THE CENTRAL ISSUE IN VIET-NAM

SECRETARY RUSK DISCUSSES U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN ASIA

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
“...sometimes it gets tough; and sometimes we are tested and we find out what kind of people we are.”

Dean Rusk
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This pamphlet is the transcript of those portions of a news conference by Secretary of State Dean Rusk on October 12, 1967, relating to Viet-Nam. The entire text will appear in the Department of State Bulletin of October 30.
OPENING STATEMENT

I should like to begin with a brief comment on the current public discussion of Viet-Nam.

I find no significant body of American opinion which would have us withdraw from Viet-Nam and abandon Southeast Asia to the fate which Asian communism has planned for it. Similarly, I find no serious opinion among us which wishes to transform this struggle into a general war.

We Americans are therefore debating variations on a theme—but the theme is a central position resting upon: (a) the need to meet our commitments and defend our vital national interests; (b) the pursuit of our limited objectives by limited means; and (c) our earnest desire to bring this conflict to a peaceful conclusion as soon as possible. Hanoi particularly should not misunderstand the character of this debate.

Our commitment is clear, and our national interest is real. The SEATO treaty, approved by only one dissenting vote by our Senate, declares that “Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area . . . would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger . . .” The treaty says “each party” will act. The fidelity of the United States is not subject to the veto of some other signatory—and five signatories have engaged their forces alongside Korean and South Vietnamese troops. Indeed, the proportion of non-U.S. forces in South Viet-Nam is greater than non-U.S. forces in Korea.

In August 1964 the Congress by joint resolution declared, with only two dissenting votes, that “The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.” This was not a new idea in 1964. It was the basis for the SEATO treaty a decade earlier. It is no less valid in 1967. Our several alliances in the Pacific reflect our profound interest in peace in the Pacific and in Asia, where two-thirds of the world’s people live, no less vital to us as a nation than is peace in our own hemisphere or in the NATO area.

I have heard the word “credibility” injected into our domestic debate. Let me say, as solemnly as I can, that those who would place in question the credibility of the pledged word of the United States under our mutual security treaties would subject this nation to mortal danger. If any who would be our adversary should suppose that our treaties are a bluff, or will be abandoned if the going gets tough, the result could be catastrophe for all mankind.

It is not easy for our people to wage a struggle by limited means for limited objectives. We Americans are an impatient people, a quality which has helped to build a great nation. The present impatience about Viet-Nam is thoroughly understandable and is shared by those who carry official responsibility. But our overriding object is—and must be in this modern world—the establishment of a reliable peace. It is easy to rush into total catastrophe. It requires courage and determination to act with both firmness and restraint in the interest of peace.

An examination of all the crises in which we have been involved since 1945 will show, I think, the supremacy of the objective of a reliable peace.

President Johnson has emphasized time and time again his interest in a prompt and peaceful settlement of the present struggles in Southeast Asia. Just 2 weeks ago, in San Antonio, he said:

The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Viet-Nam when this will

1 For text of the treaty, see BULLETIN of Sept. 20, 1954, p. 398.


3 For President Johnson's address at San Antonio, Tex., on Sept. 29, see ibid., Oct. 23, 1967, p. 519.
lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Viet-Nam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.

Can there be a more reasonable proposal? Is there anything unfair about such a simple proposition? Is it not clear that if Hanoi is interested in peace it could say “Yes,” publicly or privately, to the President’s offer?

A rejection, or a refusal even to discuss such a formula for peace, requires that we face some sober conclusions. It would mean that Hanoi has not abandoned its effort to seize South Viet-Nam by force. It would give reality and credibility to captured documents which describe a “fight and negotiate” strategy by Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese forces. It would reflect a view in Hanoi that they can gamble upon the character of the American people and of our allies in the Pacific.

Earlier I referred to variations on a theme. The debate in which we are now involved is essentially a debate about detail—this or that military move, this or that diplomatic step, this or that formulation of what is in fact a common middle position. If that be true, precision is important. People at least should make it clear whether they are arguing with Washington or with Hanoi.

