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MEET THE PRESS

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MEET THE PRESS

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Produced by LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

Guest:
GEORGE W. BALL
The Under Secretary of State

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Panel
PHILIP GEYELIN, *Wall Street Journal*
JOSEPH C. HARSCH, *NBC News*
PETER LISAGOR, *Chicago Daily News*
CHALMERS ROBERTS, *The Washington Post*

Moderator LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

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MEET THE PRESS

MR. SPIVAK: Our guest today on MEET THE PRESS is the Under Secretary of State, George W. Ball. He has held his position, the second in command at the State Department, since 1961. Today, in the absence from the country of Secretary Rusk, he is the Acting Secretary of State.

We will have the first questions now from Joseph C. Harsch of the NBC News.

MR. HARSCH: Mr. Secretary, a week ago Saturday the President said, "We must continue to raise the cost of aggression at its source."

Would it be a reasonable interpretation that this was intended as a warning to Hanoi that it must, and promptly, show some serious interest in peace or we will attempt by heavier bombing to force them towards peace?

MR. BALL: We have made very clear, I think, quite consistently that we will maintain pressure on Hanoi as a part of the general strategy for securing independence for the South Vietnamese, and I would hope that the leaders in Hanoi will understand this message, but I wouldn't necessarily interpret it in the manner in which you have.

MR. HARSCH: Not as an ultimatum?

MR. BALL: No, it is not an ultimatum. What we have tried to do with Hanoi from the beginning is to make clear to them that the game wasn't worth the candle, that they could not conduct this kind of aggression against their neighbor without, at the long end of the road, suffering very severe consequences.

MR. HARSCH: There are conflicting reports on the current attitude of Hanoi. Some say that Canadian Ambassador Chester Romning did find some interest in peace when he was in Hanoi.

Others say that he found none at all. Which type of report should we believe?

MR. BALL: There was nothing in what Ambassador Ronning brought back which gave any encouragement that Hanoi was prepared to come to a conference table. In fact, the line that they have been taking seems to us to be quite as hard as it has been at any time, and you will notice that Hanoi itself has made this clear in the last few days.

MR. HARSCH: We have been bombing for over a year and a half. Is there any evidence at all that that bombing has had the effect of pushing the enemy towards peace, or hasn't it actually worked the other way, of stiffening their will to war?

MR. BALL: I think that has achieved a number of results. It has greatly increased the cost of infiltrating men and material into the South. I think that it has had a very real effect on the morale of the fighting forces of the Viet Cong in the South.

MR. HARSCH: Hasn't it raised the morale of the civilians in North Vietnam?

MR. BALL: I don't think at all, based on the reports that we have had, that this has been the case. I think that there is a growing apprehension in North Vietnam that this is going to be a very costly business for them.

MR. LISAGOR: Mr. Ball, we have heard a great deal in recent days about the political disarray in Communist China. There seems to be some sort of a struggle among the leadership there, and I wonder if in your view North Vietnam is in a better or a worse position to negotiate in view of this situation in Peking?

MR. BALL: I think it is very hard to tell. There are two main causes, I suppose, for what is going on within Communist China. One is an act of self-criticism on the part of the Chinese Party and the regime, quite severely criticizing the government for some of the great failures which they have had both internally and externally. In addition to that there is a power struggle going on. How that will come out will answer the question you have posed to me.

MR. LISAGOR: Have we any clue as to whether the war in Vietnam is a factor in the Chinese struggle?

MR. BALL: I think certainly the question of supporting other regimes in belligerent acts is an element, but again how this is going to come out, whether the hard-liners will prevail, whether there will be a more liberal element that will emerge is something we can't tell at this point.

MR. LISAGOR: At the same time this is going on, the Russians have been complaining about the United States government insistence that its role in Vietnam is somehow limited, that it is not doing all that it can, and they claim we are in the war up to the hilt.

Can you explain why the Russians are going through this exercise at this time?

MR. BALL: First let me say what we have done in Vietnam, both in the North and in the South, has been marked by a very considerable restraint, because we have limited what we have done to our own rather limited objectives there of securing peace for the South Vietnamese. Why the Russians are using this in the manner they are in their own propaganda, I think, is something that is for them to answer.

MR. LISAGOR: Mr. Ball, some Congressmen have been saying that the Russians are doing far more in North Vietnam than the American people realize. Can you define with any precision just how deeply involved they are?

MR. BALL: They have been providing military equipment. A great part of it I may say has been defensive military equipment. They have also been assisting in economic supplies for the conduct of the war by the North Vietnamese people as well as for the maintenance of the North Vietnamese economy. But I think we know with considerable precision, or at least within a very limited area of question, how much they have been doing and what they have been doing.

