

Talent for Survival

Rusk Simplifies the Complex

By Chalmers M. Roberts

DEAN RUSK demonstrated yesterday some of the reasons why he has survived five years as Secretary of State despite the derision of his critics.

He came into a press conference on live television with a simple thought in mind: to hang on.



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of the dirty war in Vietnam on the Communist leaders in Hanoi. To do this, he reduced the whole vastly complex problem to a single sentence, simple enough for even the most otherwise preoccupied TV listener to grasp:

"The question posed to the other side—are you interested in peace?"

THAT, OF COURSE, is not strictly speaking the issue at all. Certainly the Communists are interested in peace on their terms. A good case, too, can be made that the United States likewise is interested in peace only on its own terms.

The terms of peace almost always reflect the conditions of war; the question posed today is how to establish that relationship and whether one side or both sides are ready to do so. That is why the details of Hanoi's four points and Washington's 14 points are so important.

But Rusk stuck to the simple theme, played it over and over, refused to be drawn into any of the details which would be a muddle the oversimplification.

The Rusk theme coupled neatly with the President's own earlier line that "we will push on every door for peace." Together they have not visibly moved Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues in Hanoi. But the evidence is that the peace offensive has considerably countered the international picture of

Uncle Sam acting the bully or worse half a world from home.

THIS WAS not the first time Rusk had tried to simplify the complex in this war. Over and over in past

years he used to say that all that was necessary to end the conflict was for Hanoi to "leave its neighbors alone" or for "the aggressors to stop doing what they are doing." The new theme line is even better, in terms of international public relations, because it is even simpler.

Yesterday his comments were spiced with such phrases as "the simple issue," the "heart of the matter" and "the central point"—whether Hanoi wants peace. And when he was asked if the United States had offered Hanoi any clarification of its 14 points, Rusk turned the question around: "If they want clarification, they know how to get it. Why are they afraid to come to the table? Why are they afraid to engage in discussions? Why?"

PERSISTENCE, although sometimes plodding, has always been a Rusk characteristic. The Secretary has often noted that the Communists hammer away for what seems ages at a single theme before altering policies that are unproductive. If they can show patience and perseverance, why cannot the United States do so too? Rusk does.

Because he is now beginning his fifth year in office, Rusk was asked yesterday to philosophize a bit. He took the optimistic line: "Despite the present difficulties and the present clouds on the horizon, the world is moving steadily toward peace." Why? Because the Communists have learned the dangers of both a

nuclear war or of major conventional wars.

The remaining problem, he indicated, is to convince them that their "years of national liberation," as in Vietnam, cannot pay off either.

"That is why," he added, "this situation in Southeast Asia is so very important."

President Johnson once said Rusk was his man for peace and Robert S. McNamara his man for war. Dean Rusk at times of late has appeared to be desperately trying not to forfeit his role in favor of McNamara's. He was at his best in that endeavor yesterday.