When people talk about a pause in the bombing, they should know that Hanoi calls a pause an “ultimatum.” When a Senator says that he wants to stop the bombing but of course wishes to continue to bomb in support of our Marines south of the DMZ [demilitarized zone], he should know that Hanoi categorically rejects any such notion. When people say “Negotiate now” they should know that the President would meet with Ho Chi Minh and other chiefs of state concerned tomorrow—and that I would depart today for any mutually convenient spot if I could meet a representative of North Viet-Nam with whom I could discuss peace in Southeast Asia.

Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky have repeatedly offered to meet with the authorities of Hanoi to arrange a cease-fire and a peaceful settlement. They and we both responded affirmatively to U Thant’s proposals of last March. Had there been a similar response from Hanoi, there would have been discussions to arrange a military standstill, preliminary conversations, and a convening of the Geneva conference. Literally dozens of proposals made by ourselves, other governments, or groups of governments have been rejected by Hanoi.

I cannot tell you when peace will come. I am encouraged by progress toward peace in South Viet-Nam, but I cannot name a date. But we shall continue our effort both by resisting those who would impose their solutions by brute force and by an unrelenting exploration of every path which could lead to peace.

I am ready for your questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Mr. Secretary, with regard specifically to President Thieu’s offer, reported offer, to meet with Hanoi and then arrange a week’s pause in bombing if they agreed to talks: (1) Was the United States consulted on this offer first, and did it agree; and (2) do you think such a limited offer has any chance of success?

A. My understanding is that a press officer repeated what President-elect Thieu had said during his campaign, I think in August. And that this was not itself a new development. Of course, we would be very much interested in Hanoi’s response to such a suggestion.

The problem is that dozens and dozens of suggestions have been made to Hanoi through all sorts of channels, with all sorts of formulae, and that Hanoi has categorically rejected all of them.

Now, this is the sort of an idea which is no problem for Washington. What is needed is some response from Hanoi to this or any one of a dozen other ideas with which Hanoi is thoroughly familiar.

Q. Mr. Secretary, some question has arisen in connection with the report from Saigon today as to whether the United States was consulted about President Thieu’s proposed move and how President Thieu can make a bombing offer when he is not doing the bombing.

A. Oh, I think there is no problem between ourselves and the Government of South Viet-Nam on that. We have had at least five substantial cessations of the bombings. Everything turns on what Hanoi’s attitude is. We and the Government of South Viet-Nam keep in close

touch on these matters, but the answer does not come just from Saigon and Washington. The answer must come from Hanoi as well.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you talked in your statement about the importance of precision, and with that in mind, sir, I wonder if you could help us understand whether the United States now still requires a military sign of deescalation from Hanoi in exchange for cessation of the bombing or whether the President's statement about assuming Hanoi will not take advantage of a bombing pause represents a change.

A. Well, I think we ought to be clear that as far as the United States is concerned we would engage in negotiations without any conditions whatever at the earliest possible moment. I have frequently said we will do that today.

Now, the other side has raised a major condition. That condition is a permanent and unconditional cessation of the bombing. And they have also indicated that they will take no corresponding military action on their side but would expect to go ahead with their part of the war with complete intensity, with all of the effort that they can mobilize.

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Now, President Johnson in San Antonio stated an assumption. This is an assumption with respect to the condition imposed by Hanoi. The assumption would be that if we stopped the bombing there would not be military advantage taken by that cessation of the bombing by Hanoi.

Now, Hanoi knows what this means, and we have had not the slightest indication that Hanoi is prepared for those prompt and productive talks to which the President alluded in his San Antonio reference.

South Viet-Nam Moving Ahead

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said you were encouraged about the prospects of peace in Viet-Nam. Why are you encouraged in view of the lack of reaction from Hanoi?

A. Well, there are many things. I know that some reporter in Saigon invented the word "stalemate." Our military authorities do not believe there is a stalemate. Ambassador [Ellsworth] Bunker doesn't believe there is a stalemate. We see defections from the Viet Cong double what they were last year. We see the recruitment of southerners to the Viet Cong dropped by approximately a half. We see desertions from the South Vietnamese forces sharply reduced over last year.

You have heard General Larsen's [Lt. Gen. Stanley Larsen] report on what is happening in the II Corps area, which is half the land area of South Viet-Nam—the opening up of roads, the opening up of railways, the areas under Government control, the sharp reduction of areas under Viet Cong control. There are many indicators that the Government and allied forces are getting on with the job on the military side.

