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SECRETARY RUSK'S NEWS CONFERENCE OF MAY 17, 1966

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: I have no formal statement today. But I would like to comment briefly on the meetings we have had this week with Mr. George Thomson, a member of the British Government, who has been making a trip around a number of the NATO capitals to talk about the present issues before NATO.

We have seen a high degree of unanimity among the fourteen and their attitude toward the recent announcements by France of certain withdrawals and certain actions which France proposes to take in NATO.

A number of issues are being discussed among the fourteen in the North Atlantic Council in Paris, and among governments.

Some of these are multilateral in character, such as the transfer or location of SACEUR Headquarters, the NATO military headquarters. Others are bilateral, such as some of the discussions -- some of the arrangements we have with France on bases and pipelines and things of that sort.

We would anticipate that discussions with France would be undertaken as soon as a little further clarification is obtained.

We have reason to believe that the attitude of the fourteen will be unified and they will be working together on these matters.

It would not be right to speculate along the lines of some speculation that I have seen that there are major differences or any significant differences between us, for example, and our friends in Britain on these matters, or indeed among the other members of the Alliance.

We have

We have greatly valued Mr. Thomson's visit and feel that his excursion among the NATO capitals has been a very useful thing for the Alliance as a whole.

Now I will take your questions.

Q Mr. Secretary, yesterday one of the Buddhist leaders, Tri Quang, addressed a request to the President, according to press reports, for assistance in his efforts in Viet-Nam. Can you tell us what the President's reply is.

A Well, our representative in Hue has seen Tri Quang and has informed him that our attitude is that everyone should do their best to resolve their differences in South Viet-Nam and permit the processes for establishing a constitutional government to go forward.

We believe that in this situation it is very important that all of those elements who join in rejecting what Hanoi and the National Liberation Front are trying to do to South Viet-Nam should set aside lesser differences and pull themselves together for a national effort.

Now, when the military leadership last January 15 announced that they themselves wished to move toward a

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constitutional government, when they reaffirmed that at Honolulu, and where we were able to give it our own support and good wishes, we felt that was a major step in moving toward a type of consolidation in South Viet-Nam that we have not seen for the past twenty years.

Now, we do know, all of us, that there are some differences there that are long-standing -- those between the Buddhists and the Catholics, those between the Annamese and the Cochinese; perhaps some differences with the million refugees who came from North Viet-Nam back in 1955 and 1956 to escape that regime up there. We are aware of those differences and the importance of the issues involved to the people concerned.

But what is needed here is a basic constitutional agreement among all of these elements in order that they can have a free nation, a free society, a democratic society which can get on with the great revolutionary tasks in the economic and social field that are so desperately needed by the people in the countryside.

You can be sure that all of our influence will be used to try to persuade all elements there to set aside their lesser issues in order to get on with the great national tasks confronting the country.

Q Mr. Secretary, would you give us your estimate of the effect, if any, of Marshal Ky's action in Da Nang on the political situation in general, and on the progress towards elections in particular.

A Well, I think there may be some further disagreements expressed in one form or another between now and the elections for the Constituent Assembly.

I do note that the committee which is working on the electoral procedures for electing a Constituent Assembly continues in session, is continuing its work. We hope that they will complete that work, and that the arrangements for the election of a Constituent Assembly can shortly be announced.

But it is important for everyone to act with good will and restraint in order to let that process go forward.

Q Mr. Secretary, would you give us your thoughts on whether General Ky was justified in moving his troops into Da Nang.

A I would not want to pass a judgment on that. He felt and the Directorate felt that it was necessary for the government to restore its writ in Da Nang. They moved to do so. This is something on which they made the judgment. As you know, this was not a joint

operation, it did not involve the United States, United States forces. But I would not wish to pass judgment on it.

Q Mr. Secretary, have we said anything to Marshal Ky comparable to what we have said to Tri Quang in a direct way.

A What I have just outlined as our attitude toward any of these -- what I call -- lesser differences, something that we have been saying to anyone and everyone whose ear we could get, with who we are in touch, and that means a great many of them.

