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I S S U E S     A N D     A N S W E R S

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1965

GUEST: General Maxwell D. Taylor  
Special Consultant to the President  
INTERVIEWED BY: Howard K. Smith, ABC News Commentator  
and  
John Scali, ABC State Department  
Correspondent

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MR. SCALI: General Taylor, welcome to ISSUES AND ANSWERS. President Johnson has said that he is considering some hard, new decisions on what we do in Vietnam. In your view as a military man, an Ambassador and as a consultant at the moment, would it be helpful or desirable to have a declaration of war in order to better mobilize American strength?

GENERAL TAYLOR: I have never felt there would be a tangible advantage to a declaration of war. I can see some disadvantages quite clearly. It would seem to me that would suggest that this is not the South Vietnamese war essentially, as all of our Presidents have insisted, and as our conduct, I think, will verify. You will recall from the outset our intent was simply to do those things in South Vietnam that the Vietnamese themselves could not do or could not do in time.

1 MR. SCALI: But hasn't the role of American troops  
2 in Vietnam changed from the announced goal of guarding and  
3 securing American installations and going to the aid of the  
4 South Vietnamese if requested?

5 GENERAL TAYLOR: I don't think it was ever quite that  
6 explicit on the latter point. It was clear we should use our  
7 forces for the maximum effect and, depending to a large  
8 degree on the Vietnamese forces, to find and determine the  
9 configuration of the enemy.

10 On the other hand there certainly has been no suggestion  
11 that, for the guarding of our bases we should not move out on  
12 offensive operations of our own. I think that entirely  
13 consistent in what we are doing with the previous statement.

14 MR. SMITH: General Taylor, I hope you never have  
15 occasion to read some of my past reports and find out how wrong  
16 I have been, but I am going to do that to you. In October  
17 1963 you indicated that by December of '65, now, we might be  
18 able to disengage from Vietnam. That was not right. Last  
19 summer Mr. McNamara said our bombing of supply and infiltration  
20 routes was effective, and now he tells us that supply and  
21 infiltration is tripling and more, and the aim of  
22 escalation has been to bring the Communists to the table and they  
23 are not getting there.

24 In view of the fact that so many things that are wrong  
25 have happened, what assurance can a worried America have that

1 we are on the right track now?

2 GENERAL TAYLOR: Let me defend myself as a prophet.  
3 First you don't quote the fine print of my statement in  
4 1963 that, provided there would be no significant change  
5 in the military situation. I didn't know at the time that this  
6 critical event, mainly the overthrow and assassination of  
7 Diem, would end eight years of political stability. Secondly,  
8 any statement with regard to the effect of air on stopping  
9 infiltration I would say no official that I know of has  
10 ever suggested the air offensive would stop infiltration.  
11 It is quite clear, however, it can and does hinder  
12 infiltration. But as long as Hanoi is determined to move men  
13 and supplies into the South, the air will never completely  
14 stop this.

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1 MR. SMITH. I apologize for that oversight.

2 Sir, basically the situation sounds ridiculous. We  
3 have a nation, a primitive nation of 17 million challenging  
4 the most technologically advanced nation of 195 million.  
5 Why do they do it? Do they assume we are going to quit:  
6 we are going to break? How do you explain that?

7 GENERAL TAYLOR. First, I wouldn't say that Hanoi is  
8 deliberately attacking the United States. The last thing  
9 they would want is to have a confrontation with the United  
10 States and the thing undoubtedly they wish most sincerely  
11 now is to end this confrontation. Get us out of the picture.

12 I would think that in view of our deep commitment in the  
13 South and a clear resolution to carry this thing forward  
14 in assisting the defense of South Vietnam against the  
15 Viet Cong that they have lost hope of a military victory, of  
16 overrunning forces in the South. I can't believe they have  
17 that hope, but I am equally sure they do hope there will be some  
18 break in our resolution that international pressures or  
19 domestic pressures will induce us to change our course of  
20 action.