Beyond that, despite all the tongues in cheek, despite all the skepticism, the South Vietnamese have come through with what really ought to be considered almost a miracle in politics.

In the midst of a dirty, tough, mean guerrilla war, they have elected a constituent assembly; they have adopted a Constitution; they have had hamlet and village elections throughout the country; they have elected a President and a Vice President and a Senate; they will shortly elect a lower house of the Legislature—in a situation where the Viet Cong in most areas has said "If you vote you die"—and they are getting on with it.

Now, it is not easy, and we can sit back here comfortably and be skeptical about details, worry about this or that particular point, but the overriding fact is that in the midst of this kind of struggle the South Vietnamese have been moving steadily toward a constitutional system.

Now, these elections were held in areas representing some 75 percent of the population. A very high percentage of those who registered voted—favorably compared with our own elections in this country. The economic situation has been improving. In other words, the Viet Cong have not achieved their objective. The country is moving ahead. And I see no reason for us to be gloomy simply because it is not over yet. We have had our combat forces there for approximately 2 years, and other allies have put forces in there, and the situation is moving.

Now, one can find individual incidents here and there that would throw doubt on it, and the skeptic can always find some basis for his story, but there are at least a thousand stories a day that could be filed from Saigon, many of them of success, many of them reflecting close
cooperation, friendship, and acts of kindness among South Vietnamese and Americans.

When you look at the total situation, it's moving; and I have no reason, myself whatever to subscribe to this notion of a stalemate. It is not a stalemate at all.

Hanoi Refuses To Use Geneva Machinery

Q. Mr. Secretary, what is the motive of the Soviet Government to reject the reconvening of the Geneva conference? Did you explore this with Mr. Gromyko [Andrei A. Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R.] in New York?

A. I find it difficult to get into motives. I would suppose that Hanoi categorically refuses a Geneva conference and therefore the Soviet Union is unwilling to step out in front and join with the British cochairman to convene a conference to which Hanoi and Peking both strenuously object. We ourselves will be very glad to have such a conference convened, about Vietnam, about Laos, about Cambodia, or about any subject related to Southeast Asia.

A Senator the other day in the course of a Senate debate was asked what his alternative was for Viet-Kam, and he said, “Well, I would like to see a Geneva conference.” Well, he is not arguing with Washington. We have tried over and over again to use the Geneva machinery for the purposes for which it was established. We will be glad to see the two cochairmen, say, go to Geneva and put themselves in touch with elements or parties in the dispute. We would be glad to have the three ICC [International Control Commission] countries do the same thing or to make arrangements for the demilitarization of the DMZ or to assure Prince Sihanouk that Cambodia’s neutrality will not be abused.

So there is no problem with us on that. The problem is that Hanoi says “No.”

Q. Mr. Secretary, what do you think of the thesis of turning negotiations upside down and beginning instead between Washington and Hanoi at some lower level within the countries, specifically between the Government of Saigon and the NLF [National Liberation Front] or elements of it?

A. Well, we, as you know, draw no major distinction between what is called the NLF and Hanoi. I think that the United States view is affected by the fact that as far as peace is concerned, our problem is with Hanoi. We did not put our combat forces into South Viet-Nam because of dissident elements in South Viet-Nam. We put our combat forces in there because North Vietnamese forces moved into South Viet-Nam. So that our problem of peace is with Hanoi.

Further than that, we knew from captured documents, testimony of prisoners, and other sources of information that the NLF is directed from Hanoi on a daily basis.

Now, we have no objections to exploring the possibilities of contacts with the NLF, nor do we have any objections to the Government in Saigon doing so. But I would not want to mislead you by thinking that in my judgment that is going to solve the problem of North Vietnamese regiments in South Viet-Nam for the purpose of imposing a solution on that country by force. Hanoi has a major role to play in peace in this situation, and until there is some indication from Hanoi that they are prepared to make peace, then I don’t think that lesser formulae are likely to solve the problem.

Constructive Developments in 1967

Q. Mr. Secretary, on the same day the Russians ratified the Outer Space Treaty and announced their biggest-ever rise in their arms budget. Would you please appraise the relative weight of these two events in U.S.-Soviet relations?

