

Dean Rusk Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 12/09/1969
Administrative Information

Creator: Dean Rusk

Interviewer: Dennis J. O'Brien

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Biographical Note

Dean Rusk (1909-1994) was the Secretary of State from 1961 to 1969. This interview covers the United States' military involvement in South Vietnam, the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime, and the State Department's relationship with the Defense Department, the Pentagon, and the White House, among other topics.

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Dean Rusk

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Second Oral History Interview

with

DEAN RUSK

December 9, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: What were your views on the strategy as well as the character of the war in Indochina when you were Assistant Secretary for Far East in the Truman Administration?

RUSK: The United States, France, and Great Britain had agreed among themselves that the security of Southeast Asia was vital to the security of the United States and that the security of the United States and that the security of Southeast Asia turned crucially on the security of the Red River Valley in North Vietnam. During my service as Assistant Secretary of State we looked upon the boundary between North Vietnam and China as being the crucial dividing line between the Communist world and the free world in Asia. We gave assistance to the French in their struggle with the Viet Minh and their struggle against Ho Chi Minh, but at the same time we were putting very substantial pressure on the French to make political concessions to nationalism in Southeast Asia and to convert Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia into genuinely independent countries and get rid of the stigma of colonialism.

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The French found it very difficult to do that at a pace that would have worked. We had some problems in the amount of pressure we put on the French because we did not want the French simply to abandon Southeast Asia and turn the problems over to us, and so there were some limits on the amount of pressure we put on the French. But our hope was that the French would build independent national countries in Southeast Asia, abandon the colonial idea, and give nationalist forces in Southeast Asia a chance to work out their own situation without a communist solution.

In retrospect, it was a mistake for President Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] to have abandoned the political solution of Southeast Asia while he was still President. Southeast Asia was that theater of war which was under British executive administration on behalf of the combined Chiefs of Staff. President Roosevelt had clearly in mind that the former colonial areas in Asia should emerge as independent national states at the end of the war; you will remember that he put considerable pressure on Churchill [Winston S. Churchill] as far as India is concerned. And we thought the same solution ought to apply to Burma and to Ceylon as well as to Indochina and the Netherlands Indies, what later became Indonesia. But, for some reason, President Roosevelt submitted to rebuffs by Churchill. The result is that the war ended with a British decision to return those colonial areas to the colonial masters, so the French went back into Indochina, the Dutch into Indonesia, and the British back into their own colonial territories.

Now, it wasn't very long before it was realized that colonialism was not viable and that independent states would emerge out of these areas. Now this is relevant to Indochina because a genuine post-war solution for Indochina did not come soon enough to head off and frustrate the kind of movement which Ho Chi Minh led, and it gave Ho Chi Minh a chance to rally to himself the authentic national forces as well as the communist elements. It made it possible for the communists to seize nationalism as one of their great strengths.

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My own feeling at the time was that a stand ought to have been made in the Red River Valley of North Vietnam. Indeed, I had some thought (that got nowhere) that when troops were withdrawn from Korea that if necessary those troops ought to be put in Indochina in order to make it clear that Southeast Asia was not going to be overrun from the north. But that didn't come about; that was the responsibility of the Eisenhower Administration after I left office.

O'BRIEN: Well, Mr. Secretary, in your decision to leave at the end of the Truman Administration, what went into that decision? What factors were involved in that decision?

RUSK: I'm sorry; I didn't understand.

O'BRIEN: In your decision to leave the State Department in, let me see, it was 1952 or was it early '53?

RUSK: Oh, it was very simple. I was invited to become president of the Rockefeller Foundation, and that was one of the most attractive and appealing posts in the country and involved the kind of work in which I had a very deep interest. I did not leave the Administration through any differences of policy view between myself and Secretary Acheson [Dean G. Acheson] or President Truman. Indeed, President Truman and Secretary Acheson both told me that I could have any posts in government that was at their disposal if I wanted to stay but that they would not stand in my way if I wanted to become president of the Rockefeller Foundation. So it was, in the most literal sense, the attractiveness of the new post that caused me to leave rather than any disagreement with what was going on in government.

O'BRIEN: It's been suggested that the Korean War, as well as the disregard of the Marshall agreements in China, toughened many people

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in the State Department and the military in their views towards Asian communism and that this is very important in the thinking of people in the fifties. Would you care to comment on that?

RUSK: Well, I think that we faced the problem at the end of World War II posed by the return by the Communist world to a doctrine of world revolution and action on the ground to do something about it. There were pressures by Stalin [Joseph V. Stalin] into Central Europe. He disregarded the peace arrangements for what later became the satellites of the Soviet Union in Bulgaria and Romania and Hungary and countries like that. There was a communist coup d'etat, a bloodless coup d'etat, in Czechoslovakia, and it looked as though this mudslide movement of communism was likely to continue until it was stopped. We were concerned about the militancy of Chinese communist doctrine when they took over in mainland China. I think the issues of the cold war were issues which arose from the world revolution and actions taken by various communist countries to try to move the world revolution ahead by force.

Now, the mood of everybody in the free world that was concerned about it was that this had to be stopped, otherwise you'd be in for World War III, and that the time to stop it was at the very beginning before it developed a momentum. So during the late forties, and the fifties, government was very alert to the beginnings and the course of aggression based upon the doctrine of the world revolution. This was very much in mind when the Korean attack occurred. Not only was it looked upon as a problem involving Korean, but it was considered to be a challenge to the idea that there is such a thing as peaceful coexistence, that the status quo would be reasonable respected, that force would not be used to change the status quo. Otherwise, there was a great concern that we would embark once again on the sorry tale of the 1930's when one aggression led to another and eventually into World War II.

You see, we came out of World War II committed to the notion of collective security that was written into Article I of the United Nations Charter and into our

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security treaties. The reason that we committed ourselves to collective security was that we felt that it was the absence of collective security that had produced World War II and that World War II could have been prevented had the governments of that day taken action at an early stage when the Japanese went into Manchuria and the Italians went into Ethiopia and Hitler went into the Rhineland and then Austria and Czechoslovakia. So those who were interested in stabilizing a peaceful world on the basis outlined in the United Nations Charter were very much concerned about the use of force by the Communist world to change the status quo in the direction of what they call their world revolution.

O'BRIEN: In this regard, I'm sure that you knew Walter Robertson.

RUSK: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Did you have much contact with him in the fifties when he was...

RUSK: No, I had very little contact with Walter Robertson during the fifties. I would, on occasion, drop by and pay a call on Mr. John Foster Dulles. But I was looked upon as one of the *ancien regime* at that time; I had served in the Truman Administration. Mr. Dulles had told me that he would have been glad for me to serve in his administration except that I had more or less been disqualified because of my service in the Truman Administration, and Eisenhower Administration came to office on the basis of taking a new look at foreign policy. And there had been the McCarthyist period, and there'd been all the allegations about Communists or softheads in the Department of State, and that led the new Administration, the Eisenhower Administration, to try to firm up what it considered to be some of the soft spots in American policy before that time. So there was a rigidity about policy during the Eisenhower Administration that in part was a reaction to McCarthyism and influences of that sort.

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O'BRIEN: Is Walter Robertson this kind of a tough person in policy towards Asia?

RUSK: Yes. He took a very firm view on Asian questions and was convinced that the sweep of communism had to be stopped, that we should try to stabilize the situation on the basis of the status quo, and that force should not be allowed to change that status quo to our disadvantage.

O'BRIEN: Did you often agree with him or disagree with him, either, on major issues in regard to Asia?

RUSK: Well, I was so busy at the Rockefeller Foundation I didn't put my mind to all

the specific questions that came up. I thought that they were unduly rigid in some of their points of view, particularly with regard to mainland China. I thought that it was possible that mainland China might be led to a position of peaceful coexistence somewhat like the Russians eventually adopted. But the feeling toward mainland China was very hostile during the Eisenhower Administration.

I had at one time, on a purely personal and private basis, given some thought to negotiating a new look at China as between Senator George [Walter F. George], the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Mr. Dulles and the Eisenhower Administration. But when Senator George announced that he was not going to run, it was apparent that he would not take on such a burdensome problem, and nothing ever came of that idea.

O'BRIEN: How did you react to the Geneva agreements of 1954?

RUSK: Well, I was regretful that a better solution had not been found. I was sorry that North Vietnam was organized as a Communist country because I felt that it was predictable that North Vietnam would then become the center of infection for other countries in Southeast Asia (as in fact happened), that Laos would be imperiled, that South Vietnam would be in jeopardy, that Cambodia would be in jeopardy, because the North Vietnamese communists appear to be committed to a militant brand of communism. They

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seem to be following a Peking line. And so I regretted the solution of 1954 -- and I'm sure the Eisenhower Administration regretted the solution of 1954 -- because it just seemed to me to have it in all the seeds of trouble for the future.

O'BRIEN: Well, in your last interview when we were talking about SEATO, you mentioned that you had opposed the idea of SEATO while you were in the Truman Administration and on the basis that it perhaps was a divisive treaty in the sense that it contributed to a split in Southeast Asia and that perhaps the United States would have been wise had they stayed out and waited for the nations of Southeast Asia to form some kind of regional grouping.

RUSK: Right.

O'BRIEN: I was just curious here. Are you thinking in terms of including North Vietnam in this as well? I mean, did you ever envision North Vietnam perhaps becoming a nation much like Yugoslavia?

