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ADDRESS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

Commencement Exercises

Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington

Sunday, May 24, 1959

THE GERMAN CONFERENCES AND PEACE

As you know, there is a conference of foreign ministers in progress in Geneva. This conference is likely to be followed in the summer by a meeting of heads of states. In short, we are embarked on what may prove to be extended negotiations in an effort to untangle the problems of peace which have accumulated in the wake of World War II.

We cannot foresee how long this process of negotiation may go on. Nor can we predict what it is likely to produce in the end. It is sufficient to the moment, however, if the negotiations represent a serious effort to make a start in cutting through the jungle of sterile slogans in which the problems of Germany and Central Europe have been so long enmeshed. It is sufficient if a serious effort is made to find, in this jungle, the clearings of reason, the areas of adjustment of bonafide interests.

Negotiations on an international issue are never a simple process and the problem of Germany is most complex. Sometimes, as we discovered at the opening of the Geneva Conference, it is even difficult to decide whether the negotiators are to sit at a round table, a square table or at separate tables. Some of the issues which must still be dealt with are going to be, I can assure you, a lot more perplexing than that. At stake in the current negotiations may well be the future of many nations, the freedom of Europe and the peace of the world.

The task which confronts our new Secretary of State in these negotiations, therefore, is one of the most demanding which can fall to any man in public life.

I have no wish to add to his burdens by anything that I may say here today or, indeed, at any time. Let me stress that I have every confidence in the ability, the experience and the patriotism of Secretary Christian Herter. This sentiment, I may add, is shared by the entire Senate. Just a few weeks ago we confirmed his appointment by a vote of 93 to 0.

When Secretary Herter, as the representative of the President, speaks in Geneva, he is speaking for all of us. Let there be no doubt on that score either abroad or at home. Under the Constitution, it is the President and his designated representatives who conduct the foreign policy of the United States. The Senate advises in this process and, in the last analysis, it must consent. It is the President, however, directly or through his representatives, who must speak and act on behalf of the rest of us.

That does not mean that Senators do not have, in their individual capacities or as a body, any concern in matters of foreign policy. On the contrary they have a responsibility to consider any problem which affects--as foreign policy does--the fortunes, the happiness, the very survival of the people of the United States. Senators have an obligation to inform, to

debate, to try to make a constructive contribution to the solution of such problems. They have a clear-cut duty to speak out on these problems, when conscience and reason compels, to speak out notwithstanding the fear of censure or the political attractions of silence.

May I say that many Members of the Senate have spoken out on the German situation in recent months and the impact of their words, I believe, has been felt in a constructive fashion in the basic policies from which we are now negotiating in Geneva.

I, myself, had occasion to advance certain ideas on Germany last February in the Senate. I did so because I was persuaded, then, that we were drifting dangerously into crisis through a reluctance to face changes in the German situation and a reticence to make adjustments in our policies to meet these changes. I have discussed German problems on several occasions since that time. I propose to speak of them again today. I do so because these problems are of special concern to you graduates. It is your generation which will bear the heaviest consequences of any failure of my generation to deal competently with them.

Background of the German Conferences

Let me point out at the outset that in present circumstances, there are several regions of the world in which there exists a serious potential of conflict. War can begin in the Far East. It can begin in the Middle East. It can begin in Germany and Central Europe, the area which I propose to discuss with you now.

I put this fact--this grim fact--to you bluntly. I do so because I am satisfied that as mature and responsible Americans you do not need to be spoon-fed on reassurances that all is right with the world. I do so, too, because I believe the tragedy of war is best prevented by facing its possibilities in a realistic fashion, by weighing these possibilities carefully, by acting on them honestly and in good time.

I will not hold out to you the comforting thought that nuclear war, being too terrible to contemplate is therefore too destructive to be fought. As a former teacher of history I find this thought--despite its considerable currency--completely illusory. It is unsupported by the historic experience of mankind.

War can come today as it has come many times in the past. It can come by the design of madness and aggression. It can come by accident or miscalculation, despite a basic desire of all to avoid it. It can be a limited conflict, as in Korea,

or it can be of an extent which will reduce to radioactive ruin the legacy of several thousand years of human civilization.

It is against this background, it seems to me, that the present conference in Geneva and any others on Germany which may follow must be seen. The danger of conflict in the German situation is real. It will not be dissolved by ignoring the reality. It will not be dissolved by a breast-beating bravado. Nor will it be dissolved by protestations of peace on all sides, while the clouds of conflict continue to gather.

