

Rusk Plays Down Cuba In British TV Interview

Secretary of State Dean Rusk said yesterday that the dispute between Britain and the United States over Cuban trade is "tactical and minor in character." He added that the two countries are working closely together on "many questions all over the world."

Rusk appeared to rule out any "tit-for-tat" bargaining between Washington and London respecting U.S. support for British interests in the Middle East in return for British support on Cuba.

He added, however, that the United States has "a strong interest in the British and the Western position in the Persian Gulf and access to the resources of that area." The statement was made in an interview recorded for broadcast on British television.

Under questioning, Rusk consistently sought to play down the Cuban trade issue as a source of major disagreement, although it is known that the Johnson Administration has been pressing London for months to support the U.S. policy of economic boycott.

"On the Cuban question," Rusk said, "I think our approach differs primarily in this respect—that to you, this, broadly speaking, looks like a question of trade policy. To us, this is a problem of a security threat to the Western Hemisphere."

An interviewer said that some Britons ask why they should back the United States on Cuba when the United States doesn't support Britain in its dispute with President Nasser of the United Arab Republic. The British are involved in a struggle in defense of the Aden Protectorate on the Arabian peninsula, in which Nasser is backing Yemen.

Rusk said such a view is based on a misunderstanding of the "degree of difference" on both the Aden and Yemen

questions. Britain, he added, has "an important interest" in Western Hemisphere security.

"Now there may be differences," he said, "rather tactical and minor in character, about when and under what conditions particular efforts should be made. . . ."

"But in any event, bear in mind that Britain and the United States are involved with each other in dozens of questions right around the globe. In most of them we are working very closely together."

At another point Rusk said he does not think the Cuban issue "is a large question as between ourselves and Britain."

Rusk is in Europe now for a meeting of NATO foreign ministers. One of his major objectives is understood to be to make a new effort to get the British to lower their level of trade with Cuba.

The Sunday Times said in London that the British government is having second thoughts about trading with Cuba and that some concessions might be made to ease U.S. animosity on the issue. The Cabinet may review the whole matter of Cuban trade and perhaps establish a ceiling on credits advanced to the Fidel Castro regime, the newspaper said.

Foreign Secretary Richard A. Butler is expected to discuss the Cuban trade problem along these lines when he meets with Rusk at The Hague, the newspaper said.