RUSK: Well, back in the Truman Administration one would have looked at a unified Vietnam as an independent member of such a Southeast Asian grouping -- there was not North Vietnam as such in those days. But had North Vietnam emerged as a non-communist country as a part of a unified Vietnam, it would have been a logical member of such a regional grouping. Now -- and this is getting beyond the date a

little bit -- but in 1969 I see no reason why North Vietnam could not become a member of a regional grouping in Southeast Asia, particularly on economic and social matters, if in fact it's willing to live at peace with its neighbors. But, the key question is whether it's going to try to reach out and unify not only Vietnam but all of what was formerly Indochina and whether it's going to apply pressures on Thailand, because those pressures began early and have continued up until the day of this interview.

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O'BRIEN: Well, now coming into the actual period while you're Secretary of State -- and this, in a sense, is kind of a general background question -- who was briefing you or who was responsible for briefing you within the Eisenhower Administration and in the State Department before you became Secretary of State on problems in Southeast Asia?

RUSK: Beginning about January 1, 1961, about three weeks before inauguration, I was furnished an office on the first floor of the Department of State with a small staff. I had almost daily briefings from the head of the intelligence bureau, Mr. Hugh Cumming, and my calendar shows that I saw him almost every day from January 1, on to Inauguration. Beyond that, Mr. Herter and I would talk frequently. I would go in, go up and talk with him about various problems. And the question of Laos was very much in his mind at that time; we had a good many talks about what was happening in Laos. Also, they were good enough to make available to me all the cables that were coming in and out on important questions, and so I had a full chance to do a lot of reading on issues involving Southeast Asia. So they went to considerable lengths to try to get me briefed up on these problems before I actually became Secretary of State.

O'BRIEN: At the time you assumed the position of Secretary of State, I understand that there is in some nations in Southeast Asia -- Cambodia, Vietnam, as well as Laos -- a problem of other agencies, both the Defense Department as well as the CIA, have got themselves involved in a much larger role than they ever have before. Did you have any problems of coordinating these efforts, and what efforts did you make to bring about more comprehensive control by, let's say, the ambassadors in these nations?

RUSK: There had been during the closing years of the Eisenhower Administration, a little freewheeling on the part of the military and the CIA in Southeast Asia, I think with the general blessing of the Department of State in everything that was going on. We tried

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to pull all that together when I became Secretary. We had the task force on Southeast Asia that had representation from the Defense Department and CIA. We tried to pull together on a

unified policy as much as possible. This was particularly true of Laos, which was very active at that time, but it later became true also of Vietnam.

One reason why these things would pull together was that President Kennedy himself took a very strong and detailed personal interest in these problems. He did not neglect them at all; they were the principal issues on his mind when he became President; and so the fact that the President was taking a personal leadership on these matters tended to work out as coordination in itself. The other agencies were available to brief the President, but they were also expected to comply with decisions that he made. There was, for example, some doubt in the Administration about the wisdom of going to the Laos conference and working out a compromise for Laos. But President Kennedy's decision in that matter was felt by all, and very shortly we found that that policy was being supported by all the agencies in the government.

O'BRIEN: Well, one of the first problems you have is replacing Ambassador Durbrow [Elbridge Durbrow]. I understand that a number of people are suggested, including General Lansdale [Edward G. Lansdale]. Do you recall what led to the eventual selection of Ambassador Nolting [Frederick E. Nolting, Jr.]?

RUSK: Nolting was a well-regarded professional Foreign Service officer and seemed to be the kind of personality who could deal with a very complex and even dangerous situation. I personally did not think that a man like General Lansdale, who was basically a CIA type of operator, was the kind of man who should be freewheeling in Southeast Asia as an American ambassador. We needed someone who was a disciplined professional officer to take on that post. Nolting's willingness to serve was one of the factors because the post was so difficult that there were not many volunteers for it. But, in any event, the decision was made to send Nolting.

O'BRIEN: Were there any other people that were brought into the picture at that point and considered?

RUSK: I don't recall the names of people that might have been considered for it. I would have no doubt that we considered several alternatives, but they just don't occur to me at the present time.

O'BRIEN: Did the President become involved in this at all?

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RUSK: Oh, yes. Personally he made the selection of Nolting.

O'BRIEN: You had some carry-over, some people that carried over from the Eisenhower Administration, for at least a few months in positions of some authority in

regard to Southeast Asia and Asia in general: I'm thinking of John Steeves and J. Graham Parsons: were these people, in a sense, in tune with the incoming Administration on policy matters? Did you have any difficulties?

RUSK: I had no difficulty with them. As a matter of fact, both of them continued to serve in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in one post or another. Our general approach to top personnel in the Department of State was to bring in a new team, even though some of the new team would be professionals themselves who were carried over as professionals from the Eisenhower Administration. We felt that we ought to make changes in practically all of the assistant secretary spots, the so-called presidential appointments. But where we did not have candidates immediately available, there was some delay in certain of the posts. Graham Parsons served for a brief period as Assistant Secretary for Far East, but we made changes as soon as it was convenient to do so.

O'BRIEN: Well, what went into the decision to appoint Walter McConaughy as Assistant Secretary? Do you recall?

RUSK: He was, again, a professional who had served in the Far East. He had served in China; he had been following Far Eastern affairs very closely; and he was an honest, competent officer without too much imagination. He was not very articulate. But he had served under me in the Department of State when I was Assistant Secretary, and I had known him and had confidence in him as a human being, as an individual, and we thought that we would give him a chance to serve as Assistant Secretary. He was not a strong Assistant Secretary: He did not have much imagination and was a little slow on initiatives, and we eventually made a change there. But he seemed to be a person that we ought to try out, and so we did.

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O'BRIEN: Well, is it fair to say, as some authors have written about the foreign policy of the Kennedy Administration, that the Secretary of State basically viewed Vietnam as a military problem in 1961, from '61 on?

RUSK: Well, the problem of Vietnam and Laos in 1961 had a very important military component in it because there were people coming out of North Vietnam prepared to shoot at you, so that any other policy had to take into account the fact that there was a military issues. Here comes a group of guerrillas down the road. What do you do? Do you get out of their way, or do you shoot back at them? Now, the military aspect of policy at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration was imposed upon us by the military activity of the North Vietnamese. They seemed to be going for the seizure of Laos when we first took office, and that was a military effort on their part. So, naturally, there was a very important military component in our consideration of those issues at that time.

O'BRIEN: Despite the fact that Laos is, of course, the major boiling point of those first

months of 1961, was there much focus of attention on Vietnam within the Administration? How was Vietnam, in a sense, regarded in relationship to Laos?

RUSK: I think that very early in the Kennedy Administration it came to be considered that Vietnam was the main issue, that Laos was a secondary consideration. Indeed, the major effort made by the Kennedy Administration to stabilize Laos, which we talked about last time, came about because we felt that if the situation in Laos could be sorted out and settled that that would make an enormous difference to the security of South Vietnam. But I think that the geographic position of South Vietnam and its relation to Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and the resources, the population, all led us to take Vietnam very seriously very early in our Administration.

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Now, the North Vietnamese were not making as strong an effort against South Vietnam in 1961 as they came to do later, and so we were relying pretty heavily upon the forces of the South Vietnamese to deal with the infiltration of individuals and groups from North Vietnam. It was not until the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965 that North Vietnam began to send the regular units of their regular army into South Vietnam in divisional strength. Before that time it was an infiltration of cadre and personnel, individuals and groups, and it was our hope that President Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] and the South Vietnamese forces could deal with these efforts pretty much on their own.

O'BRIEN: The Vice President takes a trip very early in the Administration to Vietnam. Do you recall how the idea of this trip generated? Was it something that was suggested to him, or was it something that he wanted to do....

RUSK: I don't recall in detail. In general, President Kennedy felt that it would be useful for the Vice President to make foreign trips and get himself personally briefed on the situation in different countries and act as the President's own emissary in talking with leaders abroad. Vice President Johnson visited, oh, thirty or thirty-five countries while he was Vice President. Since a great deal of attention was being given to Vietnam in 1961, it would have been natural for the Vice President to go out on kind of a little observation visit and to talk things over with President Diem and with our own representatives on the ground. But I don't know of anything, any special circumstances, that produced the visit.

O'BRIEN: Did he stay within the framework of Department guidelines as well as the President's pronouncements?

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RUSK: Oh, yes. He had on his staff a Foreign Service officer whose duty it was to

brief him every day (or as often as the Vice President wanted) on developments in the foreign policy field, and that staff officer received all the important cables that came in. So we made a special effort to keep the Vice President briefed. This was President Kennedy's own desire that this be done.

And then when Vice President Johnson went on a foreign trip, he wanted detailed briefing on the countries that he was visiting and the policy questions that might come up for discussion. Vice President Johnson did not like the idea of making purely formalistic kinds of visits. He didn't want to go just as a matter of protocol or for purely courtesy visits; he wanted to discuss real issues and have a feeling that his visit had some point to it. So we carefully briefed the Vice President on the policy issues and put him in the position to talk authoritatively with foreign representatives on the questions that might come up. And we had State Department staff with him on all of his visits. We helped him with his speeches because many of his speeches abroad were in sensitive situations and he needed help in avoiding problems and knowing what to say and what not to say. So there was very close working relationship between the Vice President and the State Department in those days.

O'BRIEN: Was he cooperative in staying within the framework that you laid down?

RUSK: As far as policy was concerned he was, yes. Sometimes on his personal arrangements he would want to make last minute changes and he would want to do things that were a little off the beaten path and sometimes created problems with his hosts in terms of where he wanted to stay, and what he wanted to see and what he wanted to do. But on policy questions he was very well disciplined.