MR. GEYELIN: Mr. Secretary, you have been described on several recent occasions as a sort of devil's advocate to the Johnson court by appointment to his Majesty, you might say, and recently Marquis Childs wrote in his column, "It has been no secret in Washington that for at least three years Mr. Ball has consistently opposed in the private councils of government the escalation of the war." Is that true?

MR. BALL: One of the gratifying aspects of service in the Johnson Administration is the fact that the President insists on hearing every side of every question. We make decisions by a kind of adversary procedure in which matters are argued out and argued out in great detail. I have played a part in this, and have played a part very often at the request of the President, who has asked me to take one side or another or even to argue each side in turn of a particular question. I think this is an essential role to assist the President in making the terribly difficult decisions he has to make. I think it has been a useful one.

MR. GEYELIN: In our system isn't this a good rule for the public then? Isn't what is good for President Johnson good for the people? Shouldn't there be a public debate on this as well as a private one?

MR. BALL: We have been gratified by the public debate on this question. We have never suggested for a moment that it wasn't a perfectly normal and healthy attribute of democracy that these things are argued out in public and at length.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Secretary, can you tell us whether the United States has been bombing the dikes and dams of the North Vietnamese irrigation system as the government in Hanoi says we have been doing?

MR. BALL: It has not; it has not.

MR. ROBERTS: Has this perhaps been only incidental, this kind of thing, to other bombing targets in the north?

MR. BALL: There has been no attack on the irrigation system of North Vietnam as a target. There may occasionally have been a dam hit in connection with some other target which we were bombing as a military target for quite a different purpose, but there has been no attack at the irrigation system.

MR. ROBERTS: As to where the war is going at this point, there appears to be a considerable mood of optimism coming out of Saigon. Ambassador Lodge is beginning to sound more optimistic; the Foreign Minister of Thailand is talking about the war being wrapped up in 18 months or two years. Do you share this? Is this the Washington view?

MR. BALL: There are reasons to be gratified at the demonstration that American power, as an ancillary to what the South Vietnamese are doing, can be very effective and has been very effective in wearing down the belligerence and the aggression of the other side, and I think that we have quite a good deal of evidence upon which to base a hopeful prognosis. This doesn't mean the war is going to be over quickly.

MR. ROBERTS: Are you any more hopeful now than you were some months back, or is it more or less the same thing we have been saying for months?

MR. BALL: I think anyone who has watched the war carefully must be gratified and pleased and more encouraged by what has occurred on the military side.

MR. ROBERTS: But I can't get you to say you are more hopeful?

MR. BALL: I would say that the military side has gone rather better than I thought it would.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Secretary, may I ask you a question? It wasn't clear to me from your answer to Mr. Geyelin whether you favor the escalation of the war in Vietnam. Is it fair to interpret that you do not favor or that you do favor escalation of the war?

MR. BALL: What do we mean exactly by "escalation," Mr. Spivak?

MR. SPIVAK: Bombing Haiphong, for example.

MR. BALL: There is no decision on the part of the United States Government to bomb Haiphong or to bomb the POL installations in Haiphong-Hanoi. This is not a matter which I would normally discuss, but I will say I will deviate from the practice about not talking about operational matters because of the amount of discussion there has been in the press on this subject.

MR. HARSCH: Mr. Secretary, back in the days of President Kennedy, we used to hear a great deal about the so-called "grand design," which was sometimes referred to as the George Ball Plan. As I understood it at the time, it called for a closer union

of Western Europe, which would then become the equal partner of the United States. We are not hearing much about the grand design any more. Isn't it true that whatever General de Gaulle has done for better or for worse, he has made the grand design of the Kennedy period look like rather an antique heirloom, which has been replaced by a new de Gaulle order which, instead of twinning the United States with Western Europe, looks like it might twin Russia with Western Europe?

MR. BALL: No, I can't agree at all that there has been—that this policy has been rendered obsolete by events. It seems to me that it still remains the objective which we must work for and for which Western Europe must work, and I think there is great vitality in the movement in Western Europe toward a greater unity. I think they look at their history and see what has happened over the years as a result of national rivalries, the terrible catastrophes that have occurred, and I think that there is a great sentiment in Europe toward a greater unity. And a greater unity in Europe combined with an effective working partnership with the United States is, I think, the best hope for peace and the best hope for a stable world.

MR. HARSCH: Is it not true that the old grand design assumed the permanence of the Iron Curtain, whereas the new de Gaulle one assumes the impermanence?

MR. BALL: Not at all, not at all. What was contemplated and what is contemplated in the concept of a united Europe working in equal partnership with the United States is the gradual erosion of the Iron Curtain, the expansion of Europe, the incorporation of other peoples within a united Europe—and Europe coming to peace with itself, the West and the East, on a basis which will insure stability and will insure equality.