21 MR. SCALI. General, based on what has happened on the  
22 battlefield in the past few weeks and the past few months,  
23 would you say that the Viet Cong, instead of the American  
24 and the South Vietnamese forces, are the ones who have gone  
25 on the offensive in the dry season which was supposed to be

1 the season that most favored us and our air power?

2 GENERAL TAYLOR. No, I would not say that. I would say  
3 that the Communists had the offensive at the start of the  
4 monsoon offensive and gave it up, however, on around the  
5 first of July after a round of bloody battles in which both  
6 sides suffered very heavily. Now they have come out with  
7 additional forces in a form of escalation near the frontier  
8 but only near the Cambodian border and in general I would  
9 say that we have the offensive against their main units.

10 MR. SCALI. They haven't initiated most of the recent  
11 actions.

12 GENERAL TAYLOR. They always do. They have the  
13 opportunity. Just as the robbers initiate the operations  
14 against the police, for example. They always will have the  
15 largest number of offensive operations because they can  
16 choose the time and place for their depredations. But,  
17 in terms of the actions against the main units, I would say  
18 that we have rather clearly the offensive.

19 MR. SMITH. Sir, the question most people are interested  
20 in is, what can we do to prevail, to force these people to  
21 the conference table and to guarantee the South Vietnamese  
22 a free choice, which is basically I think what we are trying  
23 to do?

24 Can you do it purely by military means or do we have  
25 to do something besides military action?

1           GENERAL TAYLOR: I would say, of course, we are not  
2 doing it just by military means. Our whole program in South  
3 Vietnam is a complex mixture of military and non-military  
4 factors. The diplomatic, the political, the economic  
5 factors are just as important in the long run, perhaps more  
6 important than the military factors. So it is really a  
7 combination of these components which we are blending together  
8 in our present strategy.

9           MR. SMITH: What kind of thing can you see bringing this  
10 to an end?

11           GENERAL TAYLOR: Well, I think the ultimate end has to be  
12 a change in the will of the leadership in Hanoi. That is  
13 really the purpose of all wars. I like to quote the Greek  
14 writer Polebius who said 125 years before Christ, "The  
15 purpose of war is not to annihilate those who provoke it  
16 but to cause them to mend their ways."

17           I would say our whole purpose is to get the Hanoi  
18 leadership to mend their ways.

19           MR. SMITH: How long do you think it will take?

20           GENERAL TAYLOR: I can't say obviously, but we have to  
21 create a very clear, unmistakable picture to them that they  
22 can't possibly win this thing and there must be better ways  
23 to conduct their government.

24           MR. SCALI: Well, General, obviously the North Viet-  
25 nameese and the Chinese Communists are not mending their ways

1 or showing any tendency to go to the conference table right  
2 now. What additional military steps then do you think are  
3 wise and prudent to take in order to show them that we are  
4 not going to give up and we are going to carry this through?

5 GENERAL TAYLOR: I would never isolate the military  
6 steps. You can't do it, Mr. Scali, honestly. I think we  
7 have to do a number of things. We have to continue to do  
8 better on the ground. We have the initiative. Retain it  
9 and increase the pressure on the military units of the Viet  
10 Cong in South Vietnam. I think we have to continue the air  
11 pressure on Hanoi in a moderately ascending scale, and  
12 finally, we have to work every day on the governmental problems,  
13 the economic problems,  
14 the social problems of South Vietnam. You can't neglect any  
15 of those factors.

16 MR. SCALI: You said air pressure on Hanoi. You mean on  
17 the Hanoi government and not on the city?

18 GENERAL TAYLOR: I am using that as representative --

19 MR. SCALI: What do you think is one of the critical  
20 decisions now confronting President Johnson whether or not  
21 he should order air attacks against oil supplies and oil  
22 depots in the Haiphong area?

23 GENERAL TAYLOR: I should probably make it clear I am  
24 not a member of the government and am not in the decision-  
25 making process and can't answer directly. Obviously con-  
26 siderations of the proper target system is something that

1 goes on day by day.

2 MR. SCALI: As a military man who has been there and  
3 knows his way around Washington to a considerable extent,  
4 as a private citizen  
5 do you think this might be the next step that should be  
6 considered?

