

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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OPENING STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DEAN RUSK
SECRETARY OF STATE
BEFORE THE TWELFTH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
OF THE
SOUTHEAST ASIA TREATY ORGANIZATION
TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 1967, 10:30 A.M., E.S.T.

This Alliance was formed nearly 13 years ago to defend peace and security in a very important area of the world. It so happened that the first international conference which I attended as Secretary of State was the meeting of the SEATO Ministerial Council in Bangkok in 1961. All of us were then deeply concerned with the threats to both Laos and South Viet-Nam. With your permission, I shall recall certain remarks I made at the opening of that meeting.

"The hard fact is that this particular meeting finds the treaty area in a situation full of danger for the future of its nations and peoples -- a possibility clearly envisaged at the time of the founding of the treaty.

"... The people of this treaty area, no less than elsewhere, have inherent rights to create peaceful, independent states and to live out their lives in ways of their own choosing ...

"... We cannot hope for peace for ourselves if insatiable appetite is unrestrained elsewhere ... If we are determined, as we are, to support our commitments under SEATO, it is because peace is possible only through restraining those who break it in contempt of law."

"We believe, and we feel confident that our views are shared by the other members of this Organization, that it is our obligation to assist the peoples of Southeast Asia in their fight for their freedom, both because of our responsibilities in connection with the formation of these states and because of the duties undertaken in the formation of the SEATO organization.

"Speaking for my country, I wish to assure the members of this Organization and the people of Southeast Asia that the United States will live up to these responsibilities ..."

In its 1961 communique the SEATO Council endorsed the efforts, then just begun, for a cease-fire and peaceful settlement in Laos but said also:

"If those efforts fail, however, and there continues to be an active military attempt to obtain control of Laos, members of SEATO are prepared, within the terms of the treaty, to take whatever action may be appropriate in the circumstances."

With regard to Viet-Nam, the 1961 communique said:

"The Council noted with concern the efforts of an armed minority, again supported from outside in violation of the Geneva Accords, to destroy the Government of South Viet-Nam, and declared its firm resolve not to acquiesce in any such takeover of that country."

Agreements on the independence and neutrality of Laos under a government of National Union were achieved. But, as we all know, the Communist North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao never did what they promised to do. In violation of the Geneva Agreement of 1962, North Viet-Nam never withdrew all its troops from Laos and has continued to use Laos territory to infiltrate arms and men into South Viet-Nam. The International Control Commission has been denied facilities for investigating violations of the Geneva Agreement in Communist-held territory. And the Government of Laos has not been able to exercise its authority in those same areas. The Council expressed its increasing concern with these violations in its communique in 1964, 1965, and 1966.

The members of this Alliance represented here understood from the beginning that the conflict in South Viet-Nam was not just a "civil war." I have already quoted the Council's 1961 communique on the element of outside support.

In 1964, the Council described the assault on the Republic of Viet-Nam as a "Communist aggression" and as an "organized campaign ... directed, supplied, and supported by the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam ..."

In 1965 and 1966, the Council called attention to the enlarging scale of the aggression from the North -- the increasing infiltrations of armed and combat personnel, including "members" and, later, "many units" of the regular armed forces of North Viet-Nam.

There are still people in the world who prefer to shut their eyes and ears to the realities. The governments represented here know, as they said in 1966, that North Viet-Nam is engaged in a "continuing armed attack" against the Republic of Viet-Nam "in contravention of the basic obligations of international law and in flagrant violation of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962."

And the Council has recorded some fundamental convictions about security and peace:

"... that the elimination of aggression is essential to the establishment and maintenance of a reliable peace..."

and that "efforts to meet the Communist challenge" in the Treaty area "must not fail."

In 1965 and 1966 the Council expressed concern with the continuing "serious threat of subversion to the Asian member countries" -- to Thailand, in particular. The members of the Council have reiterated "their determination to do whatever is necessary to assist their ally to eliminate this threat."

While the Council has made clear the determination of its members to meet their commitments to repel aggression, either overt or indirect, it has made equally clear that the goal of this Alliance is peace.

Last year, after taking cognizance of the efforts of many governments and individuals to initiate negotiations looking toward peace in Viet-Nam, it expressed the "common resolve" of its members "to do everything in their power to promote the peaceful settlement of the conflict." Since then there have been many further efforts to get peace talks started. My government has made clear that we are willing to try any promising path to peace. We are prepared to talk about a final settlement -- and then work out the steps by which it might be reached. We are prepared to take steps to de-escalate the conflict, whenever we are assured that the North will take appropriate corresponding steps.
But every

But every effort we and others have made to talk peace has met a curt refusal by Hanoi.

There is much evidence that Hanoi is sustained by the hope that dissenting opinion, here or abroad, will cause the United States to abandon, or weaken, its support of South Viet-Nam. Any such supposition is a basic miscalculation which prolongs the war, thus adding to the casualties.

I believe that President Johnson expressed the resolve of a large majority of the American people when he said:

"We will not be defeated.

"We will not grow tired.

"We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of meaningless agreement."

And that, I believe, is the resolve of all who are helping South Viet-Nam to repel this aggression. At the same time, we shall continue unceasingly the search for a peaceful settlement. Eventually Hanoi must realize that it will not be permitted to conquer South Viet-Nam.

Let me say a word about the wider significance of SEATO. We all recognize that security is only the foundation on which nations seek to build better lives for their citizens. The Council has repeatedly expressed the dedication of this Alliance to economic development and social progress. It has applauded the commitment of the Government of South Viet-Nam "to the work of social revolution and to the goal of free self government." It has also "welcomed steps toward increased regional cooperation in political, economic and cultural matters." I am sure that all of us will continue to act in every possible constructive way toward the great objectives of political stability and economic and social progress in conditions of peace.

And

And I believe that we see, all of us, solid grounds for confidence in the future of Southeast Asia -- indeed of the free nations of East Asia and the Western Pacific generally. Many individual nations have made dramatic economic progress. New regional organizations have come into being that carry with them tremendous promise.

Moreover, last August, agreements were reached to bring to an end the sterile confrontation between Indonesia and its neighbors in Malaysia and Singapore. The present government in Indonesia is dedicated to promoting the welfare of its citizens, and to living at peace with its neighbors.

All of these developments are essentially due to the good sense and creative spirit of the peoples and governments of East and Southeast Asia. Yet I think it is fair to relate them in some degree to a growing climate of security and confidence in the area, and to relate that climate in turn to South Viet-Nam's heroic efforts to defend itself, to the efforts of other nations to assist South Viet-Nam, and to the broad contribution that SEATO as a whole has made over a long period of years.

So, even as we continue with the difficult and complex tasks in South Viet-Nam, and with our other efforts to insure security among the members of SEATO, let us look outward to what is happening in all of Asia.

As President Johnson said on returning to the United States from his Pacific tour last fall: "We found people who are determined to be free. We found people who are determined to have a better life for their children and for their families. We found people who are dedicated and determined to stand on their own feet.

"The United States of America has taken its stand in Asia and the Pacific. We are fighting in Viet-Nam to make that stand come true. And we are going to be successful."

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