MR. LISAGOR: Mr. Secretary, in answer to Mr. Spivak's question a moment ago when you said there has been no decision to bomb Haiphong Harbor or these petroleum and oil dumps near there, you weren't foreclosing the possibility that such a decision might be taken?

MR. BALL: I was not, no, not at all.

MR. LISAGOR: Now, to go back to Europe for a moment—MR. BALL: Let me say that what we have been doing is bombing military targets. We will continue to bomb military targets as it becomes necessary.

MR. LISAGOR: During the current Senate hearings, one of the constant themes that was reiterated was that West Germany should now take a more mature lead in the affairs of Western Europe and in reaching toward Eastern Europe.

I'd like to ask you two questions about that: One, whether you agree that it is now time for West Germany to take that lead and, two, whether you would agree with Defense Secretary McNamara that there are many legitimate pressures for the United States now to begin to reduce some of its forces in Germany?

MR. BALL: First, so far as West Germany is concerned, it has been playing a very important role in Europe. It has been playing a very important role in the uniting of Europe, the creation of the European communities. It has been doing what it could slowly to increase the relationships between East and West that might lay the basis for an ultimate reunification, but this is a slow process.

On the second question that you asked with regard to the maintenance of American Forces in Europe, Secretary McNamara has made clear, as the President and Secretary Rusk have repeated, that we shall keep our forces in Western Europe as long as they are wanted and needed.

MR. LISAGOR: But if there are legitimate pressures for reducing them, why don't we reduce them?

MR. BALL: I repeat that we will keep them there as long as they are needed and wanted. This is a military judgment and a political judgment.

MR. LISAGOR: But I am not talking about withdrawing them, Mr. Ball; I am simply talking about reducing them so as to improve our balance of payments situation and all of the other reasons which Mr. McNamara gave for our reducing them.

MR. BALL: Our first objective is necessarily to maintain an effective defense of the West. This defense of the West is to some extent determined by the forces that are posed against the West. On the Eastern, the Soviet side, there are still very substantial forces posed against the West. To the extent that those forces may be reduced, then some decision can over time be taken in NATO, which might look toward a reduction of western forces, but we have to be very careful when we talk about equilibrium in these matters because there is a great difference between pulling forces a few miles back from East Germany, say, into the Soviet Union, and pulling them back across an ocean.

MR. GEYELIN: Mr. Secretary, there were a lot of dire warnings before President de Gaulle went to Moscow on his current trip, and it seems that actually he hasn't done a great deal which would hurt the Western Alliance or done a great deal to create any new realignment.

Leaving aside the physical damage he has done to NATO as a military instrument and an organization, aren't de Gaulle and President Johnson on the same wave length on the basic objective in Europe as a whole?

MR. BALL: I think first so far as President de Gaulle's trip is concerned, it is still in progress. There has been no final communique. I think until the trip is over it will be very difficult to make a proper assessment of it, so I'd prefer not to comment on the trip, because we really don't know the full extent of what General de Gaulle may have succeeded in accomplishing during his visit there.

I think certainly so far as President Johnson and President

de Gaulle are concerned, they are both determined to maintain peace in the world. I think there may be some differences, however, and important differences, in their concept of the most effective way to go about this.

MR. GEYELIN: Do you think it would be useful for them to meet fairly soon?

MR. BALL: Oh, I think it is always helpful to have contacts at the top levels between the chiefs of government and of state, of major powers, and I am sure this will take place, but let's not forget there is constant communication between ourselves and the French Government. There is no failure of communication here.

MR. GEYELIN: Even so, a meeting between the two, you think, would be helpful?

MR. BALL: I think that each has repeatedly said that it would be helpful at some point.

MR. GEYELIN: Do you see it coming on any particular date?

MR. BALL: No specific plan for it.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Secretary, could I put the question that that Mr. Lisagor asked you about troops in substantially the way it was put to Secretary McNamara in the Senate? He was asked, as I recall, if the Soviet Union took some of its 20 divisions out of East Germany, would the United States be prepared to lessen its presence in Europe?

MR. BALL: I thought I had answered that question. What I said was that obviously the western defense takes into account the force that is posed against it, and if there were a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, then this would be a matter for NATO to take a hard look at and determine the extent to which there might be some readjustments of the forces on the Western side.

MR. ROBERTS: When you look down the long road—as you must in the State Department—about the problem of Europe, can you conceive of Germany being reunified by some scheme—perhaps a confederation at some point—in such a way that we would be willing to accept Germany leaving NATO, and, of course, not being in the Warsaw Pact either?