O'BRIEN: You don't happen to recall the names of the Foreign Service officers that were detailed with him, do you?

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RUSK: No, I don't. The historian will have to get that from the Johnson papers.

O'BRIEN: What impact did his visit have, first of all, on Saigon, and then, secondly, when he came back, on Washington?

RUSK: He spent most of his time in Saigon listening. President Diem was a great talker, and it was very hard to have a two-way conversation with President Diem because he did all of the talking. But the Vice President was out on a fact-finding mission, and so he listened carefully to the briefings from our own diplomatic and military representatives on the spot out there.

There was no policy difference between the Vice President and President Kennedy in those days. Both of them looked upon Vietnam as an important place and looked upon the SEATO Treaty as an important commitment. Both of them hoped that the South Vietnamese would be able to do this job more or less on their own. And so there was no inclination to put

in large numbers of U.S. forces to help the South Vietnamese deal with a relatively low level of infiltration from North Vietnam.

The situation deteriorated during the course of the year 1961 because of steadily increasing infiltration from the north and forced President Kennedy to consider whether we should be doing more to strengthen the South Vietnamese regime. The military mission that we had out there was basically a services of supply mission. We had six or seven hundred men there, but they were quartermaster, ordinance, signal, and other types of supply people who were there to deliver American military assistance and to train the South Vietnamese in their use. We had very few tactical and combat-type people, very few infantry or artillery, air force, people of that sort, at the beginning of 1961. But when it seemed necessary to strengthen the South Vietnamese forces beyond the effort that was being made in the first half of 1961, President Kennedy then reviewed the situation on the basis of reports from various people and decided that we'll have to put advisors in the field as a part of the South Vietnamese forces to try to teach them how to react more rapidly and more effectively to the type of guerrilla action

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to which they were exposed. There was a tendency on the part of the South Vietnamese forces to static warfare, very little effort being made to get out into the countryside and chase down the guerrilla and catch him before he catches you. It was felt that a more active tactic could be stimulated if American advisors were with combat units. And so President Kennedy made the decision to employ combat units or combat personnel.

That was a major decision from several points of view. In the first place, it required President Kennedy to go beyond the levels of military advisors that were provided in the 1954 agreements. You see, in those agreements the French were permitted to leave behind a certain number of military personnel in South Vietnam, six or seven hundred. By arrangement with the French after 1954, we substituted American personnel for those French personnel and more or less assumed that we were doing that within the general limitations of the Geneva agreements of '54. It was President Kennedy that decided that the other side had sufficiently violated the agreements of '54 to justify the United States in ignoring the limits that we had accepted. And so President Kennedy put in advisors.

O'BRIEN: During the summer of 1961 there is apparently a conflict of intelligence reports from the various department agencies and within the government itself. Is this, in a sense, what leads to, let's say, the Taylor-Walt [Maxwell D. Taylor] [Walt W. Rostow] mission in the fall?

RUSK: In part. I think what President Kennedy wanted was a firsthand look on the ground in some detail by people in whom he had great confidence, and he had great confidence in both General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow. But it's always difficult to get the real truth out of a guerrilla-type situation.

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I'm not at all sure -- and this is true up to this date -- I'm not at all sure that we were getting accurate information out of President Diem and the South Vietnamese authorities. I think we were given a good deal of wishful thinking in the reports we were getting from the South Vietnamese. I think the situation was worse in considerable areas of the country than President Diem would have us believe. There were areas of the country which had been inhabited by the Viet Minh, the Ho Chi Minh forces, continuously, had never been pacified, had never been brought under the control of the South Vietnamese government, war zone C and war zone B and certain areas in the Delta and certain areas up in the highlands. I don't think we had a frank exposition of the real situation by President Diem and his advisors, and so an effort had to be made to get information ourselves by direct probing if we could.

O'BRIEN: At the same time, there seems to be an intrigue with guerrilla movements in Vietnam within the Administration and, as I understand it, the counterinsurgency group forms as a result of this. Do you have any reflections or comments on that counterinsurgency group and the way they may have affected thinking on Vietnam or were affected by what went on?

RUSK: Now, I think that the historian will want to look pretty carefully at the question as to how do you deal with a genuinely guerrilla-type action. During the 1950's we had helped build up and train the South Vietnamese forces along the lines of conventional warfare. Now, operations against guerrillas is a very complex and difficult, subtle type of operation, and we had ourselves a great deal to learn about it. We weren't very skilled, and we had not developed adequate tactics, and we had not worked out in full detail the combination of military, political, economic, psychological moves that were necessary to deal with a guerrilla situation. So we had a good deal of learning to do. As a matter of fact, the simplest part of the war was that part of the war which later came to be conventional in character. And it was not until '67, '68, '69, that we began to get at the guerrilla infrastructure in the countryside in a sophisticated way, so that everybody

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had a great deal to learn. And in 1969 I'm sure that there's still a great deal to learn about the proper defense against a guerrilla-type of aggression. It's a very difficult thing to meet, and how you go about it is a very complicated problem.

The counterinsurgency force that you mentioned was established to try to examine the broad question as to what kind of counteraction is indeed required to deal with a guerrilla situation and to try to combine the military, political, economic, psychological and other factors because it was felt that the anti-guerrilla action meant action across the board, that there was no magic about one particular kind of move, and that it required a comprehensive program involving all factors if it was to be successful. The counterinsurgency group was organized to try to pull together all of the elements that were involved in the counterinsurgency effort, and I think it had a useful influence on policy and was of some value to those in the field who were actually responsible for conducting operations.

O'BRIEN: Did you meet with them?

RUSK: I met with them from time to time, but in general I delegated most of that work to subordinates.

O'BRIEN: Who was the State Department person that...

RUSK: The Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs took on that responsibility.

O'BRIEN: And that was a permanent... And it changed with the Assistant Secretary?

RUSK: That's right. There were other staff who were assigned to that group as well.

O'BRIEN: At the same time you have the British advisory mission there. Did you ever have a chance to meet Sir Robert Thompson or any of the people from the British advisory mission and talk over...

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RUSK: I think I met Sir Robert Thompson briefly only once, but I never had any long talks with him. We invited the British advisory mission to come there because we wanted to get from them as much benefit as we could from the experience they'd had in Malaya. The situation's rather different in Vietnam because Vietnam had long, exposed frontiers whereas Malaya did not and the situation in Malaya was basically internal to the country whereas in Vietnam you had infiltration coming in from the outside in a continuous stream. But nevertheless, we thought that the counterinsurgency techniques used in Malaya might have some relevance to Vietnam, and so we invited the British advisory group to come up to Saigon to help us out.

O'BRIEN: Well, one of the things that comes out of that is the strategic hamlet program. Why doesn't it work? Or does it?

RUSK: Well, various devices were tried. We had the ink spot theory going for awhile, feeling that you would consolidate in particular areas and then gradually move out. The strategic hamlet program was an attempt to move more rapidly on the ink spot idea and create strong points in the countryside which were secure and then from which you would try to deal with the guerrillas who were operating in the interstices among these strategic hamlets. I think the reason the strategic hamlet did not succeed as well as we had hoped was that we tried to move it too far too fast. We put in strategic hamlets in a good many places where we were not able to provide security, and when strategic hamlets were overrun, that tended to discourage the multiplication of strategic hamlets in other parts of the country. I think had we gone about it somewhat more cautiously and made sure that we had areas secure before we moved out and established new strategic hamlets that it would have

then built up a confidence and a strong position more steadily, even though it would have taken more time to do it.

O'BRIEN: Well, is the Secretary of State at this time instructing the ambassador to make any kind of representations to Diem in regard to the manner

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and the means by which the strategic hamlets...

RUSK: Yes, we were constantly making recommendations to President Diem about things that he ought to be doing, including the strategic hamlet program. Those instructions to our embassy in Saigon were interdepartmentally drafted. They came out of task forces, came out of the counterinsurgency group and other interdepartmental machinery. There was no independent action by the State Department in those days without the participation of Defense and CIA and others who were involved, but there was a constant stream of advice going out from Washington to Saigon about what might be done in all fields -- economic, social, political, military.

As a matter of fact, looking back on it, I think we probably provided the South Vietnamese with more advice than they were able to absorb. We were calling upon them to do a lot of things which were good in themselves but which were simply beyond the capacity of the machinery of government in Saigon to put into effect. There were times when we had to review all of the advice that we had given and establish some sort of priorities in our own advice because we were overtaxing the capacity of a rather fragile government in South Vietnam to move, in fact, on the ground.

O'BRIEN: Well, I assume that in 1961 you met President Diem at one time or another.

RUSK: I met him only once, I think.

O'BRIEN: What kind of a person was he? Your impressions.

RUSK: He was a dedicated nationalist. He had some leadership ability. He had a good deal of wishful thinking in his makeup. He was very suspicious of anybody who did not accept his point of view entirely, so that there was no loyal opposition in South Vietnam. Anyone who opposed President Diem could be in deep trouble. He, unfortunately, relied very heavily on his brother Nhu [Ngo Dinh Nhu] and his brother's wife, and they were pretty bad characters.

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O'BRIEN: Did you ever have the opportunity to meet them?

RUSK: No, I didn't meet them. I never met Madame Nhu, for example, even after her

husband's death. But they were the ones who pursued policies that alienated so many elements in South Vietnam. My personal hope had been that it would be possible to persuade President Diem to remove his brother and sister-in-law from positions of responsibility. I think had that been done that President Diem might have survived as president of the country.

