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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT OF HON. DEAN RUSK
SECRETARY OF STATE

SECRETARY RUSK: I understand there has been some discussion in the course of the day about the attitude of the United States in this situation in the Near East.

I would refer you to the very fundamental statement made by President Johnson on May 23rd, and to his reaffirmation of the policies enunciated by four Presidents, that the United States is committed to the support of the independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of the area of the Near East.

We are in a situation where several governments have declared war. We are not a belligerent. We do not have forces involved in this violence. Our citizens in the area are entitled to the treatment that is due to citizens of countries who are not belligerents. They are not enemy aliens wherever they might be out there.

But this traditional word of international law "neutrality" does not involve indifference. The President has been deeply concerned about this situation since it flared up about 2-1/2 or 3 weeks ago, and has worked incessantly to try to stabilize the peace out there.

We have an obligation under the United Nations Charter, and very especially as a permanent member of the Security Council, to carry our full share of the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.

At the present time we are making a maximum effort in the Security Council to bring about a cease fire. In the course of the day, that has been caught up in some of the political discussions which have to do with the longer range issues.

We have felt that it is important to work with the Security Council to stop the fighting in order that peaceful processes can have a chance to operate on those other questions.

So there is the position at law that we are not a belligerent. There is the position of deep concern which we have as a Nation and as a member of the United Nations in peace in that area.

I would hope that this would clarify some of the discussion that I have heard in the course of the day. I can take just a question or two. I have to go to a meeting in a moment.

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THE PRESS: Then, Mr. Secretary, what we are trying to get straightened out was Mr. McCloskey's statement that we were neutral in thought, word and deed. The tradition of neutrality, legally, in international law, would that foreclose any options that we would have in the future?

SECRETARY RUSK: I don't want to speculate about the future. What I am saying is that the President has stated in the most fundamental way our attitude on this in his statement of May 23rd. You had his statement, of course, this morning, about our attitude toward this outbreak of violence.

I want to emphasize that any use of this word "neutral", which is a great concept of international law, is not an expression of indifference and, indeed, indifference is not permitted to us because we have a very heavy obligation under the United Nations Charter, and especially as one of the permanent members of the Security Council, to do everything we can to maintain international peace and security.

THE PRESS: Mr. Secretary, has this Government made any determination on the basis of the information it has as to who initiated the violence in this present outbreak?

SECRETARY RUSK: No. The President commented on that this morning in his statement. The facts are still very obscure. It may be some time before the facts can be clarified. It may take quite a long time. We have not tried to make a judgment on that, and we have no reason to think that the Security Council is trying to make a judgment on that at the moment. The key problem is to get the shooting stopped.

THE PRESS: Have we had any indication whether Russia will go along with the effort to get a cease fire resolution through the Security Council?

SECRETARY RUSK: We hope that they will. There have been discussions with them in the course of the day at the Security Council. They, of course, as a permanent member, have the same obligations that we have to play their role in maintaining international peace and security. But when I last heard from the situation up there, those talks had not come to a final conclusion in the Security Council.

THE PRESS: Mr. Rusk, under our concept of neutrality, would it be a violation for one of the countries involved to raise funds by financing or floating bonds in this country in your judgment?

SECRETARY RUSK: I wouldn't want to get into that. We are not in a situation that calls for judgment or decision on that.

THE PRESS: Mr. Secretary, are we neutral in thought, word and deed?

SECRETARY RUSK: I have in a good many words told you what our attitude is. I don't, I think, need to get into particular phraseology that goes beyond what the President has said and what I have said. Thank you.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.