7 GENERAL TAYLOR: The POL targets?

8 MR. SCALI: Yes.

9 GENERAL TAYLOR: It would certainly be on my list to  
10 be considered.

11 MR. SMITH: How about something else? Obviously the  
12 infiltration is going through what is considered neutral  
13 territory, Laos and Cambodia. Don't we have to try inter-  
14 diction in those areas and not just South Vietnam?

15 GENERAL TAYLOR: I wish, Mr. Smith, you could  
16 suggest an effective way to do this. It is a very tough  
17 proposition because the territory adjacent to the frontiers  
18 of South Vietnam, both in Cambodia and Laos, are dense jungle,  
19 dense forest, and even if one flies a helicopter at treetop  
20 level it is almost impossible to see into that forest  
21 canopy. So, to identify and locate the infiltration which  
22 undoubtedly takes place is very difficult indeed.

23 MR. SMITH: Well, one possible way might be to send  
24 ground troops into those areas. Do you think that is  
25 feasible?

GENERAL TAYLOR: I just know as a military man that

1 combat in forests and in cities soaks up endless troops. In  
2 other words, to be effective, you would have to have "N"  
3 divisions. I have no idea how many.

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5 MR. SCALI: General Taylor, at the time that President  
6 Johnson made his decision to send American fighting men into  
7 South Vietnam -- I think the figure that was used at the time  
8 was 125,000, with provision for sending more -- was there a  
9 realization on the part of those who made the decision that  
10 perhaps hundreds of thousands more of American fighting  
11 troops might be required if all did not go well?

12 GENERAL TAYLOR: Well, I would only speak for myself.  
13 I would say that I never accepted that figure as being neces-  
14 sarily a final figure. It is really impossible to sit down and  
15 plan accurately and say we know that the ultimate require-  
16 ment is so and so.

17 The best we can do is to say that we know at least we  
18 need this kind of reinforcement. If that is not enough, then  
19 we will have to review the future requirement and I suspect  
20 that attitude was in the mind of most of the people involved  
21 in that decision.

22 MR. SCALI: But one of the questions I think many  
23 people are asking now is, where does this spiral end? We  
24 now have almost 200,000 men there and, as you say, we need  
25 to do better on the ground. Is it possible that the number

1 of troops that we send could reach the figure of say a millio  
2 men?

3 GENERAL TAYLOR. I certainly couldn't anticipate any  
4 such figure unless Red China came directly into the war.  
5 However, I would say while it is a valid question to say about  
6 how many will it take, I don't think any honest official could  
7 give you a fair estimate.

8 MR. SMITH. I'd like to ask you about some quotations  
9 that I have heard from other people, and not you. On this  
10 program the idea was once scouted of defoliating the jungle  
11 and interdicting supply routes by defoliating the jungle  
12 with nuclear weapons. Would that be a realistic possibility  
13 now?

14 GENERAL TAYLOR. I don't think anyone has ever considered  
15 defoliation using nuclear weapons. We have tried chemical  
16 agents and the jungle is just too big for our capabilities.

17 If I understand the work of nuclear weapons, we are  
18 likely to have more fires than we would have purely defolia-  
19 tion.

20 MR. SMITH. Now, Mr. Nixon said in a speech last week  
21 that we are letting ourselves get bogged down too much on the  
22 ground; we should instead resort more to using sea power --  
23 presumably artillery and gunfire -- and air power. Is that a  
24 realistic --

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GENERAL TAYLOR: I don't think so. Obviously we have to use all our resources. We can't exclude any one. But the issue is on the ground. The problem is the Viet Cong apparatus in South Vietnam. 120, 130,000 armed men who are bandits and desperadoes attacking the government and attacking the people. We can't do away with them by air power or sea power alone.

MR. SMITH: Well, now one other possibility using ground power against the very source of the military trouble. Would it be a realistic consideration to think of raiding North Vietnam, on the ground?

