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Rusk: Too Soon to Tell If Hanoi Wants Talks

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 4 (UPI).—Secretary of State Dean Rusk said today it was too early to tell if North Vietnam really wanted to talk peace but that the United States would go "more than half-way" if it did.

At a news conference here, Mr. Rusk commented on the latest peace talk reports from Saigon by saying "I cannot tell you if there has been a change or not" in Hanoi's stipulations for peace negotiations.

It was reported in Saigon that Hanoi was ready to talk if the United States stopped bombing North Vietnam and halted all other "acts of war," against it.

But Mr. Rusk said if it could be determined through diplomatic contacts that there was a sincere Communist desire for peace, the United States would go more than half-way.

However, he noted that the Communists have apparently ordered an "intensive offensive" in the war in the coming months and said there had been "intolerable violations" by the enemy in the New Year's truce.

Skillful Pursuit

He said the United States would "pursue as skillfully as possible whether there has been any change" in Hanoi's conditions for peace talks.

Asked if Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk's willingness to discuss the problem of Vietnamese Communist sanctuaries in his country indicated some feeling on the Prince's part as to who might be winning the Vietnam war, Mr. Rusk said: "I wouldn't want to speculate on other meanings."

In reply to another question, he said he did not expect Ambassador Chester Bowles, the emissary who will take up the issue with Sihanouk, to make any direct diplomatic contacts with either the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese.

As for Hanoi's new statement on peace talks, Mr. Rusk said North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh's Dec. 30 declaration "leaves a great many questions still open."

Mr. Trinh said North Vietnam "will" talk with the United States once the bombing and other acts of war stopped.

"I think the use of the word 'will' instead of 'would' or 'could' is a new formulation," Mr. Rusk said. "We need to clarify that more."

Before calling an end to the bombing, Mr. Rusk said the United States would still need an assurance from Hanoi that the North would not capitalize on the halt by replenishing its supply lines of ammunition into the South.

He declined to "make a judgment now" on whether or not the statement had brought peace negotiations any closer. Mr. Rusk said the United States needs to explore more fully how the statement relates to other actions of North Vietnam.

About six different world capitals currently are involved in speculation on the statement, Mr.

Rusk said, and he expected at least six more may become involved.

As for Cambodia, Mr. Rusk said Sihanouk's main concern was maintaining his nation's neutrality. "We strongly support that desire," he said.

On the question of "hot pursuit" of Communist forces into Cambodia, Mr. Rusk said the United States would "much prefer" that Cambodia take steps to eliminate the border sanctuary.

"Prince Sihanouk is rightly concerned," he said. "We have no desire to see Cambodia involved in the conflict."

Mr. Rusk added that Sihanouk "can be assured of our full cooperation" in trying not to bring that country into the war.

U.S. officials for five days have been studying the Hanoi statement that North Vietnam is ready to

hold talks with the United States.

While Mr. Trinh's statement was the first explicit promise to talk if bombing stopped, it restated the Communist position—unacceptable to the United States and Saigon—that the Communist Viet Cong political organization in the South must eventually be recognized as the "sole genuine representative" of the people of that area.

It also failed to contain any of the assurances President Johnson has sought that a bombing halt would be followed by a lower level in Communist attacks to provide a basis for "productive" negotiations.

Seeking clarification through diplomatic contacts in Moscow, Warsaw and other points, the United States has failed so far to secure required assurances.