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Statement of Senator Mansfield

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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3/18/58

Mr. President:

Once again the United States has been placed on the defensive in the cold war. Once again we find ourselves in a position where we must explain, and justify, and stammer.

This situation would be deplorable enough if it resulted from a weakness in our position. But it is even more tragic than that. The fact is that we led our weakest cards from a position of strength.

This morning's New York Times carries an article by a distinguished diplomatic correspondent, E. W. Kenworthy. The headline over this article is very revealing. It says:

"U. S. Aides Concede Soviet Space Plan is Propaganda Gain."

This article quotes our own officials as saying that the Soviet proposal for United Nations control of outer space was a brilliantly conceived, executed and timed propaganda stroke. And it is difficult to disagree in honesty with that estimate.

The fact that the Soviet proposal is merely a mask for unacceptable conditions will be little noticed by the world anxious for peace. The impact will be simply that the Soviet Union wishes to use outer space for peace while the United States hesitates and stands firm only on negative proposals.

(more)

Mr. President, there is no excuse for this situation. The potentialities of outer space for bringing peace to this world were first stated by the Senate Majority Leader, Lyndon B. Johnson, on January 14 of this year in a public statement. He said, and I quote:

"Further, it would be appropriate and fitting for our nation to demonstrate its initiative before the United Nations by inviting all member nations to join in this venture into outer space together."

This statement struck a responsive chord in the breasts of people everywhere. On January 31, United Nations General Assembly President, Sir Leslie Munro, suggested a United Nations conference of scientists and diplomats to study control of outer space. He said, at the time, that the world was looking for someone to bring the issue to the United Nations.

On February 3, the Senate Majority Leader once again spoke on this question -- this time to the Senate. His words are well worth recalling and I wish to quote a few paragraphs from his statement:

"There is no point in deluding ourselves that 'we' can just call off the arms race on our own initiative. There is no point in debating why 'they' do not call off the arms race at their own initiative.

(more)

"The only worthwhile discussion is what is said in the effort to find ways and means of breaking the log-jam -- of bringing the tragedy of the cold war to an end.

"This is the time to act -- now, while the satellites are searching for facts instead of for targets.

"I would hope that our leaders would give urgent consideration to a proposal for joint exploration of outer space by the United Nations. I would hope that this proposal could be pressed earnestly, vigorously and with all the sincerity at our command.

"No one would stand to lose by this proposal. The alternative is a disorderly arms race which can end only in death and destruction."

Mr. President, had those words been heeded at that time, we would not find ourselves in our present predicament. We would be standing before the world in our true garb -- that of the nation which desires peace and which is willing to take the necessary steps.

Instead, we have blundered into the world of George Orwell in which the aggressor carries the banner of the peacemaker and the peacemaker is forced to carry the banner of the aggressor. It would be a great mistake to underestimate the impact of such propaganda on the uncommitted portions of the world.

(more)

Mr. President, no one of us carries a crystal ball which actively predicts the future. We can only hope that the historians who describe that future after it has happened will not describe this particular chapter of American history as the age of timidity and defeat.

A proposal was advanced by the Senate Majority Leader. The President's special adviser on disarmament endorsed it. The Senate Minority Leader said he thought outer space should be handled by the United Nations. The Secretary of State said the idea was under study.

And then the Soviet picked up the ball and ran with it -- dangerously close to a touchdown.

Mr. President, the stakes are enormous. They include the future of our nation. They also include the concept of freedom as a social system whereby the affairs of mankind can be conducted.

We cannot forever depend upon a provident God to save a people whose leadership handles so lightly the responsibilities which have been entrusted to it.

The responsibility here is plain. Congress can propose and Congress can authorize. But only the Executive branch can conduct the foreign policy of this nation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the record as part of my remarks the article by Mr. Kenworthy of the New York Times and the statement made by the Senate Majority Leader on February 3.