GENERAL TAYLOR: One can think of all these things. We have plainly many capabilities we haven't used. Thus far I have never heard this seriously considered.

MR. SCALI: General in your view and based on reports recently of increased Chinese Communist supplies and involvement in North Vietnam, is this war becoming more and more a confrontation between the United States and Red China than a war between the South Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese?

GENERAL TAYLOR: I wouldn't phrase it that way. I think it is presenting a two-sided front to Ho Chi Minh and his counsellors in Hanoi. They see the growing American presence in the South and the inevitability of military defeat if they continue on their present course of action.

2 1 Then they have to look over their shoulder at Red China,  
2 the country which represents the traditional hated enemy,  
3 and then try to balance the pros and cons of accepting  
4 Chinese aid to hold off the Americans, or perhaps find  
5 some arrangement that could be worked out with Saigon  
6 and with Washington.

7 MR. SCALI: But isn't it possible that the North  
8 Vietnamese regime has already lost its role of independence  
9 and perhaps dislikes or hates the Chinese considerably less  
10 as they are forced to accept more losses in South Vietnam?  
11 In other words, might they not embrace the Chinese rather than  
12 go down to defeat in South Vietnam?

13 GENERAL TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Scali, obviously it is awfully  
14 hard to know what goes on in Asian minds, and I don't pose  
15 as an expert, but certainly one gets the impression that  
16 Hanoi remains relatively independent, trying to play both  
17 sides of the Communist street, the Soviet side and the  
18 Peking side. They are walking a pretty tight and dangerous  
19 rope, I would suggest. And I would doubt that they would  
20 throw away in a short period of time the traditional hatred  
21 of China, which has always existed there.

22 MR. SMITH: Mr. Nixon in that speech I told you about  
23 also said he considered China a fourth-rate military power.  
24 Do you share that assessment?

25 GENERAL TAYLOR: I have no yardstick for assigning numbers

3 1 to the Chinese military strength. There are certainly a  
2 lot of Chinese in the world, and obviously they are the great  
3 military power in Western Asia.

4 MR. SMITH: Let me ask you about a statement in an article  
5 by Mr. George Cannon today, who is an impressive thinker on  
6 these things. He says he fears if we continue to escalate,  
7 what he fears is a distortion of our defense situation all  
8 over the world, that we might be able to meet a menace in some  
9 more important part of the world. Are you concerned about  
10 that?

11 GENERAL TAYLOR: This is a problem that has to be  
12 considered all the time in the Department of Defense and the  
13 Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, I would say our ultimate  
14 resources are so great we can well afford and discharge many  
15 obligations if we have to. We are not currently at any  
16 given moment geared up to the point of having resources  
17 immediately ready, but we are far from having  
18 dispersed our military potentiality.

19 MR. SCALI: General, in view of the number of battles  
20 recently during which American troops have had to fight  
21 at close range with the VC, does it seem likely that perhaps  
22 the Viet Cong are now trying a new tactic of in-close  
23 fighting to neutralize the use of American air power?

24 GENERAL TAYLOR: I would say they are doing exactly  
25 what they did in Korea. That was their tactic there. It

4 1 was to get so close to our lines whenever there was an  
2 attack, that they would be locked in close-range combat  
3 so that our artillery and our air would be neutralized.  
4 It is just a common-sense tactic. They learned it in Korea  
5 and I am sure they are applying it now.

6 MR. SMITH: General, if you were asked what we should do  
7 about the Viet Cong offer of a 12-hour truce, what would you  
8 say?

9 GENERAL TAYLOR: I would say it is obviously propaganda  
10 and I would leave this to the decision of the commander on  
11 the ground.

12 MR. SCALI: What about the thought some have expressed,  
13 namely that we should undertake another pause in the  
14 bombing of North Vietnam and extend it longer than the five-  
15 day period, or the last one, and to announce it publicly  
16 in advance and say that unless the VC headed for the  
17 conference table within a prescribed period of time, that  
18 we would then escalate?

