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A Time for Decision in Foreign Policy

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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conflict. It will not matter then, that we have managed in the year 1957 to cling to an illusion of peace. In the end, this illusion, this delicate balance on which the fate of humanity rests will be upset by some miscalculation, perhaps by some act of madness. In the end this truce of mutual terror will give way to the terror of a war of mutual extinction.

The time for dawdling with peace, in short, is running out. The chance for moving to consolidate it may be soon or never. I do not know what course other nations may take in these circumstances. I do know that if a genuine opportunity does develop which promises to reduce the present dangers of a nuclear catastrophe to all nations, if there is an opportunity to build greater international stability, it must not be lost through inertia or other shortcomings in our own policies.

It must not be lost, because a reliable peace - I emphasize the word "reliable" - is in the interests of the people of this state, in the interests of the people of the nation and of all humanity. That kind of peace is essential if a significant reduction in the cost of government is ever going to be made. It is essential if the ominous cloud of impending doom which now hangs over civilization is ever to lift. It is essential if the people of this country and of all countries are ever going to be reasonably certain that what they build today is not going to be blasted into eternity tomorrow.

Let me say that I believe we have been moving in recent months in the direction of a policy which will enable this country to seize the opportunity to strengthen peace if it should be present. The Eisenhower-Dulles policy of

expanding commercial and other contacts with Poland, for example, may offer a greater promise of increased independence in Eastern Europe than the pattern of sympathetic words and bold words but no action that was followed in Hungary. And greater independence in Eastern Europe, in my opinion, is essential to peace on that continent. In recent months, we have also seen the Eisenhower Doctrine, as amended by the Senate, act to bring a measure of temporary stability to the Middle East. This measure is an expensive and not very satisfactory stop-gap. While it has by no means dealt with the basic difficulties in that region, it has at least bought time in which to deal with these difficulties. In the interests of our own peace, we have had no choice but to sustain this so-called Doctrine. Unless the Administration uses the time that has been bought, however, uses it effectively to tackle the basic problems of our relations in the Middle East, we shall be asked to go on paying an ever higher price and in the end be no closer to stability in that region.

In recent months, finally, we have also had the base laid for improvements in the foreign aid program and the information program, both very important instruments of foreign policy. The changes in these programs, initiated largely by the Congress, have already resulted in the saving of hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds. They have also shown the way to a more effective use of these programs.

Despite these and other improvements, however, I believe much remains to be done before we obtain a policy that is well adjusted to the realities of the present world situation, the kind of policy that best serves the interests of

the people of the United States. We have yet to take fully into consideration, for example, the problems and possibilities inherent in the emergence of a common market in Western Europe and the institution of Euratom for the common development of nuclear energy in that region. We have yet to develop an adequate diplomacy and other substitutes for what promises to be the endless funneling of hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds into the Middle East under the Eisenhower Doctrine. We have yet to face up fully to the implications of the different directions in which the force of liberation are acting in Eastern Europe - in Yugoslavia, in Hungary, in Poland and elsewhere. We have yet to recognize fully that disarmament, however desirable, lies at the end of the road to peace not at the beginning. We have yet to take the initiative in attempting to move down this road by slow and careful steps, by gradually bringing armaments under firm control, by gradually breaking down the wall of human fears and suspicions built by a lack of civil contact between ourselves and other peoples.

We have yet to recognize, finally, that changes of deep and long-range significance are taking place in the Far East while the policy of this nation remains wedded to the fears and distortions of the past. If I digress on this point it is because the Far Eastern question has special significance for you ladies and gentlemen here tonight.

In the situation that is developing in Asia, it seems to me highly desirable that the activities of American newsmen be extended as far as possible. As it is now the public information which comes to us from China amounts either to official press handouts of our own government and the Chinese

Communists or the reports of journalists of other countries. As one who prefers the press of this nation to that of other nations, as one who has often found a greater accuracy in the American press than in government press releases, I am opposed to any policy which seeks to curb the activities of the press or the free movement of its legitimate representatives.

I recognize the difficulties of the Secretary of State in attempting to determine whether press representatives should be allowed to go to China. Since it is the policy of the Department of State not to permit Americans generally to go to China, *-- and I am in accord with that view --* newsmen ought not, in the view of the Department, to go either. I believe that that position is now changing because it is untenable. In matters related to informing the people of the United States, the press is in a special position, clearly safeguarded by the Constitution.

