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SECRETARY RUSK'S NEWS CONFERENCE OF MARCH 28, 1967

The following is the State Department's release of Secretary of State Dean Rusk's news conference, which is authorized for direct quotation:

SECRETARY RUSK: Earlier today, the Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant, made public some proposals which he had offered to a number of governments involved in the problem in Viet-Nam on March 14. The following day, we gave the Secretary General our interim reply, stating that we welcomed his initiative, and, after consultation with the Government of Viet-Nam and other allies, we would give him a more considered reply.

On March 18, we delivered that reply to the Secretary General, and you now have that in front of you.

In essence, the Secretary General proposed that there be a general standstill truce in Viet-Nam, that there then be preliminary talks leading to a

reconvening of the Geneva Conference.

In our reply, we stated that we accepted the outline of his proposals, that we would be glad to negotiate the standstill truce, and take part in preliminary discussions leading to a reconvening of that conference.

We do not yet have in front of us the full text of whatever reply Hanoi may have delivered to the Secretary General. Whether Hanoi will make that public I do not now know. We do have a public statement from Hanoi which seems to indicate their attitude. That public statement of yesterday said that;

"To call on both sides to cease fire and hold unconditional negotiations, while the United States is committing aggression against Viet-Nam, and taking serious steps in its military escalation in both zones of Viet-Nam, is to make no distinction between the aggressor and the victim of aggression, to depart from reality, and to demand that the Vietnamese people accept the conditions of the aggressors."

And then it adds:

"And, by the way, it is necessary to underline

once again the views of the Government of Hanoi, which has pointed out that the Viet-Nam problem has no concern with the United Nations, and the United Nations has absolutely no right to interfere in any way in the Viet-Nam question."

The indications are, therefore, that Hanoi has once again taken a negative view toward an initiative taken by someone else to move this matter toward peace.

I might say that the recent publication of the exchange between President Johnson and Ho Chi Minh; and today's publication of the proposals of the Secretary General, and the responses to it, illustrate the problem that we have had from the beginning in bringing the Viet-Nam problem to a peaceful conclusion.

Many governments, many groups of governments, many world personalities, have tried to take an initiative to move this conflict toward a peaceful settlement. There has invariably been a positive and a constructive response from the United States; and there has invariably been a negative and hostile and, at times, vituperative

response from the authorities in Hanoi. When one looks back over the long record of initiatives taken by many personalities and governments, and groups of governments, one sees the record of Hanoi's intransigence, with such phrases as "swindle," and "farce," and words of that sort.

Now, we do not ourselves believe that peace is not the business of the United Nations. We believe that no nation can say that a world organization representing 122 nations cannot properly take up the question of maintaining the peace. The Charter provides for it; the obligations of the nations of the world are involved; and the issue of peace is at stake.

Nevertheless, we have never insisted that the United Nations is the sole mechanism for dealing with this question.

There is now pending before the Security Council a resolution offered by the United States calling for a peaceful settlement of this problem. That has been resisted in the United Nations because of the attitude of Hanoi and Peking toward the involvement

of the United Nations. When the Soviet Ambassador said at the Security Council that "This is not the business of the U. N., it is a matter for the Geneva machinery," Ambassador Goldberg said, "All right. If that is your view, we will agree with that; then let us use the Geneva machinery."

But the Geneva machinery has been paralyzed by the attitude of Hanoi and Peking. For example, that machinery has not been available to respond favorably to Prince Sihanouk's request that the International Control Commission step up its activities to ensure the neutrality and the territorial integrity of Cambodia. That machinery was not available to ensure the demilitarization of the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Viet-Nam.

So we would say to the authorities in Hanoi that, surely, there must be some machinery somewhere which can open the possibilities of peace. If not the United Nations, then the Geneva machinery; if not the Geneva machinery, then the resources of quiet diplomacy.

I can tell you, now that the exchange between

President Johnson and Ho Chi Minh has been made public, and U Thant's proposals and our reply have been made public, that there is nothing in the private record which throws any different light on this situation than you now have in the public record. Despite all of the efforts made privately by many people in many places, the private record and the public record are now in agreement.

I do hope that the authorities in Hanoi would give serious thought to the present situation. If they have supposed that they would be able to obtain a military victory in the South, they must, surely, now put that hope aside. If they have had any hope that there would be a political collapse in South Viet-Nam, surely, they must now know that all of the groups in South Viet-Nam, who have some differences among themselves, are resolved to bring into being a Constitutional Government in which those various groups can work together on a basis of the free choice of the South Vietnamese people with respect to their future; and that one point, on which they are generally agreed in South Viet-Nam, is that they do not wish the program

of Hanoi or the Liberation Front.