19 GENERAL TAYLOR: I can see many pitfalls in the  
20 pause. I can see advantages also in the fact it would show  
21 once more to our own nation and to the international spectators  
22 that we leave no stone unturned to give Hanoi a chance to  
23 come to the conference table.

24 I would think it highly implausible, however, that in  
25 the course of a pause with the spotlight of world attention

1 focused on the decision-makers in the Communist world, that  
2 they would make a move that would be interpreted as a  
3 sign of weakness. It just seems incredible to me. Unless  
4 it was in the form of a trap that in the course of this  
5 pause they would say "Yes, we will sit down providing we  
6 have a permanent cease-fire," then we would be trapped in  
7 that situation we had in Korea of endless, endless months of  
8 negotiation with no outcome except to the wearying of our  
9 side at the negotiation table. I think  
10 that is a real danger.

11 MR. SMITH: General, I think you said in a talk  
12 recently that by the end of this year 80 percent of the  
13 people of South Vietnam would enjoy security. Did you --

14 GENERAL TAYLOR: No, sir, I never made any such statement.  
15 I wish it were true.

16 MR. SMITH: I was going to say I was very impressed  
17 by that. What is your opinion of the morale of the  
18 South Vietnamese people, but especially of the South  
19 Vietnamese troops?

20 GENERAL TAYLOR: I would apply two words to the Vietnamese  
21 people. Two adjectives: One, war-weary, and second,  
22 steadfast. They have been fighting for 11 years against  
23 the Communists. They certainly have no zest for this but they  
24 certainly have no intention of giving up and accepting  
25 Communist rule if they can have any chance of security provided

1 by their government. With regard to the troops, I would  
2 just say that Vietnamese troops are like troops anywhere,  
3 like American troops. They fight well when they are well-  
4 trained and well-led. Their behavior is spotty when those  
5 two conditions are not met.

6 MR. SCALI: General LeMay says if we haven't been able  
7 to do an effective job of reducing the flow of men and  
8 supplies across the 17th Parallel that we are hitting the  
9 wrong targets. Do you think that we have been hitting wrong  
10 targets?

11 GENERAL TAYLOR: No, I don't think so. We have been hittin  
12 the military target system related to infiltration  
13 and doing just as complete a job as we can within the  
14 general ground rules, the rules of a slow progression toward  
15 the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

16 MR. SCALI: What do you say to the people who contend  
17 that we should be bombing targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area?

18 GENERAL TAYLOR: I use a statement of Polybius  
19 which I gave before, that we are not here to annihilate Hanoi  
20 but to get it to change its ways.

21 MR. SCALI: But aren't there important military targets  
22 in the radius of those two cities?

23 GENERAL TAYLOR: There are military targets. There are  
24 also economic targets but judged by the standards of  
25 targeting such as we had in World War II they are relatively

1 insignificant. The main thing we would be hitting if  
2 we went into all those targets would be urban population  
3 and obviously that is the last thing we want to do.

4 MR. SMITH: General, there have been reports about the  
5 Viet Cong collecting inside Thailand and Northern Thailand.  
6 Have you heard those reports, or do you attribute any --

7 GENERAL TAYLOR: I am not aware of this.

8 MR. SMITH: Can you assess what the effect of Vietnam  
9 has been on the Soviet Union since they raised their  
10 defense spending by five percent?

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1           GENERAL TAYLOR: This is something the Secretary of  
2 State should answer. I can only give you my personal impres-  
3 sion that the Soviet Union is drawing no pleasure out of the  
4 situation in Southeast Asia. Indeed, they are drawing consider-  
5 able embarrassment from it because they have no national  
6 objectives here, nothing to gain and conceivably a great  
7 deal to lose if they ended up in a military confrontation with  
8 us.

9           Nonetheless, they have to fly the flag of Communist  
10 leadership. They can't cede primacy to Peking, so they, like  
11 Hanoi, are walking a tight rope in their activities in this  
12 part of the world.

13           MR. SMITH: Now, they raised their defense spending for  
14 next year five per cent. They announced it this week. Some  
15 editorialists have said that is not enough really to constitute  
16 a menace; that is kind of a declaration of intent to stay well  
17 defended. How do you assess that five per cent increase?