A. Well, as far as the arms budget is concerned, I believe that the defense budget as they announced it is about the same proportion of their new budget as it was in the previous budget. In any event, it indicates some increase. Just what direction that increase will take we have no way of knowing. There was some indication that it related to the need for more military assistance to other countries. And we know that they are increasing their military assistance to North Viet-Nam.

But it is true that we signed the Space Treaty, and I think it is worth pausing to reflect a little on 1967, despite Viet-Nam. It turns out to be a most constructive year. The Kennedy Round negotiations were successfully concluded. The International Monetary Fund took a major step in the field of international liquidity. The Space Treaty was ratified unanimously by our Senate. We concluded the Consular Treaty with the Soviet Union. We and the Soviet Union filed a
joint draft of a nonproliferation treaty in Geneva. The Presidents of the Western Hemisphere decided to go for a Latin American Common Market in this next decade. The Asian Development Bank became a going institution this year. Even though there was a distressing and sharp war in the Middle East, the fighting was ended in 4 days without the intervention of the great powers.

In other words, there have been some very constructive developments this year looking toward a general peace and a general solution of problems despite the pain and the tragedy of Viet-Nam. We should not be negligent of those important developments.

**U.S. View of U.N. Role**

**Q. Mr. Secretary,** in a speech in the Senate yesterday, Senator [J. W.] Fulbright asserted that the United Nations is being deterred from action concerning Viet-Nam more by the failure of the United States to encourage it to act than by the opposition of the Soviet Union. What are your views on that, sir, and what role do you think the United Nations can play?

**A.** Well, I don't have his statement in front of me. I—relying upon the way you stated it—

**Q. Would you like for me to get it verbatim?**

**A.** Would say that it is not true. The United States would be glad to have the United Nations take up this question and deal with it responsibly. We have pending in the Security Council a resolution which the Security Council does not wish to act upon.

I think the general attitude in the United Nations seems to be that since Hanoi and Peking and Moscow are saying that this is not appropriate for the United Nations, that an effort by the United Nations to resolve this problem might get in the way of the use of other machinery, such as the Geneva machinery or quiet bilateral diplomatic exploration.

Now, I have said many times that we ourselves do not share this view, because we believe that the United Nations has a responsibility for general peace and security in the world, and we'd be glad to see them take it up. But on the other hand, there are some problems about going through an exercise of futility, if that is what it appears to be, to satisfy some critics among our own people.

We can't say to you that a resolution will come out of the Security Council, because of the Soviet veto; and the Soviets have made it perfectly clear they will veto.

And we have no reason to think that the General Assembly will address itself to this matter in the same way in which the U.N. is addressing itself to the Middle East. In the case of the Middle East, they have had a long association with these problems. They played the crucial role in establishing the State of Israel. They have had peacekeeping forces out there, and they have had armistice machinery out there; and this matter has been before the United Nations year after year. They have the United Nations machinery for refugees in the area. But this is not the attitude in the United Nations about South Viet-Nam. I think that they are somehow hoping that other means and other procedures will find the key that will unlock this problem, when they are on notice by most of the parties concerned—that the United Nations will not be permitted to find that key and not be permitted by Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow.

**Q. Mr. Secretary—**

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**Q. Mr. Secretary,** may I ask, in view of a widely published report, whether in your non-public appearances around the country you are denouncing the intellectual entu... of the war, including Arthur Schlesinger, and whether as reported you have dismissed Roger Hilsman?

**A.** No; I am not going to comment on third-hand reports on what I was alleged to have said in a private meeting. These things get out of context very quickly.

It is not true that I have any generic attitude toward all those people who call themselves or are called intellectuals.

I've been around them a good deal in my time.

I do recall once in a while—perhaps you will forgive me for this—as friends used to say of Einstein, that he was a genius in mathematical physics, an amateur in music, and a baby in politics.

Now, I think that an idea stands or falls on its own merits and the fact that a man knows everything there is to know about enzymes doesn't mean that he knows very much about Viet-Nam or how to organize a peace or the life and death of nations.
So I have great respect for intellectuals, but I don’t feel that I’m intimidated by them.

[Laughter.]

Q. Mr. Secretary—

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said in your opening statement that essentially we are engaged in a debate about detail. But the record would indicate that there has been increasing defection in the ranks of administration supporters in the Congress. Do you contemplate, sir, a further sequence of public appearances in the Congress to try to clarify, amplify this position?