One cannot say at this time with any certainty whether it will be possible to end or even to reduce significantly the danger of war in Germany and Central Europe. To find out the chances for doing so is, after all, the underlying purpose of the present conference.

It seems to me, however, that if there is to be a valid hope for a more durable peace, it is to be found in an accurate identification of the sources from whence the danger of war arises. Then, if the will to peace is present in all, or, to put it another way, if there exists a sincere desire on the part of all to continue to live in a recognizable civilization, there will be a common effort to abate, control or eliminate these sources. That common effort will take the form of frank and honest negotiations, negotiations which can produce conditions of peace through mutual restraint, through concessions which match concessions.

Sources of Conflict in Germany

Let me try first to describe for you the principal sources of potential conflict in Germany. It is a dangerous over-simplification, it seems to me, to see the danger of war in that country solely in terms of the diabolical doings of our opponents. That is a child-life or, if you will, a propagandistic interpretation of the facts of international life. To be sure the Soviet Union is ruthless in the way it strives to expel freedom from all of Germany. Indeed, the Russian rulers will leave, unturned, no stone which they can lift-- not only in Germany but anywhere in the world in order to undermine freedom. In recognizing that, however, let us not overlook in all honesty our own desire to terminate Soviet influence in Germany and our own antipathy to communism wherever it may exist in the world.

To conclude that the Russians are the sole cause of the problem in Germany is to ape the practices of Soviet propaganda which have held that the problem is due solely to the machinations of the United States and other Western nations. A mutual finger-pointing of this kind may relieve feelings. It may fill both sides with self-righteousness. It does not abate the danger in Germany and Central Europe. The threat of

war remains and it is a threat not only to the well-being of Russians but of Americans as well and, indeed, of all humanity.

We shall get closer to the reality if we see the problem not as a one-sided matter but, in part, as a mutual repulsion between freedom and communism, a repulsion which has led to a cold war fought largely without Marquis of Queensbury rules. That cold war, acting as it does, to keep a high state of tension in Germany is, indeed one of the major sources of the potential conflict.

But let us go on from there. Let us recognize, too, that the danger of war also derives from the close and unstable contact of hostile and ever-more powerfully armed military forces--Western and Communist--in a divided Germany and, particularly, in a divided Berlin. The contact, at any time, can produce as it has, local military incidents or clashes. It is far from inconceivable that such incidents, in this day of quickening countdowns, can precipitate a war of prestige, a war of accident which no nation really wants. It is risk enough when a war of annihilation can be set in motion by a calculated word from Moscow. It is risk beyond reason when it can be set off by the madness or misjudgment of any one of the many military commanders scattered through Germany.

Let us recognize, finally, that the danger of war in Germany derives in major part from still a third cause. It derives from the festering of a large collection of unsolved political problems in and around that nation. Principal among them is the continued division of Germany, fifteen years after the war, and the continuance of a status for that nation which while it is no longer one of war is not yet one of peace.

These unsolved problems are related to the ideological struggle between freedom and communism. They are related to the present juxtaposition of the armed forces of West and East. Perhaps most important, however, they stem from nationalist fears, rivalries, hopes and presumptions which have characterized international relations within Europe for generations.

All of these sources, then, contribute to the danger of war in and around Germany. Further, they pour their poisons into the relations among Europeans--East and West--heightening the estrangement between the two segments of the continent and acting to perpetuate the injustice suffered by millions who are still denied genuine national equality and basic political rights in Eastern Europe. Finally in the world at large, they conspire with other sources in the Middle East and in the Far East to keep the human race continuously on the edge of disaster.

Attitude Towards Conferences

It is with these sources of conflict in and around Germany--all three of them--that the present conference and those which may follow must come to grips. Unless they do so they will serve little useful purpose. On the contrary they can do much harm.

As I have already noted the period of negotiation on which we are now embarked may end quickly or it may go on for a long time. It may produce results in terms of a more durable peace or it may fail to do so. I daresay that the people of the world will understand and appreciate an honest try at achieving agreement even though its success may be limited. They will not understand, they will not appreciate a distortion of these conferences which turns the deepest of human hopes, the hope for a secure peace, into a finger-pointing exercise in self-righteousness, into a search for the hollow victories of propaganda war.

I believe our Secretary of State is off to an excellent start in Geneva. His remarks have been temperate and restrained. They indicate clearly our earnest desire for fruitful negotiations. I wish that I could say the same for the attitude manifested by the Soviet delegate.