18           GENERAL TAYLOR: First, one never knows how they keep  
19 the books on the defense budget. Whether this is true or  
20 not, one cannot be sure. Certainly I would say it is a  
21 statement made with a propaganda objective in mind in some  
22 degree.

23           MR. SCALI: There have been reports recently, General  
24 Taylor, that the United States forces are undertaking to build  
25 some important bases in Thailand to serve as a back-up and as

1 a precautionary source of offensive action. Do you think this  
2 is wise?

3 GENERAL TAYLOR. I know of no new bases being built in  
4 Thailand. The airfields and installations of that sort are  
5 really in the SEATO context of the defense plans of Thailians.  
6 I know of no U. S. bases in Thailand.

7 MR. SMITH. Sir, let me change the subject.

8 About five years ago or four years ago, you wrote a  
9 book describing defense policy and the title was "The Uncertain  
10 Trumpet." What sort of sound is the trumpet emitting now?

11 GENERAL TAYLOR: My trumpet you are referring to ?

12 MR. SMITH: No, it is the defense policy  
13 trumpet.

14 GENERAL TAYLOR. I would say our policy in Southeast  
15 Asia has been amazingly simple and amazingly consistent.  
16 We started off in 1954 saying we wanted to give the right  
17 of self determination to this new emerging nation beside  
18 South Vietnam.

19 We haven't changed one iota. It remains the same today.

20 It is true our tactics and our strategy have changed, as  
21 they should, with the changing situation. With the changing  
22 degree of the threat represented by the aggression from Hanoi.  
23 So our methods have changed, but our purpose has never  
24 changed and I think that is something we should always bear  
25 in mind.

MR. SMITH. Not just in application to Vietnam, but in

1 general do you think our defense picture has been remedied  
2 since the time you criticized --

3 GENERAL TAYLOR: Very much so, Very much so. The  
4 fact that we are able to conduct this kind of operation, as  
5 extensive as it is in South Vietnam, without calling up  
6 reserves, is a major tribute to our defense policies.

7 MR. SCALI: A quick question, General. Do you think  
8 a stalemate acknowledged by both sides which left South  
9 Vietnam free and independent would be an acceptable settle-  
10 ment for us?

11 GENERAL TAYLOR: I am always asked, what do we mean by  
12 victory in South Vietnam, I say it is as simple as this.  
13 To attain what we set out to do, which is a free, independent  
14 South Vietnam choosing its own government. How we get  
15 there, frankly, doesn't seem to me very important.

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17 MR. SMITH: Sir, I have an impression that one reason  
18 the Communists persist is that they identify us with the  
19 French and think we are in the same position and can be  
20 beaten the same way. Do you think that a Dien Bien Phu,  
21 in defeating America, is possible or likely?

22 GENERAL TAYLOR: I cannot possibly visualize another  
23 Dien Bien Phu. We simply have too much military strength  
24 to be overcome militarily in South Vietnam.

25 MR. SCALI: Do you think, General, that the time that

1 hanoi heads for the conference table will come only after a  
2 series of sharp defeats on the battlefield in South Vietnam?

3 GENERAL TAYLOR. I would suspect that some defeats of  
4 that nature will be necessary and also other indications of the  
5 growing threat of our air effort against the North. In com-  
6 bination, they will have to see that success is not possible.

7 Now, I will add also that the political stability of  
8 South Vietnam is very important because they would hope  
9 also that by political subversion they might somehow attain  
10 their ends so we must be strong on all fronts.

11 MR. SCALI: I gather then, General, that you do see in the  
12 offering harder American air attacks against North Vietnamese  
13 targets?

14 GENERAL TAYLOR. I would think that would have to be  
15 a part of our overall program.

16 MR. SMITH. Thank you very much indeed, General Maxwell  
17 Taylor, for coming here and being with us on ISSUES AND  
18 ANSWERS.

19 GENERAL TAYLOR. I have been happy to be with you this  
20 afternoon.  
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