O'BRIEN: Do you remember -- and this is an unfair question in many ways -- but do you remember approximately in time when you made representations in that direction?

RUSK: Well, I would think that that would be in 1963, primarily. But you got nowhere at all with President Diem on a matter of that sort. His loyalty to his brother and sister-in-law was complete.

O'BRIEN: Do you have any reflections on Madame Nhu's father who was the ambassador -- and I've forgotten his name at the present.

RUSK: Yes, I forget his name.

O'BRIEN: Do you have any reflections on your contacts with him, what kind of person he was?

RUSK: He was a competent man who was valuable as an ambassador because he had the confidence of his president. It doesn't do you much good to have an ambassador who doesn't have the confidence of his own government. And he was a useful channel of communication, although I must say that most of our dealings with the South Vietnamese occurred in Saigon rather than in Washington, so that the ambassador played a helpful role, but he played a helpful role, but he played clearly a secondary role.

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O'BRIEN: Well, actual control of the war in a military sense, as I understand it, is through the CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific] in the Pacific. Is there every in 1961-1962, into '63, any consideration of making the military command in Saigon report directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than through CINCPAC?

RUSK: There was some discussion of that, and we at the State Department tended to favor the direct assignment of the military operations in Vietnam to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Now it's true that the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave detailed attention to military operations in Vietnam and gave detailed orders to CINCPAC which in turn were relayed to South Vietnam, but I thought that the intervention of CINCPAC sitting there in Hawaii was an unnecessary level of command and in due course came to influence the operations in an unhelpful way.

For example, the bombing in North Vietnam was the responsibility of CINCPAC, not of the commander in South Vietnam. There were questions, therefore, of priorities as between the resources that were available as between bombing the north and operations in the south. And then there tended to be developed in CINCPAC a psychology that the war could be won solely through bombing North Vietnam. This was CINCPAC's part of the war, and he tended to put emphasis on that part of the war and gave secondary consideration to what was actually happening in South Vietnam. So there were times when we were under pressure -- if you want to call it pressure -- from CINCPAC for a steady escalation of the bombing of North Vietnam because that was CINCPAC's war. whereas the commander in Saigon might not look upon that steady escalation as compatible with what his needs were and what the situation required as far as he was concerned.

My own personal view was that the war was going to be won or lost in South Vietnam and that the bombing in the North was subsidiary to what was happening in South Vietnam. Therefore, I was in favor of concentrating the bombing on those targets which would affect the battlefield in South Vietnam -- the infiltration routes, supply dumps in the southern part of North Vietnam -- rather than the bombing in the far North of Hanoi and Haiphong where the costs were very high and where the impact on the fighting in the South was minimal.

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O'BRIEN: Did you find Admiral Felt [Harry D. Felt] a difficult person to work with?

RUSK: No, he was not difficult in personal terms. He was a very civilized, agreeable fellow. But he emphasized the bombing of the North more than I was entirely comfortable with.

O'BRIEN: General McGarr [Lionel C. McGarr], I understand, is a rather controversial character as well. Were there difficulties between General McGarr and Ambassador Nolting and their responsibilities in Saigon?

RUSK: I just don't recall the details of that relationship. We had a relationship which in theory was very hard to manage and which had to be worked out by the personalities of those engaged in the operations. On the one side, the military responsibility remained in military hands. The chain of command came from Saigon back through CINCPAC to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On the other side, it was clear that the ambassador was the President's number one man in the country and that he had a responsibility for all aspects of the American presence in Vietnam, including military presence there. Well, that was not a very tidy arrangement. We discussed at some points turning Vietnam into a theater of operations as we did during World War II and concentrating all the responsibility in the theater commander and putting the ambassador in a role as a political advisor. We did not do that because we felt that that would Americanize the war too much, that it would downgrade the Vietnamese part of it to a degree, and that in a guerrilla situation, in any event, political factors were very important and should not be subordinated

to military factors, so we never made that change. But the relationship in theory was confused.

In practice, it worked out all right when you had a man like Ambassador Bunker [Ellsworth Bunker] working along side of a man like General Westmoreland [William C. Westmoreland], because they kept in close touch with each other and had complete confidence in each other and worked as a team about as effectively as any two men could possibly do. The same thing came to be true of Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams [Creighton W. Abrams, Jr.].

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O'BRIEN: How about the selection of General Harkins [Paul D. Harkins]? Did the Department get involved at all in the replacement of General McGarr by General Harkins?

RUSK: No, I think the Department played a very small role in that. That was basically a military decision.

O'BRIEN: Well, as you reflect back over -- in time, we're right about 1963 -- as you reflect over those first two years in the time that you were Secretary of State and your contacts with the President, has the President changed his mind much about what is going on in Vietnam?

RUSK: I think the principal change that President Kennedy came to was a feeling that we would have to do considerably more than we were doing if we were going to assure the safety of South Vietnam, that the South Vietnamese standing along would not be able to withstand the steadily mounting pressures from the infiltration from the North, and that we would have to take a hand in it. It was President Kennedy who made that basic decision. And he did so because of his commitments to the security of Southeast Asia as reflected in all the public statements he made on Laos and Vietnam while he was President.

I think I said this in our last interview, but I think it's very important for the historian to look very carefully at what President Kennedy said and did while he was President about Southeast Asia because some of the so-called Kennedy people in later years said things about Southeast Asia that were not compatible with what President Kennedy himself said and did. I am not myself one who is going to call upon a man who is no longer alive as a witness in later policy. And I would urge the historian to make his judgment on President Kennedy in terms of what President Kennedy said and did while he was President and not on what was later said about President Kennedy by some of those who call themselves Kennedy people.

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O'BRIEN: May I switch this?

RUSK: Yes.

[BEGIN TAPE I, SIDE II]

O'BRIEN: Well, now, the Secretary of State. Has the Secretary of State changed his views in those first two years -- let's say, to the spring, to the beginning of the Buddhist crisis -- about Vietnam and what's happening in Vietnam?

RUSK: My own view was parallel to that of President Kennedy's. He and I saw Vietnam in about the same way. [Interruption]

President Kennedy had some very clear views about the total world situation. I remember very clearly one sentence from his inaugural address which is the sentence which was engraved by the British people on the stone at Runnymede, the field of the great charter when they gave the United States a memorial there to President Kennedy. He said, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty." Some of the self-styled Kennedy men in later years would tend to brush this aside as rhetoric. My own experience with President Kennedy was that he believed it in his reaction to the Berlin crisis of '61-'62, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and to events in Southeast Asia. I think he had a very deep sense that the free world has got to defend itself against the Communist world whether or not the Communist world is monolithic or whether it acts piecemeal.

In 1969 the views that I held back in '61, '62, and '63 might be termed impossibly old-fashioned. But I felt that the free world cannot afford to have the Communist world picking it to pieces by various forms of aggression and pressure at different points around the world and that if there was to be peace in the world, all nations large and small must have a right to live their own lives without being molested by force from outside their own borders. That was a basic concept of the United Nations Charter and seemed to be the conclusion that one would derive from the experiences of the 1930's that led us into World War II.

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Now, this is something that the historian will, by the time that this particular record is available, have had a chance to think long and hard about because of the bearing on all of these questions on whether or not we're going to have World War III. It was possible for us to draw the lessons from World War II and start over again in the U.N. Charter and these various security treaties that we have, but if there is one thing clear, it is that there will be no lessons drawn from World War III: there just won't be enough left. And so most of these issues that came up during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were looked upon by me in terms of what the effect would be in moving toward or away from World War III. That is the thing which has to be prevented at all costs. Now President Kennedy had a strong sense of mission in maintaining the status quo over against pressures from the Communist World, and he exhibited that on every occasion when the issue arose during his Presidency.

O'BRIEN: Well, in your contacts, both in the official Cabinet meetings and unofficially with the Attorney General in those years, did you get any insight into his view towards Southeast Asia, whether there was any difference between the Attorney General and the President?

RUSK: In those days the Attorney General was very much following in the wake of President Kennedy. He supported the President, as you would expect him to, and generally took the same line that President Kennedy took. If you look at the speeches made by the Attorney General while President Kennedy was President, you'd find that they were entirely consistent with what President Kennedy had to say.

The Attorney General had a considerable interest in foreign policy, and my understanding with President Kennedy was that we would try to find ways and means to let the Attorney General express that interest or participate in some way in the making of foreign policy decisions -- for example, by sitting with the National Security Council or sitting with the 303 Committee -- but that there would be no confusion about who was Secretary of State. President Kennedy was sometimes very amusing in talking about the exuberance of

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the Attorney General and the necessity for keeping him more or less in his place as far as foreign policy was concerned. But this was an expression of the concern of the Attorney General and his great energy and drive and his recognition that what happened in foreign policy would be crucial to the success or failure of President Kennedy.

There were times when he would come up with ideas that had to be brushed aside. For example, the Attorney General once proposed that we set out systematically to organize American businessmen in foreign countries to put on demonstrations in support of American policy, demonstrations in the streets, counter demonstrations to some of those that were organized against the United States in various countries by the communists. Well, it's perfectly clear to us that foreign countries would not allow American business to undertake that role and that business itself would not be interested in assuming so highly political a role, and we had to brush that idea aside. But, in general, the Attorney General was very helpful on foreign policy questions while President Kennedy was still alive.

O'BRIEN: Do you remember the Attorney General participating in any decisions in regard to Vietnam, his presence or participation in any of the key decisions?

