Dullness May Be Better Than Dramatizing, He Says

Rusk Replies Indirectly to Schlesinger

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Secretary of State Dean Rusk replied yesterday to a charge that his conduct of foreign policy is conventional and banal by asserting that it's his duty to be dull.

"It is the purpose of the State Department to try to bring about what some people will call a boring situation, that is, a period of peace," Rusk said in indirect reply to a statement by former presidential adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. that President Kennedy had planned to replace Rusk as Secretary of State.

Schlesinger's assertion was published recently in Life magazine, which excerpted his forthcoming book on Mr. Kennedy, "One Thousand Days." In it, the one-time Harvard history professor reports that Kennedy, while admiring many things about Rusk, had been disappointed in Rusk's inability to shake the State Department out of its often plodding ways.

In the view of many, Rusk was following his own advice about being dull yesterday when he addressed himself to the Schlesinger report. At the very least, his comments came as a distinct anticlimax.

For the past week, official Washington had hummed with authoritative reports that Rusk intended to make a public reply to Schlesinger. And at his news conference yesterday, the inevitable first question was for his comments on the Life article.

In answer, Rusk said: "I'm not going to comment on these particular remarks or similar remarks that might be made while I am in public office."

He then went on to say that his papers and his "own impressions" of his period in office will be given to the Kennedy or Johnson libraries to be made public "when the relevant presidential papers become available."

And, in what appeared to be a swipe at Schlesinger, he added: "But my associates in Government and my colleagues abroad can rest on the assurance that when they deal with me on the basis on confidence, that confidence will be respected."

Rusk then was asked about attacks on the effectiveness of the State Department, as distinguished from him personally. He answered with a bow to his subordinates as "competent and dedicated officers who have to grapple every day with the most complex and difficult problems that this Nation has to face."

Then, without actually saying so, Rusk turned to Schlesinger's assertion that Rusk's mind "for all its strength and clarity was irrevocably conventional," that he "mistrusted the flashy or sensational" and that he seemed most comfortable with tedium and banality in diplomacy.

"There are times," Rusk contended, "when some wish is to act with more drama, but there are problems about dramatizing issues, if drama gets in the way of settlement."

He reminded the newsmen packed into the State Department Auditorium about an editor's admonition that "no blood means no news," adding: "I should not object if we got international relations off the front page for a while."

Finally, Rusk closed off discussion with a comment that most spectators interpreted as a call for Government officials to pay attention to their jobs rather than to the rumors and gossip that are the staples of the cocktail circuit in the more fashionable parts of town.

Asked if he was uneasy amidst the intrigue of Washington, Rusk replied:

"Not at all. I feel very comfortable around this town because the part of the town that I see is in connection with my official duties, and not in some of the suburbs."

Schlesinger later declined all comment.