2-26-1957

U.S. Foreign Policy Today and Tomorrow

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
United States Foreign Policy Today and Tomorrow

Address by Senator Mike Mansfield (D) Montana
Father Edmund A. Walsh Lecture Series - Georgetown University
Monday, February 25, 1957 - 8:00 p.m.

More than thirty five years ago the late Father Edmund A. Walsh saw the fulfilment of a dream for which he had labored with steadfastness of purpose and great energy. It was the foundation at Georgetown University of the school of Foreign Service which now, fittingly, bears his name.

The circumstances of its birth are familiar to you all. A terrible war had ended. Father Walsh recognized the demands which coming events would make upon the intellectual resources of the nation. He properly estimated the importance of having an informed citizenry and a trained and dedicated personnel to discharge the responsibilities of this country in the cause of world peace.

Yet Father Walsh could not have anticipated the extent to which the life of our people was to be dominated by the subject of foreign policy, or the scope of its development. The world is quite a different place today from what it appeared thirty five years ago. When I was a student, our problems, our interests were predominately local or national. We were concerned almost exclusively with domestic matters. The United States was an immense country, so immense that even what happened on the west coast touched the east but lightly. Our relations with foreign governments were for the very few who were qualified to understand the meaning of incidents around the globe.

Today one has only to look at the curriculum of the average University
to appreciate the extent of our preoccupation with foreign affairs. Main Street knows, and insists on knowing, why Washington proceeds in one way or another; for Main Street is directly affected by decisions on countless matters to which, a few decades ago, it paid little or no attention. Areas of the world which were merely places in a book are common topics of conversation, because they are vital to our national interest.

Foreign policy has become the business of everyone. And it is just about the biggest business of our government right now. National defense, commerce and agriculture are all involved in the determination of our policy towards other nations. Tangible proof of this regularly comes across my desk.

A few days ago I received a routine distribution of Department of State press releases. One of these dealt with an agreement for the sale of United States surplus agricultural commodities to Korea under Public Law 480. The purpose of this agreement was to assist in stabilizing the Korean grain market and the entire Korean price structure. Defense equipment will be procured by the Korean currency generated in the transaction.

Another press release informed me that the United States and Mexico had reached agreement on the use of standard band radio broadcasting channels. Another set forth the latest facts concerning the failure by the Chinese Communists to release imprisoned Americans, as they had undertaken to do. Still another contained word that the Italian Government had notified the United States of its intention to limit the export of velveteens to this country during 1957 to 1.37 million square yards.
Now, this was only one day's announcements. But observe the broad range of subjects involving issues of foreign policy, which bear directly on activities of our people within the United States. Decisions of our government in the field of foreign relations reach down into every corner and crossroad of the country, affecting the farmer, the blouse manufacturer, the dairy producer, the watch-maker, the radio broadcaster. This trend will grow, as the world is more closely knit together, as technology advances and as the major problems of each nation are identified with the problems of every other nation. In the past ten years we have concluded almost 2000 agreements with other governments on matters of mutual concern.

If the United States is to be equipped adequately to meet these problems, our reservoir of human talent will have to be enlarged. There will be more and more demands for trained personnel in overseas posts. At the present time there are approximately 100,000 Americans working abroad. If current trends continue, it is not unlikely that in another 25 years that figure will reach 200,000.

Yet before the Second World War the average college graduate gave hardly a thought to utilizing his special training in foreign countries. The opportunities inviting him abroad today are so many and so attractive, even apart from the career foreign service, that they should not be overlooked in the planning of a graduate's future. As the intercourse of nations widens, the burden of universities to feed this reservoir will grow heavier. We are already feeling the pinch, in a shortage of those skills we should like to make available to other governments - particularly engineering - under the Point IV program.
The development of a competent corps of overseas personnel, and particularly of the career service, is a most vital matter for the future of this nation.

No policy, no matter how brilliantly conceived, can be effective unless it is executed with skill. Even more important the actual policy which is adopted will, in large measure, be determined by the resourcefulness, ability and quality of the men and women who represent the United States government in the field. This is what is meant when it is sometimes said that foreign policy is made by the cables to the Department of State. To a considerable degree this is true. Yet, as impelling and compulsive as those cables may be, it is what the Secretary of State does with them which, in final analysis will measure the success or failure of a policy. The freedom of action they permit may often be very restricted. Yet within those narrow limits, a decision must be made, and made correctly. Peace and war may hinge upon it. Certainly the recent events of the Middle East have evidenced how true this is.