Even though the Executive Branch may change its position, the issue remains and it is much larger than the question of whether or not a handful of reporters shall be allowed to enter China. The issue is whether the press shall play in matters of foreign policy the same role that it plays in domestic questions. To put the question bluntly: is the press in matters of foreign policy an instrument of policy or an independent check on policy, an independent enlightener of the people of the United States?

It seems to me that under our system of government the press must exercise, in foreign policy, the same independence as it does in domestic matters. Under our system of government, it is not for the Congress and certainly not for the Executive Branch to decide where legitimate representatives

of the press shall go to get the news. If they are alert newsmen they will go wherever they can. If they are willing to take the real risks of unsanctioned travel in dangerous regions abroad they are performing a very real and courageous service for the people of the nation. They most certainly ought not to be subject to punishment or threat of reprisal from the government or any of its officials for their courage. It is bad enough, as you well know, when other governments place obstacles in the path of legitimate news gathering abroad. It is indefensible when those obstacles arise from the policies and actions of our own government.

Before concluding, I should like to turn to one other shortcoming which I believe must be corrected if this country is going to have the kind of foreign policy that fully serves the interests of the people of the United States. It is, in some respects, the most fundamental, the most costly and, in the last analysis, the most dangerous shortcoming of present policy.

I refer to the tendency within the Executive Branch to base the international actions of this country almost exclusively on fear of the Russians. Fear as a factor in international relations is not much different than it is in human relations. If it is excessive, if it is out of proportion to the danger which induces it, fear may produce unnecessary and excessive action and, in some instances, it will prevent reasonable and necessary action.

For years, I have listened in Congress to officials of the Executive Branch, under both Democratic and Republican Administrations - officials of the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Voice of America and

countless other agencies - justify their requests for ever-increasing appropriations. Many of these requests have had high constructive merit in terms of the interests of the United States and I have not hesitated to vote for them. Yet, increasingly, the element of fear has been brought in to justify these requests. These justifications have sometimes reached a point where it has seemed that the Executive Branch has been acting in foreign policy preponderantly on the basis of two fears: fear of what the Russians might do in the world and fear of what Congress might do to appropriations if there were no Russians to fear.

Certainly this country must maintain a healthy concern with the threat which communism poses to freedom. Certainly there are continuing dangers to the peace and wellbeing of this country and other countries in the totalitarian power of the Soviet Union and in the erratic, unpredictable and frequently ruthless behavior of its rulers.

There is also a danger, however, in the tendency on the part of the Executive Agencies to inflate this fear, whether the inflation derives from an eagerness to insure appropriations or from simple miscalculation. This inflation can only lead as it has been leading to a costly and futile effort to build absolute security in a non-existent Fortress Free world. It can also lead, as it has also been leading among the people of the United States, to a revulsion with these excesses and to the unwarranted expectation that we may be able to obtain absolute security more cheaply in a Fortress America.

There is no likelihood, in my opinion, that this country or any country will find absolute security regardless of what course is pursued, regardless of how much is spent or done to that end. There are, however, degrees of insecurity and I believe that an effective foreign policy can lower the degree of insecurity. It can reduce the international dangers under which we all live and labor. It can do so at the same time that it lightens the burden of government expenditures all of us sustain because of these dangers.

Foreign policy can act in this fashion, however, only if the judgments of the international situation on which it is based are not distorted by a stimulated and excessive fear. It can do so only if the actions which are pursued under that policy are effectively adjusted to the real situation, the actual dangers that confront the nation.

That is why I emphasize tonight that I believe it is time for the Executive Branch to put aside the excess of fear that has underlain much of our policy in recent years. It is time to recognize that if Russia is strong in a material sense, this nation is and can remain stronger provided it is united and properly led. It is time to recognize that if there are dangers to freedom in the ideology of communism, there are even greater dangers to communism in the doctrines of liberty.

What I am suggesting, in short, is that foreign policy if it is to serve fully the interests of the people of this country, must be based less on fear and more on faith. I do not speak of faith in the Russians or even of excessive faith

in allies. I speak rather of faith in ourselves, in the intelligence, the courage and the steadfastness of the people of this country and faith in the power and in the ultimate triumph of freedom throughout the world. It is on that faith that this nation has grown to greatness. It is on that faith that we must depend, that we can depend, to find the way to a just and enduring peace.