

negotiations, not only because of military reasons but also because they fear their ability to maintain the morale of their people. If they go to the table, they feel they will not be able to maintain their regime in the North or the confidence of the communists in the South. General Thieu thought that when Hanoi finds it no longer has the ability to take over the South, the most logical way would be for them to just quietly stop. Secretary Rusk commented it was a possibility that they would not make peace at a table but would just stop. General Thieu said there were many points of view in South Viet-Nam. In order to maintain morale, the Government would not offer a soft position. When anyone talks about the four points of Hanoi or about the National Liberation Front, this has an effect on morale, and helps those who wish to weaken the Government or those who wish to offer an easier solution. The Vietnamese Government does not doubt the U.S. commitment but it is concerned with the psychological impact of what is going on.

Secretary Rusk said that in a way this is more a problem for us. Quite frankly the world position of South Viet-Nam is weakened when a sense of disunity is shown. We know that there are differences between various elements in Viet-Nam: Buddhists, Catholics, Montagnards and others. But we do know that there is unity in that they all do not want Hanoi. The more one can find fanatical unity in South Viet-Nam, the more will one get support. This sort of fanatical unity of people under attack is important, as has been demonstrated in such places as Berlin and Korea, and anything that can be done to promote it is for the better. General Thieu said that the Government has been trying for seven months to do its best in this regard. The Government is seeking to develop a democratic viewpoint and promote constitutional development in the future. But the basis of unity is a strong national policy. Offers of neutrality or other solutions arise but if the country stays strong it can fight. The position of the Government and the position of its friends must stay strong. Secretary Rusk replied that the Vietnamese people must know that we haven't put in 1/4 million troops to run away. The U.S. is not going to abandon Viet-Nam.

Secretary Rusk said he knew President Johnson would be most interested in General Thieu's remarks. The President spends an enormous amount of time day and night thinking about Viet-Nam. The Secretary noted that a Communist Foreign Minister at the UN recently told him that the single most important question in the world is to require Peiping to turn to peaceful coexistence. The U.S. has commitments all over Asia: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Australia. Peace in the Pacific is vital to the U.S. and is in no way second to peace in the Atlantic. We need peace in both oceans. The persistent policy of militancy in Peiping will have to change or they would have to pay the price. They must pull back. Governor Harriman commented that in particular Tito had

spoken to him of the danger to peace from Peiping, and the need for a buffer between Communist China and the rest of the world. Governor Harriman has asked Nasser if he wanted to turn over Southeast Asia to Communist China. Nasser has said "Oh, no." They all want us to stay here to insure peace.

Secretary Rusk said a major disappointment has been that more nations have not helped. The issues have been confused, the nature of the war which involves movement by infiltration, rather than across the 17th parallel with divisions, has caused many people to believe that South Viet-Nam was not a problem. The issue was now more clear. It concerned Hanoi's willingness to live in peace with its neighbor.

General Thieu said Vietnamese recall the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962. They knew that the Communists would not respect them. The Communists have a war all over Indo China. They are now putting in more troops in Laos. One must think of a concept of defending the entire area. We must not only defend Viet-Nam, we must defend Laos and the whole area with a complete strategy. Secretary Rusk added we would have to include Thailand as well.

24. Editorial Note

On January 15, 1966, Prime Minister Ky delivered a state-of-the-nation address to the Second Congress of the Armed Forces. The text of the speech was transmitted in telegram 2544 from Saigon, January 15. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 VIET S) Ky announced three major objectives of his government during 1966: 1) "to win the war" and "to pacify and to reconstruct the rural area"; 2) "to stabilize the economic situation"; and 3) "to build democracy." He declared that a "Democracy Building Council" would be appointed shortly to draft a constitution, which would be reviewed by local groups and then submitted to a national referendum in October 1966. Ky pledged that the constitution would serve as the basis for a democratic regime and promised democratic national elections in 1967.