To an outsider, to one not in a position to appraise all the facts, the policy indicated in a particular situation may seem to offer no difficulty. The question may appear clearcut, black and white, an open and shut case.

But things are not always what they seem - not even in foreign relations. We cannot always do what we might like to do. Let me cite just one example: During the last session Congress received mounting protests from Eastern cotton blouse and shirt manufacturers against ruinous competition from Japanese exporters. The Japanese were able to market their finished product here for about one-fourth of what identical cotton goods could be sold in this country. Some American plants had already closed down in
consequence. And so, pressures grew for an increase in tariff rates against the Japanese blouses. A simple and obvious solution -- or so it seemed.

But when the Committee on Foreign Relations held hearings on a bill introduced for that purpose, we found it was not so simple or obvious. Japan was manufacturing shirts from cotton imported from the United States. In fact, Japan has been the largest single export market for American cotton growers. To deny the Japanese the American market would have inflicted serious injury upon American agriculture. A particular segment of industry would have been protected at the expense of a much larger branch of our agriculture. The Carolina shirt-makers--and I might add, a great many newspapers - could see only a local consequence, not the over-riding national interest on which the policy decision had to be based. Their remedy might well have been worse than the disease. Happily, Japan by a self-imposed quota on exports to this country has partially relieved the tension.

I have over-simplified this illustration for convenience. But there was a more subtle point involved. We were not only dealing with a tariff and trade problem. Indirectly, had the bill passed we would have been tinkering with the national security. It is, of course, to our interest that Japan should find an adequate outlet for her exports, if it is to maintain a viable economy. Unless Japan can do business with the west and the so-called neutralist powers, it may be forced to draw closer to the Communist trade orbit. Such may well prove to be the ultimate outcome, in any event; and I do not wish to imply that American business should be sacrificed to the trade requirements of another Government. I merely mention this as one of the many veiled elements in what, on the surface, appeared to be a relatively
uncomplicated problem.

I do not believe that ever before in our history, at least in peace time, have we been so preoccupied with the security of the United States, as we have been during the past ten years. The quest for national security pre-empts almost every other issue in the life of our country; directly or indirectly it cuts across both domestic and foreign policies. It dominates the budget; it is a brake upon atomic progress for peaceful purposes; it is the principal cause for the growth in the national debt, the drop in the value of our dollar, and the burden of taxation which you and I must carry. And, most regrettably, there is little on the visible horizon to encourage the hope that the search for security will not continue to be the principal concern of American foreign policy for the next decade. The general elements in that policy are, as you well know, support for the United Nations, the system of regional defense pacts capped by NATO and the RIO Treaty; and our Foreign Aid Program. All these have the same predominant purpose -- security.

We are all aware that the broad lines of our foreign policy have been conditioned for the past ten years by the designs of the Soviet Government. And as long as that Government seeks control over the rest of the world, it will not be possible for the people of the United States to cultivate with the people of Russia those bonds of human friendships which could enrich their existence and ours. Years in advance of most of his contemporaries, Father Walsh, who visited Russia not long after the revolution, sounded a warning to this country of the peril which the Soviet Union offered.

We have seen a reflection of that peril in Hungary. That tragic episode
has caused a worldwide re-appraisal of a principal source of Soviet power. It is recognized to a larger degree than ever before throughout the world that this source is naked force. It is clearer now that in the satellite countries, at least, Soviet control is maintained largely by force of arms or threat of force. Given any kind of a chance, the oppressed peoples of central Europe will light the flame of freedom again and again.

The emergence of Russia as the most powerful nation in Europe and Asia has compelled a course of action upon the United States and a preoccupation with the problems of other nations which would have been unthinkable a few decades ago. And yet it is not, in my view, necessarily the most significant long-range political development of recent years insofar as our policy is concerned. Nor is the emergence of China as an industrial society, nor indeed the effect of atomic energy on world relations.