A. Well, I’m not sure that as far as the Congress is concerned the way to clarify and achieve accord is through public appearances. I myself greatly enjoy serious, responsible, candid consultation with the great committees of Congress in circumstances in which such discourse can take place. I do not think such discourse can take place always in open session. As far as I’m concerned, a public hearing has some of the same problems as does a press conference. There are very few secrets, if Americans can discuss these matters among themselves without the rest of the world listening in. But when our allies and the nonaligned world and the Communists are listening in, there are some inhibitions, at least upon the Secretary of State, because what I say in my official capacity does have repercussions in other places.

Now, these repercussions don’t occur when there can be private consultations in executive sessions.

Now, that doesn’t mean that I’m opposed to public discussion. I have taken part in a good many of them and made a good many public appearances in the Congress. But in terms of exercising the great constitutional responsibilities of the President and of the Congress in the national interest, I think myself that close consultation behind closed doors is one of the better ways to do it.

We do have men engaged in combat. We do have some very serious and delicate problems in front of us. And these are not problems that can always be fully explored or resolved with the klieg lights and the rest of the world all looking on and listening in.

Q. Mr. Secretary—

Q. Mr. Secretary, I’m not clear yet on your explanation of the President’s statement in San Antonio. Is that intended to modify, reduce, or leave ambiguous our terms, our conditions for a bombing pause in North Vietnam?

A Reasonable and Fair Proposal

A. Well, I think we ought to just read the statement for what it says and reflect upon the absence of a response from Hanoi.

Now, you may wonder about the details of this expression that they will not take advantage of a bombing halt. There’s no point, as I have said before in these conferences, no point in my negotiating the details of that with you, because you can’t stop the bombing. We are prepared to discuss the details of that with Hanoi. They know it—they know it. But the point I was making is this: It seems to me that this is an essentially reasonable and fair proposal for anyone who is interested in peace. And it seems to me that it is hard for anyone to reject this proposal without confessing at the same time that they are not interested in peace and that they propose to continue their effort to move in on Southeast Asia.

This is not, by the way, just a question of Viet-Nam. I have never subscribed to the domino theory; it’s much too esoteric. There are North Vietnamese regiments today fighting in South Viet-Nam. There are North Vietnamese armed forces in Laos being opposed by Laotian forces. There are North Vietnamese-trained guerrillas operating in northeast Thailand. There are Communist dissident elements in Burma who are being aided, encouraged, and helped from outside Burma across the Chinese frontier.

There was a major Communist effort in 1965 to pull off a coup d’etat against Indonesia. You don’t need the domino theory. Look at their proclaimed doctrine, and look at what they’re doing about it.

Now, we would like to see peace in South Viet-Nam and in Southeast Asia just as quickly as possible. It takes two to make a peace; and we would like to see some indication from the other side that they accept the notion that all countries, large and small, as the U.N. Charter puts it, have a right to live in peace without molestation from across their frontiers.

When that moment comes, there can be peace very quickly indeed; and the United States will be no obstacle whatever in making a peace on that basis.
Q. Mr. Secretary, do you foresee a greater effort or greater participation by some of the Asian allies in Viet-Nam, and what are the prospects for a meeting of the seven nations contributing troops there?

A. On the question of a meeting, the seven nations do keep in touch with each other by various means. There is no present time or date for such a meeting. We would expect that one might well occur, but that does not mean that we're not in continuing contact with each other.

As far as forces are concerned, this will be for each country to determine for itself; and each country would make its own announcements on that subject.

Of course, we would be glad to see additional forces from other countries involved in South Viet-Nam.

I do want to emphasize that the present effort is not negligible. South Viet-Nam has something like 700,000 men under arms. I think the comparable figure for us would be somewhere in the range of 9 million, compared to their population or any other measure you want to put on it.

The Laotian forces are engaged in Laos. The Thais are engaged in northeast Thailand, in addition to what they have been putting into South Viet-Nam.

So that there is a significant effort by the countries of Southeast Asia to fend off this pressure from the North.

