

# DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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## FOR THE PRESS

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### SECRETARY RUSK'S NEWS CONFERENCE OF MARCH 24, 1965

The following is the State Department's release of Secretary of State Dean Rusk's news conference, which is authorized for direct quotation:

SECRETARY RUSK: Some of you have asked me for some comment as to the policy aspects of the use in Viet-Nam of gases of the tear gas family, back in December and January. And I am very glad to respond to those questions.

The shadow of gas warfare has been raised in connection with these incidents. That is not involved. We are not embarking upon gas warfare in Viet-Nam. There has been no policy decision to engage in gas warfare in Viet-Nam. We are not talking about agents or weapons that are associated with gas warfare, the military arsenals of many countries. We are not talking about gas that is prohibited by the Geneva Convention of 1925, or any other understandings about the use of gas.

Now, we can understand the concern around the world and in this country about the specter of gas warfare. These memories go back to World War I, when tens of thousands were killed or maimed by what might be called "military gases."

This is not involved here.

We are talking about a gas which has been commonly adopted by the police forces of the world as riot control agents

agents--gases that are available commercially, and have been used on many occasions, some in this country; and on many occasions in other countries.

Now, why is tear gas a part of the equipment of police forces?

It is because police forces would like to be able to use the minimum force that is required for the maintenance of law and order. It is a minimum instrument. And my information is that certain situations arose in South Viet-Nam where this problem presented itself.

On one occasion, for example, the Viet Cong had seized a village, was holding the villagers in hostage, and was firing through these villagers at mixed crowds outside the village.

The decision was made to employ tear gas to try to deal with that situation as a riot control type of problem, in order to avoid the problem of whether to use artillery or aerial bombs that would inflict great damage upon innocent people.

There is no question here about gas warfare, and gas in contravention of established conventions.

Now, it may be that there was a failure in full explanation, in briefing or in reporting, from Saigon on this matter. The initial reports tended to stimulate problems which were not present; for example, the use of the word "experimentation" suggested that something new and

esoteric



esoteric and weird might be involved here. This is not the case.

What has been involved has been well-known, traditional agents, in the hands of police forces in many parts of the world.

And under the circumstances in which this gas was used in Viet-Nam, the desire was to use the minimum force required to deal with the situation to avoid death or injury to innocent people.

Now, that is at the heart of the policy question. We are not engaged in gas warfare. It is against our policy to do so, as it is against the policies of most other governments that I know about.

But we are reminded, when something of this sort comes up, of the nature of the war in South Viet-Nam. It isn't a comfortable and easy war. It isn't a war that is going to be decided by troops on parade with blank cartridges. It is a mean, dirty, struggle carried out without regard to ordinary norms of conduct by the Viet Cong.

Those who are concerned about tear gas, I would hope would be concerned about the fact that during 1964 over 400 civilian officials were killed, and over a thousand were kidnapped in South Viet-Nam--village chiefs, school teachers, public health officers. Among other civilians, 1300 were killed, over 8,000 were kidnapped, but entire villages have been kidnapped and burned to the ground, when



when families of those who were in the armed forces were kidnapped and held as hostages.

There is nothing more urgent, from the point of view of the United States, than that peace be restored to that country as quickly as possible. And peace can be restored if Hanoi would stop infiltrating militarily-trained personnel into South Viet-Nam, stop the sending of arms into South Viet-Nam, and stop directing these operations aimed at taking over South Viet-Nam against the wishes of the people of that country.

Now, these are the essential policy aspects of the problem. We do not expect that gas will be used in ordinary military operations. Police-type weapons were used in riot control in South Viet-Nam, as in many other countries, over the past 20 years; and in situations analogous to riot control, where the Viet Cong, for example, was using civilians as screens for their own operations.

But this does not represent a new departure of policy, the introduction of new weapons, the introduction of any new approach to the very difficult problems in that country.

I would be glad to take a question.

Q. Mr. Secretary,

Q Mr. Secretary, to clear up one point, in view of the propaganda furor that has been raised over the use of gas, is any consideration now being given to the thought of not using gas any longer?

A Well, this is again a problem of general practice among nations. In situations of riot control or situations analagous to riot control, these police instruments undoubtedly will be used. They have been used in many countries and will again be used.

But I think that a good deal of the international reaction has been based upon the first impressions that somehow we were moving in to gas warfare, that somehow weapons were being used contrary to the Geneva Convention. This is not the case. And I would hope that second thoughts, of which we have already had some evidence, that second thoughts would realize that the issue that was involved here was the minimum force that was required under the circumstances where otherwise innocent people could be very severely punished in a circumstance over which they themselves had no control.

Q Is it correct, sir, that gas war, that the use of the tear gas was used initially in order to release  
some



some Americans who were being held by the Viet Cong?

A No. There was one situation, I understand, where there was a suspicion that prisoners might be held--Viet Cong elements holding hostages, perhaps both Viet-Nam and Americans--but that was not confirmed because when the area was entered it was found that no prisoners were discovered. So we don't know.

This was not an attempt to direct this particular weapon specifically toward the needs of Americans. This was a general problem in which the South Vietnamese themselves were the primary participants in a situation that seemed to require riot control methods rather than artillery, 500 pound bombs, and the rest of it.

Q Mr. Secretary, it is true, sir, that you referred to tear gas whereas many of the stories, of course, refer to nausea gas. Could you clarify the point on that?