I think one of the most shattering events in our time so far as United States foreign policy is concerned, has been the impact of developments affecting the United Kingdom. For it was Britain during the 19th and early 20th century that played the role of world policeman; and it is no mere accident that this period coincided with what now seems like the golden age of international law and order. By and large, an agreement between nations then was meant to be kept. It was not a treacherous artifice employed to bring down a Government's guard, an instrument of hostility bound with a red ribbon. The sanctity it received was undoubtedly due to the fact that the nations of Europe respected their heritage of Christian morality in a manner foreign to the Soviet tradition. Indeed, the Soviets have taken advantage of this very heritage.
Because the relative decline of British power has occurred in our lifetime, its ultimate effects may appear more obscure than they very likely will to a historian fifty years hence. To this country, however, it has already meant a vast increase in worldwide responsibilities. You have only to glance at a map of the world to see some of its immediate consequences. One of these consequences we can see right now, in the Middle East.

Before I go any further into that matter, let me make one thing clear. During the last fifteen years, the Executive Branch has frequently invoked the so-called principle of "bi-partisanship" to obtain congressional backing for the conduct of foreign relations. I do not view bi-partisanship - or, more accurately, non-partisanship - other than as cooperation with the President on policy proposals which merit cooperation. It does not, and it cannot, signify blind acceptance of any policy merely because the Executive tells us it is a good policy and that it is needed. Nor does it signify announcing a policy first, then informing Congressional leaders afterward. This administration, as administrations before it, can make unwise decisions. And members of Congress have a duty to the American people to criticize constructively, and oppose any policy which does not seem to them to serve the national interest. What I principally object to is the practice, after the Executive branch has gotten into a jam, of calling upon Congress to extricate it from the dilemma in the name of bi-partisanship.

Is there any merit at all in non-partisan support? In the proper sense, I think there is. The most obvious advantage, of course, is that it presents to the outside world a united front on vital issues, to obtain the maximum effect where desired.
I would like to emphasize the word "constructively". For the purpose of criticism of our foreign policy must be to make it a better policy if the national interests are to be served.

Last week we had an example of the effectiveness of genuine bi-partisan-ship or, what I prefer to call responsible cooperation between the President and Congress. You will recall that President Eisenhower conferred with members of both parties at the White House on the crisis in the Middle East. I attended this serious, non-political conference on matters which affect the vital interests of all the people of the United States. There was a free and frank exchange of ideas. Members of Congress came away with a better understanding of the situation which confronts us in the Middle East. On his part, the President obtained the views of members of both parties.

That same night, the President, in response to a suggestion by Senator Russell of Georgia, addressed the entire nation. In his speech, Mr. Eisenhower made clear for the first time the scope and gravity of the situation in the Middle East. I do not agree with all of the propositions which he advanced. It is not necessary to agree with all of them, however, in order to recognize in his address the beginnings of a more intelligible policy directed at the problems of the Middle East. Because he had spoken with members of Congress, the President was in a far better position to talk not only to the people of the United States but to the people of the Middle East and the world as well. That was because, in calling the conference which preceded his speech, the President was availing himself of a cross-section of both party and regional leadership.

May I say at this point that there is, I believe, a somewhat mistaken concept that the Democratic Party is run by only one section of the country, by the South alone or more specifically by Texas alone. That is a tribute to the distinguished services to the party and the nation of Lyndon Johnson, the Majority Leader in the Senate and Mr. Sam Rayburn, the Speaker in the House. Those gentlemen, I am sure, would be the first to point out that there can be no effective leadership of a great national party without participation of all sections of the country. And all sections of the country are in fact represented in the leadership of the Democratic Party in Congress. That leadership in the Senate, in addition to Lyndon Johnson of Texas, is composed of Carl Hayden of Arizona as President pro-tempore, the Secretary of the Democratic Conference, Tom Hennings of Missouri, and myself as Party Whip. In the House of Representatives, the party is guided not only by Mr. Rayburn but by the outstanding majority leader, John McCormack of Massachusetts and Carl Albert, the very capable whip from Oklahoma.
With the kind of problems we now face, however, it has become increasingly evident that unity on a national, "non-partisan" basis is not enough. The point has been reached where something akin to an international non-partisanship must be developed. By this I mean that a more effective relationship must be achieved between ourselves and friendly democracies, so that we may avoid a repetition of the appalling sequence we have witnessed in the Suez area. There are more rewarding pastimes than to continue our incredible unpopularity contest with the Soviets in France and England.