RUSK: He sat with the National Security Council when we discussed Vietnam, but I don't recall that he played a very active part in the ad hoc meetings, the special meetings that we called on the subject. I don't think that his role was nothing like as important in Vietnam as it was for the Cuban Missile Crisis where he played a very important role.

O'BRIEN: Did he play much of a role on the so-called 5412 Committee?

RUSK: Cut it there. [Interruption] The Attorney General sat in informally on a number of committees, and he did sit in with the counterinsurgency effort. He was also involved in those matters that involved CIA. Particularly after the Bay of Pigs, he involved himself in CIA matters very closely. But I would

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think in general the Attorney General's role was in support of President Kennedy and that there were no differences that turned around the Attorney General's different approach to things.

O'BRIEN: Well, backing up just a bit here to the Taylor-Rostow mission, do you recall what your reactions were to the recommendations of the Taylor-Rostow mission when it came back and made recommendations in regard to increased regular troops within Vietnam?

RUSK: I was sympathetic to the proposals. I think the historian will have a major job in making a judgment as to what might be called the policy of gradualism in our responses to Southeast Asia. In general, we were on the strategic defensive in Southeast Asia. We did not want to do any more than was necessary to safeguard the area. The result was that our own actions were more or less at all times in response to something done by North Vietnam. That always left North Vietnam the opportunity to decide that if they just did a little bit more, the Americans would not respond. And so they continued to build up their input, hoping that we had come to the end of our string and would not do anything more about it. I don't know whether North Vietnam really expected us to put in eventually more than a half million troops into South Vietnam and whether if they had expected us to do so they would have made the same judgments that they made. But this problem of gradual response is a serious one, and if one looks back over the Vietnam experience in trying to draw lessons from it, this is one of the issues that will have to be dealt with.

O'BRIEN: Would you care to comment on the influence of both General Taylor and Mr. Rostow at this point on the President and on the policies towards Vietnam? Are you in agreement basically with both of these men and their view toward Southeast Asia at this point?

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RUSK: Yes, in general, I am. If in 1969 one looks back over the general experience and tries to identify people with whose thinking you were more or less in accord, I would have to say that General Taylor and Walt Rostow were in that group with which I was generally in agreement.

You see, we did not seriously consider in 1961, '62, and '63 the alternative of doing nothing and allowing South Vietnam to be overrun by North Vietnam. We took it for granted

that we had a commitment to South Vietnam. We took it for granted that the security of South Vietnam was important to the security of the United States. We took it for granted that where we had a treaty commitment to take steps to meet the common danger, as the SEATO Treaty calls it, that it was important for us to meet that commitment and not let the network of security treaties around the world collapse through a judgment made by the communists that these treaties were a bluff. Now, at no time did we say to ourselves, "We will put in X number of men, and that's all. If the other side puts in more, then we'll just pull out." At no time did we say that the American people will not support an effort made to prevent Southeast Asia from going communist, therefore we better not begin it. We more or less took courage in hand and acted on the basis that the American people at the end of the day would support what was necessary to make good on our commitments in Southeast Asia.

Now in 1969 the question arises as to whether those judgements were correct, because by the end of the decade one finds symptoms of isolationism expressing themselves in the United States, not just in Southeast Asia -- the view that we should get out of Southeast Asia regardless of the consequences -- but also with regard to troops in NATO, slashes in foreign aid, import quotas on imports, highest priority to domestic concerns at the expense of our foreign policy obligations. So by the end of the decade the question was coming to be of whether the United States was entering a new period of isolationism. We didn't approach the problem in the Kennedy Administration from that point of view. We acted on the basis of things that we thought we could take for granted.

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O'BRIEN: Would you include the Secretary of Defense at this point in with the thinking of yourself and General Taylor and Mr. Rostow? Does he have any dissenting...

RUSK: Yes, I would, I would. The Secretary of Defense -- I'm speaking now particularly of Secretary McNamara -- was fully in accord with the actions taken and the policies adopted during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. We never had deep arguments on the matter. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were prepared to do what the President wanted to be done. We were never under harsh military pressures to do a great deal more than we were doing, but we were under military pressure to provide the resources to do what had to be done to insure the security of Southeast Asia, but that was consistent with what the political scientists also were thinking. But I would say that in all the actions taken with regard to South Vietnam from January 1961 to Secretary McNamara's departure that the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense and the President were always in accord with the actions taken.

O'BRIEN: Now in late 1962 and early 1963, you have what might be termed a hostile press in Vietnam on reporting of what's going on in Vietnam and also a certain hostility towards the government of President Diem as well as the U.S. policy. How do you explain this? How did you react to it then?

RUSK: One distinguished American publisher went out to South Vietnam on a visit on one occasion and came back shaking his head. He said, "The trouble is that we have too few reporters in South Vietnam and too many Secretaries of State out there working for newspapers." It's true that the press representatives in Saigon tended to develop their own ideas about policy and tended to reflect that in their reporting. President Diem was running a very tight ship; he was running an authoritarian system. And he made things very rough for dissidents, and when he would have so-called election, the ballots showed almost unanimity for President Diem. And so there was a.... It was easy for an American liberal press to become highly

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critical of the government and the institutions of South Vietnam. I think that later came to be modified somewhat in that more accurate reporting came out of Vietnam, but the attitude of the press is affected by the old problem as to what is news. The violent, the controversial, the negative is more news than the constructive and the positive and the beneficial. If on a given day there are two thousand acts of kindness by American soldiers toward South Vietnamese all over the countryside and one American sergeant gets into a fight in a bar in Saigon, it will be the American sergeant who gets reported by the press and not these acts of kindness that were also there. So part of it is in the nature of news.

Vietnam is the first military engagement that has been covered in detail by television; it's the first one that has been brought into the homes of every American citizen for him to see at firsthand. War is not a very pleasant thing. And one thing the historian is going to have to look at is the relationship between television exposure on the one side and the ability to prosecute a struggle on the other, because it's very rough business and it's hard to take from the point of view of opinion at home. Had we fought World War II on television, we would have had quite a different problem, I think, on the home front.

O'BRIEN: Does Ambassador Nolting ever consult you about this?

RUSK: We had -- I'm sure that the records will show various exchanges of cables about press relations and about particular stories. There were times when we would go out and inquire of the Ambassador about the facts behind a particular news story, and there were times when we would suggest to the Ambassador the various things he might say in briefing the press in Saigon. But with so many press out there, it is just impossible to guide the press.

We were not in, theoretically, a war situation: there was no declaration of war; there was no wartime censorship. Again, the historians will want to look at the question as to whether undeclared wars must not find some way to operate with wartime censorship even though there is no formal declaration of war. We never had that in Saigon. When the

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South Vietnamese government made efforts from time to time to impose censorship, we would resist that as far as the America press was concerned except where future operations were directly involved where there are some guidelines that the press pretty well adheres to. But it isn't easy to conduct a struggle of this sort in the full light of complete publicity, and that's in effect what we've been doing.

O'BRIEN: Were you ever interviewed in '62-'63 by, well, some of the major people here who were critical: David Halberstam, Mr. Sheehan [Neil Sheehan] was another one, Malcolm Browne; Peter Arnett? Did they...

RUSK: I was never interviewed by those people. I was familiar with their reporting, but they never came to talk to me.

O'BRIEN: As I understand it, there's beginning at about this time, late '62 and early '63, you're beginning to develop a split within the Department lower levels in regard to policy toward Diem on, basically, the political efforts that are made and pacification efforts that are being made in the war. Are you aware of this in '62-'63? Is it beginning to sift up?

RUSK: I was aware that some of the counterinsurgency people thought that we were trying to pursue guerrillas with too conventional type of warfare and that more unconventional types would be more suitable for routing out the guerrillas. A man like Roger Hilsman, for example, who had been himself a guerrilla in Burma during World War II, thought that the answer to guerrilla warfare was to conduct guerrilla warfare in return.

Now, the big problem that we had was that the government was in control of areas which had to be defended. There are forty-three provincial capitals in Vietnam. Every one of those has been held by the government throughout all this period. There are some two hundred forty district capitals in Vietnam. Almost literally all of those have been held by the government forces at all times during this period of this warfare (there were moments when three or four or five of the district capitals might be temporarily seized by the Viet Cong.) Now, the defense has an enormous burden thrust

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upon it when it has to secure so many areas and where the guerrilla can pick and choose his time of striking. That explains the enormous ratio in manpower between defense and offense in a guerrilla-type situation. Sometimes people have used the ratio of ten to one, sometimes other ratios. So there was some debate -- as you would expect there be -- about tactics to be used in dealing with guerrillas. But that never caused any major change in -- it never had any impact on general policy.

O'BRIEN: I understand Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal are out there in late '62 and early '61 and then return. Did you talk to either of them on their return?

RUSK: Yes, I don't remember the details of those particular conversations, but I saw Forrestal and Hilsman regularly while I was Secretary while they were in office.

O'BRIEN: As I understand it, Roger Hilsman is a rather abrasive guy in some of the meetings that he has, particularly with people from the Pentagon. Do you recall any of the exchanges that occurred there...

RUSK: Well, I think Roger's problem on that was that he himself had been an army officer and he couldn't forget that he was no longer an army officer -- he tried to substitute himself for the judgment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on a military question. And that caused some friction. But as far as I was concerned, on military questions I tended to give my confidence to the professionals and to try to play down the military judgment of people in my own department because I did not think they were sufficiently experienced or expert or knowledgeable about military affairs. I had my own views at times about military affairs. I had my own views at times about military questions and expressed them, but I did not try to play at being the Joint Chiefs of Staff where policy questions were not directly involved. Roger Hilsman liked to play with military questions and created a good deal of problems in relationships between himself and the Pentagon in the process.

