, [Anthony] Tony Lake, going to Vance and saying, "[Zbigniew] Brzezinski is trying to kill you." And Vance would say, "Don't bring these things up. Don't exaggerate the problem. Don't create them. I can straighten everything out with Zbig." And so it took Cy two or three years to realize the facts. Now, in Mr. Rusk's defense, I must note right off the bat that nobody ever tried to do to Dean Rusk what Brzezinski did to Vance. And as Mr. Rusk himself always points out, he had good relations with McNamara and Bundy. In fact, he's quite right in pointing out that the three of them got along better than any subsequent trio in the national security apparatus. However, that does not mean that there weren't serious policy disputes. Now, did these people bring their disagreements to him? I don't know. I really don't know.

The next question: Was Dean Rusk healthy in that final year in office? What about the effect of fatigue? Any evidence of drinking or poor health? Dean Rusk was bone-tired in '68. Drinking, health problems? I wasn't aware of them, or to what extent was it a factor. I was aware that everyone was tired and strung out. I was absolutely unaware of any problems to deal with drinking and health. And I must admit to this day, I'm unaware of any specifics in either area. Certainly Nick Katzenbach and Dean Rusk and others had a few drinks at the end of the working day but I have no evidence and have no personal observation that it affected them in any way. To the contrary, I never saw alcohol as affecting any of their decisions or behavior at any time.

RICHARD RUSK: What about the effects of just sheer fatigue and pressure and crisis? My dad visited John Foster Dulles ten days before Dulles's death, and Dulles told him on his death bed that had he been in better health, he might have done things differently in Suez than in fact he did. You've been close enough to this pressure to make a judgment as to whether pressure and crisis and the tense environment in which these guys operate influences their decision-making.

HOLBROOKE: Of course health is a factor in everyone's behavior, in the government just as well as in the rest of life. And of course, health can affect people's decisions. But I don't think in the end it's quite that central. You know, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill were both alleged to have suffered from something called at the time "melancholia," which a lot of doctors today would call a form of manic depressive behavior. That didn't prevent them from being brilliant. And I would not ascribe too much importance to the health problem. In Vance's case, by the summer and fall of 1968, his back was in such pain that he couldn't tie his shoelaces. He ended up sleeping on the floor of his office in Paris because he needed a firm support and no one could find a board for him to put under his bed in the hotel. The tension was unbearable and the pressure in his back, but I never saw it affect his judgment. Harriman, by this time, was seventy-seven years old. You would have thought that age alone--and Harriman was, at this time, the same age your father is today. Harriman was in that office all night long. He'd come in the office the first thing in the morning. He was driving everyone else crazy with the force and drive of his physical vigor. I never saw the health or pressure problems affect their decisions except that they were tired. But I don't think it really changed things. It was the situation that made the decisions so difficult, not their fatigue or their health.

RICHARD RUSK: What about the effects of what I call "combat decision-making?" With respect to Vietnam, my dad was making decisions that involved death on a mass scale: a policy that killed a million Vietnamese, eventually fifty-six thousand American soldiers. What about the sheer loss of life that's involved in decision-making like that, and to what extent is that a factor? How would that have affected policy? How would it affect my dad specifically? Would it also have encourage him to lock into the existing policy, perhaps for sheer humanitarian reasons, the fact that, "So much life is being lost. Somehow we've got to make this thing work?" As David Halberstam puts it, "One dead American begets another dead American begets another dead American." It's not the fact that they are indifferent or callous to the loss of life, but that for very humane reasons they have somehow got to make sense of what they're doing. They've got to make that policy work.

END OF SIDE 2