If Hanoi supposes that somehow international opinion will come to their rescue, surely they must know that when they rebuff the United Nations Organization, an organization of 122 members, that this will not bring them support in other parts of the world. And, surely, they must understand that all small nations who are within the reach of some greater power have a stake in the ability of South Viet-Nam to determine its own future for itself. And, surely, Hanoi must not be under continuing misapprehension that, somehow, some divisions within the United States might cause us to change our attitude toward our commitments to South Viet-Nam. Because although there may be some differences among us, those differences are trivial compared to the differences between all of us, on the one side, and Hanoi on the other,

So we would hope that in some fashion, in some way, at some time, the authorities in Hanoi will make use of some machinery in which to be responsive to the many efforts which we and others have been making toward peace over the last several years.

It is no good to brush aside the 17 nonaligned nations, and the British Commonwealth of Prime Ministers, and His Holiness the Pope, the Secretary General, and the President of India, and all the others who have been trying to find some basis on which this matter could be moved toward a peaceful conclusion, and suppose that, somehow, world opinion is supporting them in their efforts to seize South Viet-Nam by force.

So we would advise them to believe that, as far as we are concerned, we are not calling the search for a peaceful settlement to an end because of Ho Chi Minh's reply to President Johnson, or because of the attitude which they seem to be taking toward U Thant's most recent proposals. We shall continue that effort by private and public means, and we would hope that we would get some response through some channel that would begin to bring this thing within the range of discussion and make it possible to move toward a peaceful settlement.

Now, I am ready for your questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q Mr. Secretary, you have outlined all of the reasons why they, surely, must not believe these various elements. What is it then you think that makes



them keep on fighting and refusing to negotiate in the face of what must be a loss of international support, and these other adverse factors?

A Well, it is very hard to say. I can't enter into the minds of the leaders in Hanoi on a matter of that sort. I would suppose, really, that they are under some misapprehension. They are making some misjudgments and miscalculations on some point: either the state of international opinion, or the state of opinion within the United States. It's possible even that they still have some slender hopes of some military success in the South.

I just don't know what is in their minds. But what I am saying is that, so far as we understand their point of view, the principal pillars of their hopes are eroding from under them, and they should become interested in peace, and at an early date and not at some long delayed future date.

Q Mr. Secretary, your statement today in reply to U Thant has said that there would be "an appropriate involvement for the Government of South Viet-Nam throughout

the entire process of arranging a peace."

Would you spell that out a little more, sir? Premier Ky has been indicating that we haven't called him in.

A Well, obviously, any discussion with North Viet-Nam about peace in Viet-Nam must directly involve the Government of South Viet-Nam. Indeed, as you know, the Government of South Viet-Nam has on more than one occasion suggested direct talks between South Viet-Nam and North Viet-Nam. They have proposed, for example, that the two governments there get together on the question of possibly extending the Tet standdown, the Tet Cease-Fire.

We would support that as a means for coming to grips with this problem. We would think that it would be a very good idea if Hanoi were to accept the proposals of South Viet-Nam for direct talks to move this toward a peaceful solution.

There are many opportunities available, you see.

There would be direct talks between Saigon and Hanoi. There would be talks between ourselves and

Hanoi. There would be talks under the auspices of the two Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conferences, or under the auspices of the three members of the International Control Commission. Or there could be intermediaries, such as the Secretary General of the United Nations, or some other distinguished governmental or non-governmental leader. Any of these methods are appropriate and useful, as far as we are concerned.

The problem is that no one has been able to find a procedure or a method which, apparently, is agreeable to Hanoi.

Q Mr. Secretary?

A Yes.

Q If Hanoi persists for months and even years in its attitude, what will our response then be? What will our course be?

A We shall meet our commitments in South Viet-Nam. We shall do our duty there.

Q Mr. Secretary, at the end of the Korean War, as I recall, we entered into talks without a truce and the fighting continued for two years. Would you explain, would this formula to which you have responded today, could it be a lead to that same sort of thing, peace talks without any change in the fighting?

A Well, let me remind you, Mr. Harsch, of our most elementary position on this matter of talks. We will talk this afternoon or tomorrow morning without any conditions of any sort on either side. We are prepared to talk while the shooting is going on. If the other side wishes to raise major conditions, as they have with their demand that there be an unconditional permanent cessation of the bombing, we are prepared to talk about conditions. We will discuss the conditions which must precede the initiation of formal negotiations.