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O'BRIEN: Well, there is an alleged incident that happened in which he was supposed to have taken a pointer away from and taken over a briefing from General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer]. Were you present at that?

RUSK: No, I wasn't present at that. I don't remember that.

O'BRIEN: Well, what brought about the shift of Governor Harriman to Under Secretary for Political Affairs and then the selection of Hilsman as Assistant Secretary for Far East in early '63?

RUSK: Well, we had that post open as Under Secretary. We thought that Averell Harriman would be a very good man to fill it and that in doing so we would have that job concentrate on political questions rather than economic questions, let the Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs take major responsibility for economic questions. That created a vacancy which you had to fill in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, but that was simply a promotion of Governor Harriman to Under Secretary to play a role there that we thought he could perform very well, and, in fact, he did.

O'BRIEN: Was the selection of both these people for these posts purely a matter of the Secretary of State, or was there any outside pressure?

RUSK: No, there were no outside pressures. They were my recommendations, but President Kennedy approved them, and we proceeded on that basis. Roger Hilsman had another problem which caused us some concern: He was very talkative, and he would go to Georgetown cocktail parties and other such occasions and talk very freely, not only about policy questions, but about his own colleagues. He went to one dinner one evening at which Vice President Johnson was present and said some very severe things about his own colleagues, including the Secretary of State. Vice President Johnson came to the conclusion that a fellow who would go out and talk like that was not good to have around, so one of the first things that happened when Vice President Johnson became President was to move to replace

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Roger Hilsman. But Roger was a freewheeler and was not readily subject to the disciplines that one would expect from a person in his position.

O'BRIEN: Well, does the selection of Hilsman as Assistant Secretary have any influence on Ambassador Nolting's decision to leave?

RUSK: I don't think so. We tried to get Ambassador Nolting to stay on, and it was Nolting's own decision to leave Vietnam. I've seen some report somewhere that Nolting thought that he was relieved from Vietnam. But, in fact, I personally tried to persuade him to stay on in Vietnam, and he had decided that he had come to the end of his rope out there and could not serve any longer on that post. But that had nothing to do with Hilsman's appointment or any problems that developed with Hilsman.

O'BRIEN: Well, in the interim, the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], Trueheart [William C. Trueheart], assumes the role of the ambassador. Do you recall any contact that you had with Trueheart in those years as far as representing U.S. policy to Vietnam and any change in the reporting and the views of Trueheart?

RUSK: I don't recall anything special about Trueheart during that period. He's a professional Foreign Service officer and worked under instructions and did what he was told and did not play a very important independent role himself while he was charge d'affaires. So I just don't recall anything unusual that related to Trueheart in that period.

O'BRIEN: Well, apparently now by this point Governor Harriman, Michael Forrestal, Roger Hilsman have all become very, very critical of the Diem regime, and they're pushing for more pressure to bring about social reform, various other counter-guerrilla activities. How are you reacting to this pressure? Are you in agreement with them? Do you find yourself...

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RUSK: My concern with President Diem was that he was losing the support of his own people. He succeeded in alienating the Buddhists, in disaffecting the students, and then brought about severe disaffections within the armed forces. Again, many of these things were due to the activities of his brother Nhu and Madame Nhu. But my personal concern with President Diem was not so much his attitude toward the independence and security of South Vietnam, which was very staunch, but with the question of whether or not he could survive. Now, there were some Americans who felt that we ought to nudge him into retirement, that we ought to, in effect, get rid of him and conspire with other elements in the government there to bring about a coup d'etat. The historian will want to look pretty carefully at a series of telegrams that went out in the fall of 1963 on this subject.

On one occasion when President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara and I all three happened to be out of town, a telegram which went out which seemed to give some blessing to a purported coup d'etat effort being cooked up by some of the generals. That telegram was not very well coordinated around Washington, and some of us were informed about it only by a long distance telephone call without any details as to what was in it. When President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara and I got back to town, we thought that this telegram had gone too far, that we were interfering too much in South Vietnamese affairs, and so we sent telegrams that, in effect, pulled back from this telegram, I think, of September 1963.

But by November, the situation was out of hand as far as Diem was concerned. The armed forces had come to the conclusion that they couldn't live with him anymore and that he had alienated so many elements in the population that he could no longer run the country, and they decided to remove him. My own hope was that President Diem would straighten himself out, would get rid of his brother, and would take steps to modify his regime and maintain sufficient support to get on with the job because he had some qualities that were positive. He was a doughty fighter, and I did not myself think that just replacing Diem would necessarily bring about any miracles out there. But I did feel very strongly that his brother should get out of the picture, and that was impossible to achieve.

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When it became apparent that a coup would very likely take place, then my principal concern was to save President Diem from bodily harm, and Ambassador Lodge [Henry C. Lodge] made efforts to make arrangements for the safety of President Diem in the event of a coup. Unfortunately, those arrangements didn't work out, and President Diem was killed. But at the very end there, the replacement of President Diem was very much of a South Vietnamese effort rather than an American conspiracy.

O'BRIEN: In regard to the selection of Ambassador Lodge, how did this come about?

RUSK: Well, I had personally known Cabot Lodge for a long time, and he came to me on one occasion and said that he had some one or two more tours of public service in his system and he would be willing to serve, even though there was a Democratic administration, provided the post was one of real interest and difficulty. He was

not interested in any routine kind of post. He, in effect, volunteered for some assignment that had in it sufficient challenge to stimulate his interest and cause him to want to serve. I reported this to President Kennedy, and we thought that Cabot Lodge would be a good man for Vietnam if he were willing to take on the job -- it was difficult and dangerous and complicated and full of challenge -- and that there would be some advantages in having a bipartisan flavor to our situation in Vietnam. Cabot Lodge had been the vice presidential candidate for the Republican Party; he had served in the Senate as a Republican senator on the Foreign Relations Committee; he was pretty well experienced in international affairs; he had been a distinguished Ambassador to the United Nations for a number of years; and so we thought that it would be entirely constructive from our own point of view if Ambassador Lodge could serve as our ambassador in Saigon. And we were pleased to find that he was very willing to do it, as a matter of fact, was very much interested in going out there to try to take on this difficult job.

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O'BRIEN: Well, I understand Edmond Gullion was considered for a bit. Were there any others? Any other people at this point?

RUSK: Well, when a question of an appointment of this sort comes up, you always look at the alternatives, and so there are always other names in the picture, but I forget at the moment just which other names were considered as possibilities.

O'BRIEN: Just for a moment on the Buddhist crisis and the genesis of this. When do you first become or when are you first notified about the -- well, there's the first incident which is the thing at Hue when the troops fired into the crowd. Are you immediately aware of this?

RUSK: I was informed about a series of incidents that occurred where the government was moving in pretty hard on some of the Buddhists: the desecration of temples and the failure to give sanctuary to Buddhist extremists who were in the pagodas. But it became clear that step by step Diem was alienating the Buddhist elements in the community, and in a rather unnecessary way. Again, I attributed this largely to the influence of his brother.

O'BRIEN: What are you instructing Trueheart at this point?

RUSK: I forget. The historian will just have to look at the cables.

O'BRIEN: Are you getting much pressure from the Capitol, from the Hill here at this point on Diem?

RUSK: No, no. As a matter of fact, we had very little pressure from the Hill in any

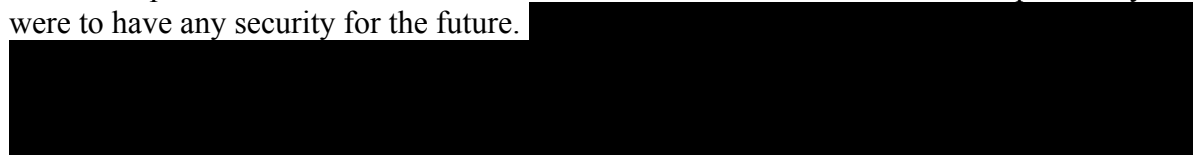
direction during this period of President Kennedy's Administration.

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The situation in Vietnam was troublesome: I appeared on a number of occasions in executive session with the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. We tried to keep them well-informed as to what was going on, but the scale of our involvement was such that it did not create what later came to be a very controversial situation in the Congress about Vietnam. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee was relatively quiet; Senator Fulbright raised no particular problems. There were no doves and hawks in those days -- that didn't come along until after we had put in those days -- that didn't come along until after we had put in substantial forces in South Vietnam. And I think everybody hoped that somehow the modest steps that we were taking during the Kennedy Administration would be enough to pacify the situation.

O'BRIEN: How about foreign nations? Is there any pressure coming from, let's say, Latin American nations or other Asian nations?

RUSK: The principal concern about Vietnam came from the free nations of Southeast Asia: Thailand particularly, Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, Malaya (it later became Malaysia.) We had the feeling that they looked upon the situation in Vietnam more or less from the point of view of the domino theory, that if Vietnam were allowed to fall then they would be next and that it was necessary to halt this southward pressure of the Communist world in Asia on the basis of the status quo if they were to have any security for the future.



O'BRIEN: Did you ever see any evidence -- I'm getting to the coup -- that any U.S. officials in either an official or an unofficial way made any contact before this one incident you're talking about, the so-called telegram of August 24th, as I recall the date, any evidence that any official made contact with military people or anyone

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in South Vietnam in regard to instigating or suggesting a coup?