A The tear gas family, which is available through commercial firms to police forces in this and other countries, includes some gas that produces nausea. I understand that on one incident, in one incident out there that there was some admixture of these two types of gases. But that again does not mean that there has been

been any new departure in policy or in practice from the riot control family of weapons in this situation.

Q Mr. Secretary, what you're trying to say is that our action in South Viet-Nam was comparable to, say, the British troops and UN troops in Cyprus who used tear gas to separate the Greeks and the Turks?

A Well, these gases have been used on a number of occasions. For example, we ourselves used these gases in connection with the famous prison riot in Korea, where some of the prisoners were engaging in violence but most of the prisoners were peaceable and wanted nothing to do with it. And the problem there arose as to the minimum force that would achieve the requirements of law and order. And so we used these types of gases in that prison revolt. And these have been used in many situations in different parts of the world. Mr. Harkness?

Q Sir, this is somewhat of a corollary question. But you referred to the inadequate or incomplete reporting from Saigon. Do you think that our policy and the South Viet-Nam policy, of restricting reporters, hinders full, accurate reporting?

A Oh, I think that the information that is

available



available in South Viet-Nam is more extensive, more detailed, more intense than any situation that I know about. I must say that I have some questions about newspapermen picking up a telephone in Da Nang and calling outside, some of them transoceanic calls, saying 20 aircraft departed from Da Nang a few minutes ago headed north, or headed west, or headed somewhere.

In other words, this is a tough fight out there. And the problem of making information available is related to the lives of the people who are directly involved in that situation. So that we have been considering that problem very seriously and we think that we can work out a basis on which there can be full and complete information to the public, at the same time protect the essential military requirements of the local situation.

Q Mr. Secretary, just to make it abundantly clear, to me at least, you referred to one occasion in which an admixture was used, but you're not attempting to separate these when you say riot control gases which have been used?

A No, no. They are all in the riot control commonly



commonly called tear gas family. In other words, police forces can go to commercial houses and buy these gases. I know of no gas that has been used which is not so available and which is not in the hands of police forces in many parts of the world.

Q Mr. Secretary, on that point, can you clarify, sir, as to whether there was a policy decision in the United States over the use of these gases? And could you also say whether the forces in the field have authority to use these at any time of their choosing?

A We have known, of course, that gases of this type are available to the South Vietnamese Government. We have ourselves provided some of those gases to the South Vietnamese Government. They had other similar weapons left over from French days out there, I gather.

So that we knew those weapons were there. We know that they have been used in riot control situations. We were not specifically asked in Washington on the day before any one of these incidents whether we approved the use of this particular weapon. They were faced with a situation that was analagous to riot control, where the Viet Cong were intermingled with civilians and,

as you gentlemen know from other reporting from out there, this has been a problem, is a problem with guerrillas where there is such intermingling, and that we have had some problems in attacking the Viet Cong where they are intermingled because innocent people get hurt.

Now, here was a situation where they tried to meet the problem with a minimum of violence that would deal with the situation.

Q Mr. Secretary, could you clarify the second portion of that, sir, as to whether from now on also the forces in the field will have authority to use the gases without referral ....

A Oh, I think that there are more of the governments of the world that reserve the right to use these weapons in riot control situations or situations analagous to riot control.

Q Mr. Secretary, what distinction do you draw between the tear gases and other non-lethal gases that are incapacitating which can range in this whole family way up to the mustard gases of World War I fame?

A I think there is a very sharp difference between the military gases that are a part of the



inventory of the military forces in a number of countries and the gases which have no lethal effect which have a minimum disabling character, which are normal to police forces all over the world. I think there is no great difficulty in distinguishing between those two.

Q Mr. Secretary, in which category--

A And I think from the point of view of the Geneva Convention there is no problem in distinguishing between those two.

Q In which category of gases would you place what are called the psycho-chemical gases, which destroy your will to resist?

A I think those would be military in character.

Q Mr. Secretary, you mentioned at the start the use of this in December and January, I believe. Were you saying by this it has not been used since January?

A It has not been used, as with gases of any type, police or military. There are operational limitations upon their use. I mean--as a matter of fact, in the three incidents which have been reported, it wasn't very effective, when the wind blew it away, it was dissipated, it didn't achieve the purpose. But the purpose

was to deal with the problem with a minimum of violence. So I would suppose that this is not going to be a very important part of the effort out there, because in any event, except in the most immediate circumstance of a mob in a city square, there are limitations on the ability of police type gases to accomplish the job.

Q Mr. Secretary, as a result of the great public interest and excitement over this issue during the last two days, have any new directives or policy decisions been issued to the authorities, the American authorities, in Viet-Nam for dealing with this problem?

A No new directives have been issued. The anticipation is, of course, that these weapons be used only in those situations involving riot control or situations analogous to riot control. There are many reasons for that. But I mean that is the nature of the weapon. It's a riot control type of weapon, and where that is not involved it would not be an appropriate weapon.

Q Mr. Secretary, yesterday Foreign Secretary Stewart said that he had brought up the matter with you and expressed a grave concern of the British people. Can you tell us what you told him yesterday?



A Well, I think that that was based upon the original reports, that indicated that we might be somehow embarking upon something new and different than embarking upon gas warfare as it is generally considered around the world. This is not involved here. And I think when the character of this weapon became known, the limited number of incidents, the special circumstances of incidents become generally understood, I think second thoughts will take over.

Q Thank you very much, sir.

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