Q Mr. Secretary, some observers in Viet-Nam have expressed the view that Premier Ky's action may lead to a civil war of the kind that could jeopardize the entire American presence in Viet-Nam. Do you read it that way?

A I do not see that prospect at the present time. There are considerable elements there who have not been in favor of the attitude expressed by Tri Quang, for example. When the Buddhist Institute called for a big rally -- when was it -- yesterday, I think they had something like a thousand people there, out of a city of two-and-a-half million.

The principal geographical area which is in control of the so-called resistance forces is now the town of Hue, which is the extreme northern part of the country.

The back country around Hue is not apparently in the same mood as the people inside the town.

So I would not expect that this would lead to civil war. There could be civil strife of one sort or another. But we do not see the sides being drawn for a major conflict among the South Vietnamese around the country.

Q Mr. Secretary, are you anticipating in this situation considerable tension at Hue if the central government tries to exert its authority there in terms of what you would call civil strife?

A Well, I would not want to speculate on whether the government might take any action with respect to Hue or what the effect would be were it to do so.

Thus far I am glad to be able to report that the organized units in that area are not battling each other. They are at something of a stand-off. They are not intermingling with each other by force. And we

would hope that these leaders could work these matters out without that kind of strife.

Q Mr. Secretary, would you think that the NATO Council could remain in Paris even after the removal of SACEUR to another place, and did you reach any understanding with Mr. Thomson on the subject?

A Well, it would not be for Mr. Thomson and us to sit down, as a party of two, to resolve a question of that sort. That is a matter being discussed in the NATO Council, and I have no doubt that it will be discussed further at the Ministerial meeting in Brussels in early June. It is possible that it might be resolved then. But I would not want to try to anticipate an answer there. That is a matter on which the governments are consulting now.

Q Mr. Secretary, you are not saying that the United States does not have a position on that question, are you?

A No.

Q What is the United States' position?

A Well, if I had wanted to say that, I would have said it.

Q Mr. Secretary, does the Administration intend to continue in its efforts to placate Mr. Nasser with food, particularly in view of the recent rash of insults and threats from Cairo?

A Well, we have certain requests in front of us at the present time which we are studying against the background of the entire situation. I wouldn't want to anticipate what the final results of that might be. We are concerned about some of the things that have been said there recently and the general state of relationships between ourselves and the UAR Government on matters of great concern to us, such as Viet-Nam and other issues.

Q Mr. Secretary, in view of the seriousness of the Chinese charge last Thursday, how do you read the relative silence from Peiping since that time on the issue of alleged intrusion into Chinese air space?

A Well, I think you will probably see some tickers on that later this afternoon. They are beginning to come in. The Chinese have returned to the charge. The only information that we have is information made available in Saigon the other day.

Q Mr. Secretary, in that same connection, Chou En-lai claimed that the United States has turned down or rejected an offer by him or by China to agree not to strike each other first in a nuclear attack. Would you have any comment on that?

A Well, we are aware of their proposal on that. But we did not--and that proposal has been made by others and it has been made publicly from time to time. But we did not accept the Chinese Communist proposal because we believe that these disarmament measures should be carried out under strict and effective international control, so that all parties can be assured of honoring their obligations. Mere declarations on such matters would not be adequate.

And so we are very much concerned about that, that any measures that involve the prohibition or the control of nuclear weapons should deal with the question of verification and inspection. We have ourselves put forward some very far-reaching proposals about limiting nuclear weapons and freezing and possibly reducing nuclear weapons delivery vehicles. You recall that the first Chinese proposal was made in connection with their own nuclear tests. They had refused to sign the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and they have made certain suggestions

which seem to be an attempt to soften the impact upon world opinion of their gross failure to cooperate in a world-wide effort to limit the further spread of these weapons.