RUSK: Speaking in 1969, it's been some time now since there was much coup talk in Vietnam. But there was a period from 1962 onward to about 1966 when coup talk was just the order of the day. There were all sorts of rumors and counter-rumors about coups, and there were many South Vietnamese who came to one and another American from time to time to talk about a possible coup and to inquire what the attitude of the United States would be with respect to such a coup. It was looked upon by

coup plotters that the attitude of the United States might be decisive in terms of whether a coup would succeed or not. So, yes, there was a good deal of gossip about coups. Most of it turned out to be insubstantial without any real content in it, but apparently every disaffected South Vietnamese general felt free to talk to some American about his concerns and try to probe the United States. And we had to be very careful that we did not get ourselves mixed up in internal South Vietnamese affairs, particularly where coup talk was concerned.

O'BRIEN: Well, getting to this August 24th thing where the telegram goes out over the weekend and you mentioned that you and Secretary McNamara had some real reservations about this, were the people who were involved in this, which, as I understand, were Forrestal, Hilsman, and Governor Harriman, were they ever, in a sense, called to task?

RUSK: Only in the sense that we pulled away from what they had done that weekend. But they were doing their duty as they saw it; they were trying to do the right thing as they saw American interests there. But we did not rebuke them personally about it. After all, the Under Secretary of State, Mr. Ball [George W. Ball], sent out the telegram, and he had been on the phone with me in a very disguised way beforehand, and the same thing had been true of Secretary McNamara. So from a purely procedural point of view, we had been involved in the telegram, but in a very unsatisfactory way, by telephone, and by an unclassified telephone. So it was a shared responsibility, and we simply

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turned it around a bit when we got back.

O'BRIEN: Well, I understand that in that contact by phone you suggested at least a part of that telegram, which was the part that support for the government would continue in case of a breakdown in the central government.

RUSK: I think it's possible that I did, yes. I don't recall it at the moment.

O'BRIEN: I think it's in the Weintal [Edward Weintal] and Bartlett [Charles Bartlett] book.

RUSK: Yes, but I don't recall.

O'BRIEN: Well now, there's a pullback from this position on the 24th, and at the same time your Assistant Secretary for Far East has done a great deal of briefing in the way of press, in talking to the press. How did you respond to this? Was there any effort to attempt to counter some of the press talk that had been done?

RUSK: We've always tried to discount rumors of coups because there were so many of them and most of them turned out not to have anything in them. So we

always, as a matter of official policy, discounted coup talk. That was quite apart from the fact that it was the accurate thing to do because most of the coup talk had no substance. It was also important because giving encouragement to coup talk undermined the position of those who were carrying the responsibility in Saigon. Even though there were three or four coups during that period, our official position was that we were not involved with and did not expect coups. And some of the coups did, in fact, catch us quite unexpectedly.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any conversations with General Taylor at this point -- and we're talking here right after that 24th and the sort of backing

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away from that position -- with either General Taylor or the Attorney General or the President in regard to the...

RUSK: We had talks with the President about the situation in Vietnam. I'm sure that General Taylor was in on those talks, but I don't recall any specific talks with the Attorney General.

O'BRIEN: Do you recall any of their attitudes towards this as far as either reservations or criticisms or...

RUSK: I think the general attitude of those at the most senior levels in government was that President Diem ought to reform his method of operation and stay in office rather than be displaced by someone else, some unknown or untested government. Unhappily, that was not possible because he himself lost the crucial support that he needed to remain president of South Vietnam. But in general, I think the attitude was that we wanted a viable government; we wanted a government that had as broad a base of popular support as possible; we wanted cohesion between the government and the armed forces of South Vietnam; we did not want the South Vietnamese armed forces to break up in fighting among themselves because of loyalty to different cliques and things of that sort. But, in general, I think we felt that Diem was a fellow who could do it if he would. The trouble is that he just would not take the steps that were necessary to stabilize the situation.

O'BRIEN: Were you present at the National Security Council meetings in late August where, I understand, there were some rather bitter exchanges between Governor Harriman, Ambassador Nolting, and also Under Secretary Ball. Do you happen...

RUSK: I remember some debates on the question of President Diem and whether it was possible for him to reform himself to carry on or whether it was a hopeless task and therefor we should give encouragement to those who were trying to unseat him. There were some lively debates on that subject.

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O'BRIEN: In the meantime, as a result of this earlier telegram, there's been contact made with, as I understand it, General Khanh [Nguyen Khanh] and General Khiem [Tran Thieu Khiem] in Vietnam. Is there any attempt to back out of those contacts and break those contacts that had been made?

RUSK: I tend to be of the impression that we were ourselves not trying to stimulate a coup and that we were not going to give the green light to anybody to overthrow President Diem. I might say that the details of these exchanges might be found in President Johnson's papers at the Johnson Library because an effort was made to reconstruct this episode and the events which followed it. Now whether that paper will be available by the time this material is being used I don't know, but the account is recorded there in some detail.

O'BRIEN: Do you happen to recall any of the details of that account...

RUSK: No, I don't. I don't.

O'BRIEN: ...as it was reconstructed? Well, that Fall the mission of General Krulak [Victor H. Krulak] and a member of the State Department, Mr. Mendenhall [Joseph A. Mendenhall], go out to Vietnam. Do you remember the genesis of that, how that developed?

RUSK: No, I don't at this point recall details of it. We sent many missions to Vietnam throughout the period trying to run down particular questions, trying to get some firsthand observations, trying to fill in the cables by direct consultation between officers from Washington and our representatives in Vietnam. But I don't recall anything special about that one.

O'BRIEN: There were a number of things that fall, too, as I understand, various things in the way of policy that were designed to imply pressure or attempt to pressure the Diem government to make certain changes including some of the cuts on minor foreign aid questions and

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the removal of, I understand, the CIA director for Vietnam, John Richardson. Did you agree with these?

RUSK: It was very hard to find ways to put direct pressure on President Diem because he was a very.... [Interruption]

[BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I]

O'BRIEN: During this time you had a number -- and I wonder whether you'd be willing to do this, would you care to evaluate not only the views, but perhaps the performance of some of the people that were in positions of authority and power during this changeover, the coup, as well as, of course, the general development of policy in Vietnam. I'm thinking of people, for example, like Governor Harriman and Mr. Forrestal.

RUSK: I would find it difficult to do that because, in the first place, I don't remember in detail what their attitudes were on particular questions at this point and, secondly, I tended as a matter of general habit to give my confidence to those who were in the actual positions carrying responsibility. If I found that I could not give them my confidence, I would make arrangements to replace them, as we did with Roger Hilsman at one point, for example.

I think the important thing to know is that there was constant discussion of all aspects of Vietnam in the staff in the Department of State and with the other departments and with President Kennedy. Almost every point of view came up for consideration one way or another. During all of the discussions of Vietnam over the years I don't recall a single instance of a genuinely new idea coming out of public debate on Vietnam that had not long since been thought of and discussed and evaluated and a judgment made on in the Department of State. People greatly underestimate the amount of discussion that goes on in a place like the Department of State about all aspects of a problem, so that we had many bull sessions about Vietnam in which various facets were discussed.

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Now, at the end of all that process, policy decisions emerge, but the policy decisions are basically the decisions of the President. It's particularly true in Vietnam which was an active theater of combat operations. President Kennedy and President Johnson both were, in effect, the desk officers for Vietnam, and they made decisions on matters of detail as well as on matters of general policy. I think this is inevitable when there's actual shooting going on that a President would himself take a very active and detailed part in policy discussions and would make most of the decision himself. But underneath that was a wide range of discussion involving many people and many points of view.

O'BRIEN: Well, Ambassador Lodge employs a strategy of aloofness in his dealings with the Diem, with President Diem.

RUSK: Well, we were trying to find ways and means to persuade President Diem to change some of his practices and, particularly, to drive a wedge between President Diem and his own brother. That led us to try to send him a signal by holding up certain kinds of economic assistance, by periods of aloofness in relationships between our ambassador and President Diem, but those things didn't have much effect on

President Diem. They just rolled off his back, and we never found it possible to persuade President Diem to take some of the steps that were necessary if he was to maintain himself in power on any basis whatever of broad support. It was a hopeless.... He was a very elusive man. We just couldn't bring him to come to grips with his own problems.

O'BRIEN: What was your reaction when you first heard that Madame Nhu was going to make a world trip and come to the United States?

RUSK: Well, I assumed that she would cause us some difficulty, but I didn't take a tragic view of it. After all, she was out, and she had had the tragic experience of losing her husband and her brother-in-law. She was a tragic figure, and we didn't try to censor her or to put her in prison or to deny her entrance to the

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United States or to limit her freedom to travel in Europe or anything of that sort. We more or less let it take its course. I think that events prove that letting her run herself out was the best way to handle it.

O'BRIEN: When did you realize in Washington that the coup was really going to take place? Do you happen to recall approximately when it was really going to go and it was not...

RUSK: As far as I can recall, just a few hours before it in fact took place, because we had pulled away from coup talk in the interim period there. Then we did get word that certain generals were going to move, and we just had time to flash Ambassador Lodge that if that did happen that he would do whatever he could to assure the personal safety of President Diem and to arrange for President Diem's departure from the country in safety. But we had.... Since we had pulled away from the coup business, we were not involved in the detailed planning that went behind the coup that in fact overthrew President Diem. And then there were unorganized and perhaps unplanned elements in it (Buddhist demonstrations, student demonstrations, popular expressions of opinion in Saigon itself and in other cities), so that the matter just sort of got out of hand on its own.

O'BRIEN: Were there contingency plans to get Ambassador Lodge out of the country in case the coup did take a violent turn?