Or if they do not wish to start at that end-- that is, what do you do about the shooting--we are prepared to start at the other end -- what do you do about a final settlement of the problem? And work back from that to the practical means by which you reach the final settlement. So we are prepared to talk without any conditions of any sort, or about conditions.

Now, let me say that we don't ourselves fully understand why there cannot be discreet talks even though the shooting is going on. Now, we are aware of the element of so-called face, but face is not a substitute for very serious practical problems that we face on the military side.

Now, I remind you that we discussed Berlin while the blockade was still in effect. We discussed Korea while the hostilities were still in effect. Indeed, we took more casualties in Korea after the negotiations started than had occurred before the negotiations started. We talked about the Cuban missiles while the Cuban missile sites were being built by the hour in Cuba. So we are prepared to talk without any change in the military situation whatever.

But we are also prepared to talk about changes in the military situation. What we cannot do is to commit ourselves to a permanent and unconditional stoppage of the bombing without knowing what the practical results of that will be on the military side.

No one has been able to tell us, for example, just as one example, that if we stop the bombing those three divisions or more of North Vietnamese troops that

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are now in and on both sides of the Demilitarized Zone will not advance to attack our Marines who are six miles away.

Now, obviously, these are important practical questions. So we will talk at this moment, or we will talk about any other circumstances in which the other side might think that they might wish to talk. But what we cannot do is to stop half the war and let the other half of the war go on unimpeded.

Q Mr. Secretary, when you refer, when we referred in our reply to the Secretary General to a general stand-still truce, are we talking at that point of a cessation of the bombing, and cessation of infiltration from the North?

A I would suppose that a general stand-still truce would involve an elimination of all military action of all sorts on both sides. Now, one reason why there has to be some discussion of that is that it is necessary for both sides to understand what in fact will happen, particularly in a guerrilla situation where the situation on the ground is somewhat complicated. And so there needs to be some discussion of that point if it is to be a protracted stand-still.

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But if that can be achieved, then we can move into the preliminary political discussions which might open the way for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference or some other appropriate forum. But a military standstill would involve the concept of stopping the military action on both sides, and that certainly would include stopping the bombing.

Q Mr. Secretary, just how does this formula today differ from Mr. Thant's previous formula?

A Well, I think that he would perhaps be the better one to comment on that. If there is a major difference, I think that this does place emphasis upon a mutual stop of the military action on both sides as an important first step.

As far as his earlier proposals were concerned, the three-point proposals, you recall that they envisage that we would stop the bombing as the first point. The second point, that there would be a mutual de-escalation of the military action; and, third, there would be discussions among all those involved in the conflict.

We said, "Your point one, stopping the bombing, gives us no particular problem, but what do you have from the other side about point two?" Well, what he had from

the other side about point two was a complete rejection, that there will be no mutual de-escalation of military action.

And on point three, the question of discussions with all the parties involved in the fighting, the other side has consistently said in and out from time to time, rather--that the Liberation Front must be accepted as the sole spokesman for the South Vietnamese people.

We find disturbing the refusal of Hanoi to engage in discussions with the Government in Saigon. We think that would be an appropriate way to begin such discussions, and the possibilities of peace might be opened up if that channel were to become active. But thus far Hanoi has refused to exercise it.

Q Mr. Secretary, how would you distinguish between this proposal and the President's proposal to Ho Chi Minh?

A Well, I think that perhaps the Secretary General's proposal is somewhat broader, in that it would presumably apply to a cease-fire throughout all of Viet-Nam, South Viet-Nam as well as the disengagement militarily between North Viet-Nam and South Viet-Nam. So to that extent, it is somewhat broader. But, nevertheless,



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that is something which we are perfectly prepared to discuss with representatives from the other side, or are perfectly prepared to have the Government of Saigon discuss with the representatives from Hanoi.

Q Mr. Secretary, what is your answer to those critics who say that the President's letter in effect raised the American price?

A Well, I don't understand what they are talking about.

Q Well, they say that in this letter the United States is demanding proof in advance that infiltration would have stopped.

A We didn't talk about proof in advance. The words used were "assurances that infiltration had stopped."

Q Well, it is your contention that the price was not raised, that you're on the status quo ante as far as that is concerned?

A The principal point here is that Hanoi has increasingly emphasized during this past year its inflexible demand that a stop in the bombing be permanent and unconditional, and that in exchange for

that, there would be no indication from Hanoi as to what comparable or corresponding military action they would take on their side.