Now, we have suggested that they ought to be associated with a preparatory committee, the so-called exploratory group, which might try to work out arrangements for a world disarmament conference. But we have had no indication from the Chinese that they are willing to do that. They have not responded constructively on those occasions when we ourselves have raised the disarmament question in our bilateral talks. We are prepared to sit down with them, as we have said many times, to talk about disarmament, such problems as the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but we can't take up these great issues of war and peace solely on the basis of unverified declarations which may or may not mean anything.

We have had a fairly recent agreement with Peiping, the Agreement of 1962 on Laos, and we can't find that Peiping has lifted a finger to assure that that agreement is complied with. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that they have encouraged its violation, both in terms of keeping North Vietnamese troops in Laos, contrary

to the agreement, and using Laos as an infiltration route into South Viet-Nam, contrary to the agreements. So we would like to see an organized peace, arrangements which can be reliable in order to get on with these great tasks of disarmament and assuring the safety and the independence of countries large and small.

Q Mr. Secretary, you referred to the Chinese to returning/the charge about the alleged penetration of their border. Is there anything further that can be said? The original United States response essentially amounted to a "No comment". Has investigation revealed anything further?

A I think there was a statement from Saigon on that matter which carried the information available at that time on the basis of debriefing and other types of information. There is nothing to add to what was said the other day from Saigon.

Q Mr. Secretary, before the American troop build-up in Viet-Nam, even officials of the Administration were heard to say that a troop build-up there would be poised on a foundation of quicksand as far as our political stability in the Vietnamese Government is concerned and critics of the Administration have made the

same point since the build-up. Do you feel that these views of events of the past six weeks have been proved correct?

A I don't recall officials talking about quicksand. Of course there have been problems there all along in this direction, but I think the element which holds them together at the end of the day is their common rejection of what Hanoi and the National Liberation Front are trying to do to them. And it would be interesting to see what response will be made to the attempt in the last 24 hours or so of the National Liberation Front to get in on this matter in South Viet-Nam and to try to throw its support to the so-called resistance forces.

I think there will be a number of those who have been opposed to the present government in Saigon who would not welcome this attempt by the National Liberation Front to get in on it, because we have found in our contacts with the leaders of all of these groups that they do have a common interest in seeing to it that the effort of Hanoi to take over the country by force does not succeed. And I think that, certainly our hope is

that element which is very widely shared by all elements in the population, that that common element would cause them to sort these problems out and assure the stability which is very important.

Q Mr. Secretary, in that connection, Senator Fulbright said today before the National Press Club that he did not find it very persuasive to proclaim a desire for a compromised peace while, he says, "we are escalating the war by such acts as bombing the biggest North Vietnamese electrical plant." What do you say to that?

A Well, I think the record on this is to me pretty clear and pretty persuasive. We held off striking the North for four years or so, during which there was increasing infiltration from the North, including elements of the regular forces from North Viet-Nam. The 325th North Vietnamese Division came from North Viet-Nam into South Viet-Nam before we started the bombing of North Viet-Nam.

Since that time, there have been two pauses, so-called, two suspensions of the bombing to provide some exploration of the possibilities for a peaceful settlement. Both those efforts came to nothing, even though

many governments in different parts of the world made a major effort, certainly during the 37-day pause over the turn of this year, to move this matter toward peace.

Now, bombing is going on in the South. We haven't bombed anybody's Embassy in Hanoi, but they have bombed our Embassy in Saigon. Arms continue to flow. Men continue to come. We have tried all over the earth to find an answer to the question, what else would stop if the bombing stopped? What would the other side do? What would their reciprocal action be? Would this be a step toward peace? Or would they simply take advantage of any such effort to build up their infiltration and to step up as much as possible their military effort?

So we are where we were before. We would like to know what else would happen. Now, I think it isn't as easy now to speculate about this as it might have been earlier, because we have had--we have tried it out. We have tried it out on two occasions. So we would like to have some indication from the other side that something else would happen that would move this matter toward peace before we feel that we can stop the bombing in North Viet-Nam.