RUSK: I don't think so. I don't think so.

O'BRIEN: Or to protect Americans present in Saigon?

RUSK: There was some consideration given to the safety of Americans on a number of occasions, and this was one of them. We didn't know just what turn things

might take, and we had a good many Americans there who were not able to protect themselves in the event of an anti-American operation. But we didn't really expect the coup to take an anti-American direction.

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O'BRIEN: Well, one final question or perhaps a couple questions that might come out of it. It's in regard to Cambodia and particularly the border problems here between Vietnam and Cambodia. Were you very, very conscious at this point of what the buildup of American or the American presence not only in Vietnam as well as the support of the South Vietnam government and in the same regard also the relations of the Thais with the Cambodians, what this meant in regard to Prince Sihanouk and Cambodia?

RUSK: Cambodia's relations with the Thais on the one side and the Vietnamese on the other have been complicated for at least a thousand years. There's a hostility there that has been fed from time to time by particular episodes and events during World War II and otherwise. But I think, in retrospect, the big question as far as Prince Sihanouk was concerned was what was going to be the future of Southeast Asia. I think at one point -- and I'm not sure I know just when this occurred -- he came to a conclusion that China was going to be the wave of the future in Asia, and I think he tried to make gestures toward China and gestures against the United States that might serve to leave him in an independent position if China and North Vietnam did in fact overrun Southeast Asia. In other words, I think they scared him.

Now when it became apparent in later years during the Johnson Administration that the United States did appear to be serious and that South Vietnam was not going to be overrun by North Vietnam by military force, Prince Sihanouk's attitude modified somewhat, and he was somewhat more relaxed about the United States and somewhat more distant with Peking. He, for example, publicly accused Hanoi and Peking of giving assistance to the guerrillas in his own country. From time to time he would threaten to abdicate and leave Cambodia and turn over the government to the right wing groups there if these guerrillas didn't behave themselves. I think his judgments were.... His policy is explained more or less on judgments that he makes about the future of Southeast Asia.

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Now there were some border disputes between himself and the South Vietnamese and the Thais. We did our best, working in different capitals, to try to resolve these border disputes because they were of no concern to the United States. They were just irritants, and it didn't make too much difference to us as to where the border was settled, but we felt it was important to get it settled, and we greatly encouraged the idea of bilateral talks between the South Vietnamese and Cambodia on the one side and Cambodia and Thailand on the other. There were no border problems between South Vietnam and Cambodia that could not have been easily worked out if the both sides were to sit down in reasonable good faith and simply

try to draw a border. But high feelings on both sides made it very difficult to do that.

[REDACTED] There are times when I've felt that this abuse of Cambodian territory was being carried out against Prince Sihanouk's will. We had reports from time to time of actual engagements between Cambodian forces on the one side and Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces on the other. On the other hand, there was evidence that a good deal of the supply of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces was actually coming through Cambodia. They'd get their rice in Cambodia. They would... We had reports of the smuggling of arms and ammunition through Cambodia into the Viet Cong areas, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] at least there was sufficient corruption inside of his government to make it possible for a good deal of smuggling to go on.

But my guess is that if Prince Sihanouk had his own first choice for Southeast Asia, it would be a Southeast Asia in which North Vietnam restricted itself to North Vietnam, in which South Vietnam would be an independent country, but making various concessions to Cambodia on borders and offshore island and things of that sort, and that the status quo in Southeast Asia be more or less preserved. That would be the most sensible thing from the point of view of Cambodian security and Cambodian independence. There was always a deep suspicion that North Vietnam was trying to unify not just South Vietnam but all of what was formerly Indochina, and there's some implication of that

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in Ho Chi Minh's will which was published after his death. But I have no doubt myself that Hanoi would like to be able to pick up Laos and Cambodia as well as South Vietnam.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever see any evidence of military equipment going from the South Vietnamese government or from South Vietnam to the Free Khmer movement in Cambodia at any time?

RUSK: I think that [REDACTED] the South Vietnamese [REDACTED] have played footsie with elements in the Free Khmer movement from time to time, but since the most active of the Free Khmer elements were communist in orientation, the South Vietnamese [REDACTED] involvement was very minimum. I don't believe myself that that was a -- although Prince Sihanouk had nightmares about it and held the Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese [REDACTED] responsible for interference in his own country, I think that was very marginal and had very little to do with what was actually happening in Cambodia. We have brought our influence to bear to get the South Vietnamese [REDACTED] to stop that kind of monkey business and not create unnecessary problems with Cambodia at a time when both of them had severe problems of their own to cope with.

O'BRIEN: Well, in your last conversations with President Kennedy, do you remember how he responded to the coup, what his thoughts and reflections were on the

coup in South Vietnam?

RUSK: It was one of regret that a better answer had not been found, deep regret that President Diem was killed, a feeling nevertheless, that somehow our own interests in South Vietnam required us to try to pick up the pieces and make do with what was there. So there was never any desire on his part to simply shake off Vietnam and forget about it and pull out on the basis of the coup or anything of that sort. But President Kennedy had a certain feeling for President Diem. He realized that he was a man who had massive difficulties in front of him, and I think there was a real regret on President Kennedy's part that it was not possible for President Diem to succeed.

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O'BRIEN: Well, now is the transition of administrations, from the Kennedy Administration to the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, do you see any major shifts in emphasis or policy or any little shifts, in a sense, that will eventually lead to changes in policy towards Southeast Asia?

RUSK: President Johnson started off with a full commitment to President Kennedy's policy on Vietnam. As the months wore on he became increasingly dissatisfied with the fact that we were not seeing the end of this involvement, that he was not able to show steady progress toward a conclusion of the Vietnam episode. But through the campaign of 1964 President Johnson's general approach to Vietnam was very much that of President Kennedy's.

Now in the debate between President Johnson and Senator Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater], President Johnson's approach was that of a modest effort, a necessary effort, but against any massive escalation of the war, I won't repeat here the general debate between the two. Now the historian will want to speculate as to whether or not that Presidential campaign of '64 did not mislead Hanoi, because it's entirely possible that Hanoi said to themselves, "Ah, ha. Lyndon Johnson has been elected against Goldwater, and Lyndon Johnson says, 'We don't want a larger war,' therefore, we, Hanoi, can have a larger war without an increase in risk," because it was after that election campaign of '64, before we started the bombing of North Vietnam, that the North Vietnamese made the decision to send large units of their regular army into South Vietnam. That presented President Johnson with a wholly new situation and led to the buildup of American forces in 1965.

But throughout the period from November of '63 until the spring of '65 President Johnson was following what he judged to be the general policy of President Kennedy toward the situation: to give the South Vietnamese support and give them advisers and give them plenty of equipment, ammunition, and economic support and things of that sort, but to put them in position to deal with these guerrillas pretty much on their own without the involvement of American combat troops, when the North Vietnamese decided to send in regular elements of their armed forces, then President Johnson had to make the decision as to whether we would commit American

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combat forces in substantial numbers, and he made the decision, of course, that we would do so. But I think that President Johnson would have preferred to have seen the matter wind up on the basis of the minimum involvement that we had under President Kennedy, but that would have required the South Vietnamese to deal with the guerrillas more or less on their own without direct American combat participation.

O'BRIEN: Well, then, as a result of the coup, is the general effort in South Vietnam weakened as a result of a change of leadership?

RUSK: I think the first result of it was to strengthen the situation to a degree, because you no longer had demonstrations in the street, you had a new team, you had a fresh start, you had a very popular man, "Big" Minh [General Duong Van Minh], in a position of responsibility. He was a hero during the Japanese period; he had a certain sense of politics. And I think the first impression was that there was certain rejoicing around the country that the coup had occurred and that a new deal was present.

Well, then various facts of life began to be felt, and one coup followed another there for a time. But the principal problem was that the various generals in the South Vietnamese armed forces broke up into cliques and were unable to act as a cohesive group. And one of the important things that General Westmoreland was to do later was to insist that the South Vietnamese armed forces act together and stop all this coup talk, and that finally came about under Ky [Nguyen Cao] and then under Thieu [Nguyen Van Thieu]. And since that time, for the last three or four years, we've had very little coup talk in South Vietnam.

O'BRIEN: Well, we've gone on rather long, and I've exhausted almost all of my questions. Is there anything that you feel, in reflection now, that should be said?

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RUSK: Well, I think that I would come back to the point that I made earlier that President Kennedy's attitude on Vietnam ought to be derived from what he said and did while he was President, that he felt very strongly that we had a commitment there, that the security of Southeast Asia was important to the security of the United States, that we could not let a course of aggression develop momentum in Southeast Asia that could well set us on a course toward World War III, and that in any event the commitment of the United States under security treaties is the principal pillar of peace in the world and what happens to those security treaties is the most important thing that there is to the safety of the American people. President Kennedy had been tested by one crisis after another. He was young, progressive, liberal, sophisticated in his outlook, and it was a tragedy that he was confronted with so many crises during his Presidency because that was not the kind of President he would really prefer to be. He would prefer to settle problems rather than fight about them, and yet he was confronted by Berlin and by the Cuban Missile Crisis and

by Vietnam and Laos, which meant that his years were filled with crisis. I don't know how to describe the alternatives, but he didn't have a chance to try out the alternatives because he was confronted with crisis through so much of his Presidency. But he stood up to them and seemed to be resolved to make good on his commitment to the free world in the face of aggression by the Communist world.

O'BRIEN: Well, thank you, Mr. Secretary, for a very interesting interview on Vietnam.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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