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Proposals To Stop the Bombing

Q. Mr. Secretary—

Q. Mr. Secretary, one of the elements in the public discussion over stopping the bombing, particularly in Congress, seems to be senatorial worries about how the United States is regarded abroad. Senators have heard the opening debate in the General Assembly, where foreign minister after foreign minister has urged the United States to stop the bombing. When you are confronted with a concern like that—I think almost 30 foreign ministers asked for a pause in the bombing—how do you reply to that concern? And linked with that is Senator [John Sherman] Cooper's proposal to stop bombing except on the infiltration routes above the DMZ.

A. Well, on the last point, a proposal to stop the bombing except on the infiltration routes would be categorically rejected by Hanoi; and not move us one inch toward peace, unless Hanoi makes a major change in its position. Your count on foreign ministers is a little higher than mine, in terms of stopping the bombing.

You know, I haven't found anyone in the world—private citizen or public official, in this or other governments—who has come to me and said, "If you stop the bombing and there is no response from Hanoi, then our attitude would change."

I had a group of private citizens in not long ago to talk about this, and they wanted us to stop the bombing. I said, "All right, if we stop the bombing"—we have stopped it on a number of occasions—"If we stop the bombing and Hanoi does not respond, will you then change your view?" They said, "No, of course not."

I could only say "Well, if we can't influence you by stopping the bombing, how do you expect us to influence Hanoi by stopping the bombing?"

Now, I would be glad to hear from any of these foreign ministers what their governments will do if we stop the bombing and there is no response from Hanoi. And I want to hear that. I haven't heard it from anybody.

I do know what the British cochairman would do if we stopped the bombing: make a maximum effort to get this matter moved toward peace.

But if Hanoi is saying "No" all the time, then he has very little chance. And if the other cochairman won't cooperate, there is very little chance.

So I would like to hear somebody tell me what they would do if we stopped the bombing. It is not just Hanoi who is not saying that.

Q. Mr. Secretary, on that point, is it not correct that this Government was informed by the Soviet Government, on the authorization of Hanoi, that if the bombing was stopped there would be a conference between the United States and North Viet-Nam within 3 or 4 weeks?

A. No, we were not informed that. We were not informed of that. There was a public statement by Mr. Kosygin [Aleksei N. Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R.], in London. But Hanoi has not said that, to our knowledge. Anyhow, just in case they should say it, why 3 or 4 weeks, why not the next morning?
Q. Is that a material difference?

A. Well, I don’t know. But I don’t know what waiting for 3 or 4 weeks means.

But what we need—there is no one in the world who has been able to tell us what Hanoi would do if we stopped the bombing.

Now, we don’t have to speculate about this: we checked this out with Hanoi. We don’t have to speculate and engage in wishful thinking and proceed on a hypothetical basis and think that maybe the atmosphere would be improved. Of course, the atmosphere would be improved over North Viet-Nam. But what we want to know is “What would happen?” and Hanoi is not willing to tell us what would happen, and no one else is able to tell us what would happen. So, we want to hear something.

For us to say, “We will stop, you go right ahead with your war; you live there safely and comfortably without being disturbed while you send your men and arms into South Viet-Nam for the next 50 years,” where would be the incentive for peace?

Now, we are interested in peace; we are not interested in a sanctuary which will let them carry on these operations against South Viet-Nam and Laos for eternity, while they sit there in a sanctuary taking their own time, paying no price, trying to seize their neighbors by force. Now, let’s not be children.

Yes.

U.S. Stake in Peace in Asia

Q. Mr. Secretary, one of the questions—basic questions—that seems to be emerging in this Senate debate is whether our national security is really at stake in Viet-Nam and whether Viet-Nam represents an integral part of our defense perimeter in the Pacific. Your earlier statement indicates that you think our security is at stake in Viet-Nam. I think it would help in this debate if you would perhaps elaborate and explain why you think our security is at stake in Viet-Nam.

A. Within the next decade or two, there will be a billion Chinese on the mainland, armed with nuclear weapons, with no certainty about what their attitude toward the rest of Asia will be.

Now, the free nations of Asia will make up at least a billion people. They don’t want China to overrun them on the basis of a doctrine of the world revolution. The militancy of China has isolated China, even within the Communist world, but they have not drawn back from it. They have reaffirmed it, as recently as their reception of their great and good friend, Albania, 2 days ago.