Policies of the western democracies during the past few years and particularly with respect to the Middle East question have given the appearance of a kind of diplomatic tower of Babel. It is time for all to try to act with something approaching a singleness of purpose, even if we cannot speak with one tongue, if we are to avoid further disaster. In this respect, the Communist orbit has one important advantage. It knows where it is going. That has repeatedly been made clear to us, just as Hitler's purposes were made clear in Mein Kampf. In contrast, the United States and its western Allies have had little common perception of where we are going, and still less of an agreed idea on how to get there. If we had, some of the recent defeats might have been avoided. What is even worse, too many of us do not seem to be aware that we have suffered these defeats at all. It is in this, I believe, that the real danger lies.

If we compare the relative position of the United States - and the West - with the Soviet Union, we will have to concede that the Western position has deteriorated. Anyone who doubts this need only review on the map the gains
made by the Soviets, at the expense of the West. The most recent of these, after almost two centuries of effort, was in the Middle East. The Communists are in there with both feet, without the use of military force, and despite the so-called "northern tier" defense system. If reports concerning the Syrian arms build up are correct, the Kremlin may well have succeeded in turning the flank of the Baghdad nations without firing a shot. This paramount factor is going to influence and direct our policy action in that area for the foreseeable future.

What is most tragic about this crisis is that it did not descend upon us suddenly. There was every reason to anticipate it; and there was a great deal we might have done to prevent it. It had been germinating for several years, ever since the Israeli-Egyptian armistice agreement.

For the United States, it is a sorry illustration of the failure of a policy - or rather a lack of policy - since our abberations in this area hardly qualify as a policy. There has been temporizing. Politics, domestic and international, have been played. We have done everything so it seems to me, except face up to the problem and take the minimal steps necessary to keep peace in the Middle East.

It is all very well to say, as has been said by the Administration, that we seek our answer to the difficult problems of the Middle East through the United Nations. And it is all very well to find, as a distinguished, able and outstanding Republican Senator did find in discussions before this group, that the United Nations has fundamental weaknesses. I think we can agree -- I know that I do -- with both the Administration and Senator Knowland. The Administration, as it says, has certainly placed a large part of our trust in
the United Nations to solve the Middle East dilemma. And the United Nations, in dealing with this and other problems, as Senator Knowland says, has displayed basic inadequacies.

Both the Administration and Senator Knowland, in my opinion, are correct but where does that leave us? If we are going to find the answer to this question, I believe we have to start by accepting the premise of the President and the Secretary of State that peace, stability and the preservation of the independence of the nations of the Middle East is in our vital national interests. We ought then ask ourselves whether we were correct in entrusting such a large measure of the defense of our vital interests in the Middle East to the United Nations which as Senator Knowland correctly says, has basic structural weaknesses?

Where, then do we go from there? It seems to me that we must either reassume part of the defense of those interests ourselves or seek to correct some of the basic structural weaknesses in the United Nations. I regret to say that I have seen no evidence of an eagerness on the part of the Executive Branch of the government to do one or the other.

On the contrary, that Branch seems willing to content itself on the one hand with sending to Congress an urgent resolution which on its own admission is directed at no immediate danger or difficulty in the Middle East. On the other hand, it continues to rely solely on the United Nations in dealing with the immediate and difficult problems of that area.

That seems to me to be a formula for inertia, for drift, dodge and delay and ultimately for disaster. It is a policy which would make the United
Nations the scapegoat for our irresponsibility. A scapegoat may relieve the Executive Branch of a sense of frustration in this situation, but it will hardly serve the interests of the United States. Either the Middle East is or is not vital to these interests. If it is, as the President says it is, then we had better defend those interests through the United Nations or otherwise.

The tendency to impose tasks on the United Nations beyond its capacities, then to bemoan the inadequacies of that organization but to take no initiative in their correction can ultimately bring us to only one end. This tendency, if persisted in, will eventually destroy even the limited capacity which the United Nations now possesses for constructive action. Before we are much further along this road, I think we had better stop for a moment to consider the consequences. I think we had better decide whether it is in the interests of the United States -- our long-range interests -- to continue in that direction.

My own view is that it is a highly dangerous direction. It is not, as some may think, the road of return to a secure national isolation. Scientific developments of the past two decades have closed off all roads back in that direction. Rather, it is the road to isolated internationalism; it is the road to the disastrous delusion of omnipotent national power.