Q Mr. Secretary, we know it is something of a wrench to talk about NATO when you have a war going on in Viet-Nam. But, given the fact that both NATO and the Warsaw Pact are in a certain degree of disarray 21 years after the end of World War II, do you foresee that the world is moving into a situation where it will be possible in the next year or so to open up the European dialogue between the two sides, and possibly come to some new conclusions, or develop the detente; or, are we totally frozen because of the war in Viet-Nam?

A Well, I think there is no doubt that Viet-Nam contributes to a general atmosphere which makes it somewhat more difficult to explore particular and further points of possible agreement between Eastern Europe and, say, Western Europe and ourselves. I think this is partly true because Peking has been bitterly criticizing and abusing Moscow, and leaving the impression that any effort made by Moscow to talk sense with the West or to reach new points of agreement will be looked upon as a betrayal of Hanoi. But I don't believe myself that we should approach it from that point of view.

I think we should continue to explore, as we have been doing, with representatives of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, what could be done on particular points--whether disarmament, or in trade, or whatever it might be.

Now, we do believe that the possibilities for far-reaching agreements between the NATO countries and the Warsaw Pact countries are greater if there is unity and solidarity in NATO. I myself do not believe that if the Nation States of the West go off and pursue divergent policies and are unable to act together that we can resolve such questions as disarmament, or the German question, or these other great issues between the East and West.

I think that the solidarity of NATO has had a good deal to do with reducing tension in Europe, in reducing the sense of threat from Eastern Europe and making possible such agreements as, say, the nuclear test ban treaty. So I would like to emphasize that I think that the 14 members of NATO in no sense are indifferent to the possibilities of improving the East-West relations. Indeed, solidarity has great advantages

from just that point of view, and we hope to explore that fully in the months to come, despite Viet-Nam.

Yes, sir.

Q Does the recent review at the White House, with Lodge, of the Vietnamese situation, indicate the need for any kind of a change in our policy or action there.

A No. This review, which we were, happily, able to have with Ambassador Lodge this past week, went right through a very long agenda and gave attention to a great many details, as well as to some of the larger questions. I think the greater part of the time was spent on economic and social questions, and how to get on, as effectively as possible, with the conclusions reached at Honolulu. Obviously, we were interested in and concerned about the more recent developments surrounding the differences about the constitutional process in which they are now engaged.

But I did not, before he came, anticipate the need for major changes in policy, nor did those emerge in the course of our discussions. It was a broad review of a great many things, with heavy emphasis on the civilian side.

Q Mr. Secretary, a large number of members of Congress are reporting that no matter how understandable it may be--the turmoil in Viet-Nam, from your point of view--that the American people are getting somewhat restive about the idea of shedding American blood on behalf of people who, for one reason or another, good or bad, don't seem to be able to settle their own quarrels.

I wonder if you could tell us how, and in what way, you are conveying this idea to all the factions in South Viet-Nam?

A Well, I think it should be obvious to our friends in South Viet-Nam that there is a restiveness here. And when the American people are called upon to make a major effort to support the independence, the safety, of a country like South Viet-Nam, that their own attitude, their own solidarity, their own effort are crucial elements in the combined determination. That is being conveyed to them. As a matter of fact, they can read it for themselves. But that is being conveyed to them, and is a part of our effort to emphasize to them that it is very important that they get on with this constitutional process

and set aside some of these issues that appear to be secondary to the issue of achieving a safe country, about which they can perhaps quarrel at their leisure later on.

Q Mr. Secretary?

A Yes.

Q Could you amplify a little bit the reasons for Mr. Lodge's visit to Seoul on his way back to Saigon? Is that an alliance that needs some firming up, or would you--

A No. As you know, Korea has a very large number of troops in South Viet-Nam, and are in the process of sending more. We felt that it was desirable for him to stop by there briefly on his way back in order to bring them up to date on what has been happening in South Viet-Nam, and in order to give them a chance to go into any questions they might wish to raise.

This is a matter, it seems to me, of a perfectly normal consultation between ourselves and Korea, given the fact that we are sharing the burdens there both on the military side and in other respects in Asia.

Q Thank you.