Now, we believe that the free nations of Asia must brace themselves, get themselves set, with secure, progressive, stable institutions of their own, with cooperation among the free nations of Asia stretching from Korea and Japan right around to the subcontinent, if there is to be peace in Asia over the next 10 or 20 years. We would hope that in China there would emerge a generation of leadership that would think seriously about what is called “peaceful coexistence,” that would recognize the pragmatic necessity for human beings to live together in peace rather than on a basis of continuing warfare.

Now, from a strategic point of view, it is not very attractive to think of the world cut in two by Asian communism reaching out through Southeast Asia and Indonesia, which we know has been their objective, and that these hundreds of millions of people in the free nations of Asia should be under the deadly and constant pressure of the authorities in Peking, so that their future is circumscribed by fear.

Now, these are vitally important matters to us, who are both a Pacific and an Atlantic power. After all, World War II hit us from the Pacific, and Asia is where two-thirds of the world’s people live. So we have a tremendous stake in the ability of the free nations of Asia to live in peace; and to turn the interests of people in mainland China to the pragmatic requirements of their own people and away from a doctrinaire and ideological adventurism abroad.

Q. Could I ask just one followup question on that, sir: Do you think you can fulfill this very large commitment of containment and still meet the commitment of the Manila conference—to withdraw within 6 months after a peace agreement has been reached?

A. Oh, yes, I think so.

That does not mean that we ourselves have nominated ourselves to be the policemen for all of Asia. We have, for good reasons, formed alliances with Korea and Japan, the Philippines, the Republic of China, Thailand, Australia,
and New Zealand; and South Viet-Nam is covered by the Southeast Asia Treaty.

That doesn’t mean that we are the general policemen. Today, the Laotian forces are carrying the burden in Laos on the ground; the Thais are carrying the burden in Thailand; the Burmese are carrying the burden in Burma; the Indians are carrying the burden upon their northeastern frontier—the Sikkim border—and whatever other threat there might be in that direction.

But we have our part; we have accepted a share, and we have accepted that share as a part of the vital national interest of the United States.

Now, what I don’t understand is that Senators would declare in August 1964 that the United States considers it a vital national interest of this country that there be international peace and security of Southeast Asia, and then 2 years later, some of them seem to brush that aside as having no validity. Now, that wasn’t a Tonkin Bay reaction. Paragraph 1 was Tonkin Bay. Paragraph 2 was Southeast Asia—was Southeast Asia.

Now, if people change their minds, then it is fair to ask the question, “On which occasion were they right?”

Now, I personally believe they were right in August 1964. And perhaps they will be right again if they come back to that position—1968 or ’69.

But these are not matters that change with the wind. These have to do with the possibility of organizing a peace on a planet on which human beings can destroy each other. Now, perhaps we could at least agree that that is the central question, even though there could be some debate about how you do it.

And I believe that those who think that you can have peace by letting one small country after the other be overrun have got a tremendous burden of proof in the light of the history of the past four decades; and they have not sustained that burden of proof.

Q. Mr. Secretary, would you describe the net objective here then as the containment of Chinese Communist militancy?

A. No. The central objective is an organized and reliable peace.

Now, if China pushes out against those with whom we have alliances, then we have a problem; but so does China. If China pushes out against the Soviet Union, both China and the Soviet Union have a problem.

We are not picking out ourselves—we are not picking out Peking as some sort of special enemy. Peking has nominated itself by proclaiming a militant doctrine of the world revolution and doing something about it. This is not a theoretical debate; they are doing something about it.

Now, we can live at peace—we have not had a war with the Soviet Union in 50 years of coexistence since their revolution. We are not ourselves embarked upon an ideological campaign to destroy anybody who calls themselves Communist. But we are interested in the kind of world structure sketched in articles I and II of the United Nations Charter, in which all nations, large and small, have a right to live in peace. And the aggressors nominate themselves—we don’t choose them—the aggressors nominate themselves by what they say and do. And when they do, then those who are genuinely interested in peace have a problem on their hands, and sometimes it gets tough; and sometimes we are tested and we find out what kind of people we are. And I think one of the most important historical facts in this postwar period has been that the almost unbelievable power of the United States has been harnessed to the simple notion of organizing a peace in the world.

Q. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.