The position I have assumed with regard to the President's proposal on the Middle East is related very directly to this matter. I have been critical of this proposal. While I accepted the premise on which it is based, namely, that developments in the Middle East involve the vital interests of the United States, I do not accept fully the manner in which the President has proposed to protect them.
It has seemed to me that two basic steps are essential if these interests are to be protected. First, we must be prepared to reassume that portion of the responsibility which we have shifted to the United Nations which is beyond its present capacity; and, I may add parenthetically, that within our government we must apportion the reasserted responsibility as between the Executive Branch and Congress more strictly in accord with the Constitution so as to avoid a misuse of power. Second, we must be prepared to enlarge the capacity of the United Nations to discharge responsibilities in the Middle East and elsewhere if the enlargement can be brought about. To that end I have proposed an amendment to the President's resolution which would make clear our support of the United Nations Emergency Force in the Middle East as a force for peace in that area. I have also proposed an amendment which would make clear our initiative in seeking international control of the present unrestricted arms traffic in the Middle East one of the principal causes of the tension in that region.

The Western nations face a serious predicament in the Middle East and we are not entirely without responsibility for it. Today, Suez is in hostile hands --that is, hands hostile to the West. French strength is dispersed in Algeria, bogged down in a revolt. The British are gone from the Canal area--with our encouragement--without retaining adequate guaranties for freedom of maritime transit. The supply of Europe's vital fuel is thus delivered over to the caprice of one Middle Eastern nation, which has yet to display a sense of its international responsibility. With the current drain on world shipping resulting from this situation, where would we be if another Korea broke out somewhere in the world? Is there not something
incongruous in a policy which produces this kind of a result, a policy which alienates our friends and invites the Soviets to give aid to the Arab nations?

No American can take satisfaction over this unhappy record. Recriminations over how we got to the present point would be futile. On the other hand, an examination of the steps which led to the disaster, from the beginning could contribute to the formulation of future policy. What is essential is that we should recognize what has happened for what it really is: a serious setback for the West. And we must begin without delay to repair the damage.

With respect to the Arab world, further penetration by the Soviet Union is not only possible, but inevitable unless we bring our energies to a solution of the issues which have plagued the Middle East since 1948; unless we base our actions upon principle and not upon expediency; and unless we can persuade all the nations in the Middle East that we have no desire to replace Britain and France in the vacuum we helped to create.

It must, instead, be made clear to them, by every means at our command, that our objective is the preservation of their independence -- and not necessarily only their independence of Russian communism. That is the menace today. Tomorrow the menace may arise elsewhere.

With respect to Western Europe, it is imperative to restore the former confidence which has been shattered and to rebuild the foundations of mutual understanding. This applies to all relations with our allies, including their problems with dependent territories. It is well and good to support bona fide nationalist movements and the natural desire of peoples to be independent. Let us take care, however, to avoid paths which conflict
with our vital interests.

Of the many lines of action we might follow, there is one that should be pursued immediately. I believe we should do what we can to enable Europe to reassert its former influence in the councils of the world. We can do this by encouraging the nations of Europe to draw together in closer association. Separately, each of these nations has lost much of its former authority in international affairs. Drawn together in a common enterprise, the collectivity of Europe can once again exert the power which is commensurate with its magnificent heritage and the great capacities of its inhabitants.

We should also give very serious thought to encouraging a pooling of the economic and technological resources of Western Europe and the development of close ties ourselves with that pool. It is almost ludicrous that the western nations should be withholding their markets and technical processes from each other, while bidding against themselves for the Kremlin's trade.

Such is exactly what the Communists want. Europe's leaders may be coming to see this. They are, at the moment, continuing negotiations to establish a common market through the elimination of trade barriers. I consider this an important first step which the United States should support; but it is only a first step to that cooperation which must exist among the nations of Europe and with the United States. We can only achieve it, if we proceed with an urgency of purpose, recognizing that, in truth, we are met upon a major battleground.
History may well look back upon this moment as the period of one of those critical shifts in power upon which the destiny of civilization is hinged. It rests with us whether the future will witness a further decline of the Western democracy, or whether by our great heritage and by our resolve we can turn back the totalitarian march toward world domination.