MR. BALL: I don't think it is very useful to speculate on possibilities which have no present possibility of realization. I think that Germany will ultimately be reunified. I think it is essential to the long-range stability of the West that this occur. The exact form it will take is something which I think is premature to speculate on.

MR. ROBERTS: You are saying then that the American reading of Soviet policy is that it is frozen, there is no movement, no sign of, no sign of—

MR. BALL: I see very little movement on the Soviet side, Mr. Roberts. I see no reason for thinking the Soviet Union is any more willing to contemplate reunification than it was, but I do

think that over time the establishment of more effective relations between East and West quietly in a variety of ways, and in hundreds of different ways, can have an effect on the total situation.

MR. ROBERTS: That would be the limit of western initiative at this point in your view?

MR. BALL: That particular initiative takes many forms. We ourselves are trying to improve our relations with the Soviet Union. This is the meaning of the East-West Trade Bill, for example, of the Consular Convention, of many things which are presently pending.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Secretary, General de Gaulle seems convinced that there is no danger of an East-West war in Europe now. Are you convinced of that?

MR. BALL: I don't see the prospects of an immediate East-West war, but I think that when we appraise what the dangers may be to the West, we have to remember that it was only three and a half years ago we were faced with a missile crisis. It was only five years ago that we were faced with the conflict over Berlin, the Berlin crisis, and I wouldn't rule out at all the possibility that we can get another moment of great tension where the prospects of war might be real. I certainly hope this won't occur, but I don't think that a prudent government rules out this possibility.

MR. SPIVAK: France is going to withdraw her troops in the next few days. How seriously does that weaken NATO?

MR. BALL: Certainly NATO has been weakened by the decisions of the French government with regard to her participation in NATO.

MR. HARSCH: To go back to what you were discussing with Mr. Roberts a moment ago, the matter of reciprocal troop withdrawals, is it not a fact that we have substantially drawn down the numbers of our troops in Germany—not in terms of units, but in terms of manpower in units, so that if there were to be any reciprocity, we would look to the Russians now to take some troops out, rather than talk in terms of what we might do if they did so?

MR. BALL: We haven't substantially drawn down our troops in Germany, Mr. Harsch. There have been some redeployments. There have been some transfers. This is perfectly normal. There has been no weakening of the fighting power of the American forces in Germany. Certainly as I said a moment ago, we intend to maintain our troops there as long as they are needed, and as long as they are needed will of course depend to some extent on what the forces are that are posed against them.

MR. LISAGOR: Mr. Ball, I'd like to ask you a somewhat personal question. Now that you are going to be leaving the Administration soon, do you think it is tired (a), and (b), do you think officials such as yourself and perhaps some of the other Cabinet

heads might usefully go on to other pastures after five or six years in these very hard jobs?

MR. BALL: First of all [as to] whether the Administration is tired, I would say the Administration is not at all tired. As for myself being tired, I am certainly not tired in such stimulating company as I find myself in at the moment.

MR. SPIVAK: Why then are you leaving, Mr. Ball?

MR. BALL: I have personal reasons why. After five and a half years I must return to private life at some point. I have no specific plans or a specific date for leaving, but I do expect to go back to private life at some point in the future.

MR. SPIVAK: We have less than two minutes.

MR. GEYELIN: Mr. Secretary, if we can't quite consign you to the rank of elder statesman, you have been in office now for five years, and you are older and presumably wiser in the ways of foreign policy-making.

What would you say if you had to very quickly sum up the striking gains or losses over that five-year period?

MR. BALL: There have been very many gains. The Alliance for Progress and the improvement in the total situation in Latin America. The partial, limited Test Ban Treaty, which has marked an approach to the solution of a very difficult and intractable problem. The improvement in the relations between East and West, which stem, I think, from the firmness that was shown in the Berlin crisis and later in the Cuban missile crisis. The efforts that we have made with considerable success to improve the standard of living of peoples around the world, and the fact that some of these great countries are now moving toward positions of self-sufficiency. These are major gains.

If you ask me for disappointments, there have been a few. I think that one of the principal disappointments has been the continued belligerence of the Asian Communist leaders, which has been responsible for bringing about such difficulties as the war in South Vietnam. And another I would say has been the failure of Europe to move toward an expansion of the communities and of greater unity which stem from the decisions in January of 1963.

MR. ROBERTS: Mr. Secretary, on Vietnam, does what you have said come down to this, that the only way to end this war, given the attitude in Hanoi, is to just pour it on and pour on in a military manner?

MR. BALL: I think that the military efforts are part of the solution. At the same time we must assist the Vietnamese people in moving toward the establishment of a solid political base. They are in process of doing it, and they must improve it to improve their economic situation.

MR. SPIVAK: I am sorry to interrupt, but our time is up. Thank you, Secretary Ball, for being with us today on MEET THE PRESS.