Now, just recall, for example, during the 37-day pause at the beginning of last year, Ho Chi Minh sent a letter to the Heads of Communist States, and in that letter he demanded that the United States must end unconditionally and for good all bombing raids and other acts, war acts against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Only in this way can a political solution of the Viet-Nam problem be envisaged.

Now, that insistence upon the stoppage of the bombing, which would be permanent and unconditional, has been a major increase in the public demands of Hanoi during this past year. And that makes it necessary for us to know what would happen if we committed ourselves to any such cessation.

The North Vietnamese representative in Paris on February 22nd said that we must state in advance at the time of any cessation of bombing that it would be permanent and unconditional. Well, that means that we must know what the effects would be. Will the infiltration continue? Will those three divisions move against

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our Marines? Are they going to continue their half of the war? No one has been able to whisper to us that that would not be the result. No one, private citizens, governments, Hanoi's own representatives, governments friendly to Hanoi. No one has been able to whisper to us that there would be any change in the present military tactics and strategy of Hanoi with respect to seizing South Viet-Nam by force.

If any of you gentlemen have any information to the contrary, I would be glad to hear it.

Q Mr. Secretary--

A Yes?

Q May I ask you if the channels directly to Hanoi remain open after this exchange of letters, and if so, are we putting these propositions that you have just stated directly to them?

A As far as we are concerned, the channels remain open. They have been open all along. I have referred to the fact that nothing we have had privately throws any different light on what you now know publicly about the attitude of the two sides. But I shouldn't exaggerate the point that channels remain open. When you

pick up the telephone and nobody answers on the other end, is that a channel or not? Or if you find yourself in a telephone conversation and the other end hangs up, I will leave it to you as to whether that is a channel. I can say at the moment that our channels are not very efficient, to say the least.

Q Mr. Secretary, is the amount of reciprocity that we would require for stopping the bombing a negotiable commodity, or is there a decisive--must there be a complete stoppage in infiltration, or is it negotiable?

A I don't want to give a categorical response to that because President Johnson in a recent press conference said that we would be glad to hear of almost anything from the other side. But that doesn't mean that we can live on just nothing from the other side, just nothing.

I point out to you that during the Tet pause, at the end of which Ho Chi Minh gave his reply to the letter which President Johnson had sent to him at the beginning of the Tet pause, he had some other alternatives open to him. If there was a problem of time, he could have said, "Mr. President, time is rather short here. We

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need a little more time on this." He didn't say that. Or he could have said, "I don't particularly like your proposal, but here are my counterproposals." He didn't say that. In effect, he called for the capitulation of South Viet-Nam and capitulation of the American forces in South Viet-Nam, and a permanent and unconditional stoppage of the bombing. That we can't take.

Yes, sir?

Q Mr. Secretary, when you talk about the public and private record being the same, what exactly do you mean? Do you mean there is nothing outstanding now privately in the way of negotiation?

A No. What I'm saying is there is nothing in the private record that reflects any different view on the part of the authorities in Hanoi than you now have on the public record.

Q Mr. Secretary, could you explain why you haven't published the text of four other letters that you recently sent to Hanoi?

A Because we do not wish ourselves to establish the point that a private communication with us is impossible. If Hanoi wishes to make public a

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communication from us, as they did in connection with the exchange between President Johnson and Ho Chi Minh, that is a choice which they can make. But I think it could be very important in the future that Hanoi at least know that it is possible for them to communicate privately with us without its becoming public, to the extent that you gentlemen would let us get away with that.

Q Mr. Secretary, Point (b) of the United States answer talks about preliminary talks. What's your understanding of who would take part in those talks--just Hanoi and Washington, or would it be Saigon or the NLF?

A Well, we haven't formulated that in great detail because we need to know what the attitude of Hanoi would be and what the general situation would be. In our reply we did say that of course the Government of South Viet-Nam will have to be appropriately involved throughout this entire process, and that the interests and views of our allies would also have to be taken fully into account. So we did not try to make that precise in detail because we would be interested in

knowing what Hanoi's response to the Secretary General's initiative would be.

Q Mr. Secretary, you referred to the fact that there was no contradiction between the public and private record as far as peace talks are concerned. I wonder if you would be prepared to comment now on reports concerning the possibility of negotiations in Warsaw.

A If your question is would I be willing to, the answer is no. I think the attitude of Hanoi on these matters is fairly clear at the present time, but I do not want to point the finger to, or close the door on, any contacts that might occur anywhere in any capital as far as the future is concerned.

Q Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

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