

Washington Post

Times Herald

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SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 1968

Phone 223-6000 Circulation 223-6106
Classified 223-6200



U.S. Marine guides blindfolded Vietcong suspects to interrogation in Hue. Suspects hold each other's clothing. Associated Press

Rusk to Confront War Critics in Public

By Murrey Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer
Secretary of State Dean Rusk will confront his sternest Senate critics in public on Monday at a time of supreme test for U.S. strategy in Vietnam.

For the first time in two years Rusk will be exposing himself and Administration policy in Vietnam to a pub-

lic, televised grilling before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Simultaneously, the Administration, with maximum secrecy, is considering major increases in its forces in Vietnam to recoup the heavy damage already inflicted by the rolling Communist offensive. In Saigon and in Washington the ex-

pectation is that the war may reach its most decisive stage within the next two months, before the weather pattern in the northern regions of South Vietnam turns in the Allies' favor.

Administration sources concede that the military-political-psychological struggle in Vietnam is at a new and perilous point. While the

United States, labeled the Communist Lunar New Year offensive, launched Jan. 30, a "failure," it is now acknowledged that it wreaked heavy damage and thrust South Vietnamese and U.S. forces into a dangerous, encircled defensive posture. South Vietnamese forces especially are now being

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urged to strike out from the cities and towns in an offensive of their own before the next Communist thrust.

Great apprehension has been voiced in Congress that President Johnson may seek up to 200,000 or more additional U.S. troops, beyond the 525,000 already earmarked for South Vietnam, to regain the initiative.

Some sources are circulating specific reports that 186,000 or 206,000 new troops will be requested. These reports and all other figures were dismissed by Administration officials yesterday as unwarranted speculation on grounds that "no decision has been reached" on any numbers.

The Rusk hearing—while technically concerned with the Administration's new foreign aid bill—is regarded by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) and other Senate critics of U.S. policy in Vietnam as perhaps the last opportunity to challenge "new escalation" before a deeper plunge into the war.

There are also immediate political implications in the hearing. One is that it comes just a day before the New

Hampshire primary election, in which Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D-Minn.), a member of the Fulbright Committee, is running for the Democratic presidential nomination on a platform challenging U.S. policy in Vietnam.

The hearing is drawing unusual public attention. At least one television network, NBC (Channel 4) plans to broadcast it live from the Senate Caucus Room starting at 10 a.m. Monday.

WTOP television (Channel 9) plans its own live coverage. The CBS network, which currently plans only to summarize the hearings after they end.

Rusk last testified, publicly about Vietnam before the Fulbright Committee on Feb. 18, 1966. It was a bruising session of nearly six hours that ended in a display of total disagreement with Fulbright on the merits and strategy of the war. The ostensible subject of that inquiry also was foreign aid.

On July 14, 1967, Rusk again was before the Committee in public session on foreign aid. But that inquiry brought relatively brief discussion of Vietnam; the Nation then was preoccupied

with the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war and the outbreak of rioting in American cities.

Rusk, with sharp memories of his 1966 encounter, firmly resisted similar questioning on Vietnam in public as the strains over Vietnam widened between the Committee and the Administration. Last Feb. 7 this battle reached the point that the Committee voted to go over Rusk's head and ask President Johnson to arrange for Rusk to testify on Vietnam.

Three weeks later, as the impasse continued, Fulbright obliquely served notice that funds for the Asian Development Bank might be held up unless the Administration responded to the Committee's state of concern about U.S. policy in Vietnam.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), himself a critic of many portions of the Administration's Vietnamese policy, quietly moved in to try to ease the damaging breach.

What has emerged, sources on both sides, privately agree, is a face-saving solution to heal what was turned into a constitutional

crisis. With Rusk obliged to testify on President Johnson's \$2.9 billion request for foreign aid, which includes a \$480 million request for South Vietnam, the Committee and Rusk can both contend they have maintained their position.

An accord to discuss Vietnam publicly was worked out behind the scenes by William B. Macomber Jr., Assistant Secretary of Staff for Congressional Relations, and Carl M. Mercy, staff chief for the Fulbright Committee.

The essence of the agreement is that Rusk will respond publicly to questions on Vietnam, although he may, on sensitive issues, reserve those for discussion behind closed doors.

Committee pressure for public hearings as a drive to belabor the Administration, rather than to solicit information from it, has insisted on finishing up the public inquiry in one day. That is the Committee's present intention, it was said, even if that requires going into a night session.

There is no serious expectation on either side, however, that Rusk's testimony

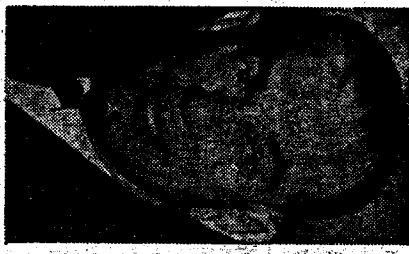
will materially change anyone's position.

The divergence of views between the Committee and the Administration has grown, not shrunk, between 1966 and 1968. The tension has increased more in recent weeks as a result of the Committee's inquiry into the naval encounters that resulted in the Congressional Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of 1964. That inquiry, Fulbright charged, clearly showed "misrepresentation" by the Administration in gaining the resolution which authorized the use of force in the Vietnamese conflict.

Committee member Joseph S. Clark (D-Pa.) in a report issued yesterday on a one-man inspection trip to South Vietnam, Jan. 16-22, just before the major Communist offensive, said:

"We are stalemated in Vietnam as we were in Korea 15 years ago. We must take the action we took then; seize the initiative to reach a compromise solution—without military victory but also without defeat. And never, never again should we commit a ground army on the mainland of Asia."

Clark, who was a critic of U.S. policy before he went



SEN. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT
... last opportunity

to South Vietnam, said the recent Communist offensive only confirmed his impressions about "the seriousness of the dilemma confronting our Nation in Vietnam."

"From pacification to political progress," Clark said, "practically every official estimate on progress in the war—or lack of it—must be revised in the light of the recent catastrophic events."

It is Rusk's chore on Monday to try to counter this kind of challenge to Administration policy, with the number of Administration supporters on the Fulbright Committee.