Nevertheless, it will be well to reserve judgment on current negotiations until all the results are in. That

course seems to me best calculated to support the efforts of those who represent us at Geneva. That course is best calculated to aid in bringing about sensible agreements for peace.

Possible Results of the Conferences

Without straying from that course I believe it is possible to indicate to you the various directions in which these conferences can lead.

(1) These conferences can lead--again, let me be blunt--they can lead to a dead-end. There is no built-in guarantee of their success. They will certainly lead to a dead-end if propaganda advantage takes precedence over peace as the objective of any nation. They will certainly lead to that end if the words of conciliation are not encased in the acts of accommodation.

These conferences can fail, they will fail, if any nation seeks a unilateral victory in them. The fact of the matter is that either all will win, in the sense that they will strengthen their highest common interest in the survival of a recognizable civilization, or all will lose.

We will do well to recognize now the meaning of a failure of these conferences to us and to others. It does not follow that war will come the day after, a month after, a year

after. It does follow that there is likely to be an increase in the tension in and around Germany, as well as elsewhere in the world. It does follow that the cost to all of us and to others of cold war and of armaments will rise. It does follow that an ever-increasing segment of the material and manpower resources of all nations will be diverted to military purposes. I may note in this connection that 61 cents out of every one of our tax dollars that was spent by the federal government in 1958 went to maintain the defenses of the nation, and the fiscal experience of other leading countries is similar. It does follow, too, that if these conferences fail, the brink of war on which the world now walks is likely to become ever more narrow as the pressures of potential conflict, unrelieved, continue to pound relentlessly at the remaining footholds of peace.

(2) These conferences can lead in a second direction. If they follow this path they will appear not to have failed. They might even appear to have succeeded and yet they will not succeed. To put it another way, they may follow the pattern of the Geneva Conferences of Heads of State in 1955. You will recall that meeting and its consequences. It produced what seemed to be solutions but what, in fact, turned out to be generalizations on peace. It produced a momentary abatement in the cold war and with it, a grave readiness on

the part of free peoples to accept the illusion of peace as the actuality of peace. The real sources of conflict, scarcely touched at Geneva, continued to operate. And in the ensuing years we came very close to war in Suez, Lebanon and the off-shore islands of China. The cold war was resumed. The arms race intensified, with the West disadvantaged by its own laxity.

We shall repeat the pattern of Geneva-1955 in these current conferences only at the peril of heightening the danger of war in the future. We shall repeat it if we assume that the only threat to peace in the current crisis is Soviet pressure. The Russians may relax that pressure on Berlin for a month, six months, indeed, indefinitely. But if that is all that is produced by these conferences, the danger of war will not really be lifted. For as I tried to indicate at the outset the international problem in and around Germany is fed, not by Soviet diplomatic manoeuvring alone but by multiple sources.

(3) This suggests, then, the final direction in which these conferences can go. If the will to peace is genuine, if the negotiations are honest, however hard the bargaining, they need not end in failure. Nor need they end in an illusion of accord which masks a reality of discord. They can produce a pattern of evolving peace in and around Germany.

If you will recall the sources of conflict which I suggested earlier in my remarks, I believe you will see, readily, the nature of this pattern. There will be, not merely a momentary easing of Soviet pressure on West Berlin but a new interim status for the entire city of Berlin with a United Nations or some other form of international guarantee of its security until it is once again the capital of all Germany. There will be arrangements which will provide for the progressive unification of Germany and a progressive equalization of the public rights and duties of all Germans--East and West. There will be a progressive easement of the danger of war which now arises from the close contact of communist and free forces in Germany and from the accumulating power of the armaments--East and West, German and non-German in that region. There will be a progressive healing in all the relationships of the nations--East and West--of the divided continent of Europe.

May I say in this connection that I hope that the participation in the present meetings will continue to be limited to Russia, France, Britain and the United States and the Germans of both East and West. This limited membership seems to me the best way to progress, at this time, on the immediate problems of Germany, and I believe Secretary Herter is quite correct in insisting upon maintaining the limitation.

However, I do not think it is too soon to begin planning for a larger all-European conference. It is in such conference that the representatives of Poland, Czechoslovakia, of Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, indeed of all the European countries can make their voices heard on the problems of peace of Europe and, on other issues of primary interest to the people of that continent. I would hope, moreover, that in such a conference both the United States and the Soviet Union would remain in the background rather than in the foreground.

To return to the matter of the German conferences, I should like to emphasize that we cannot, alone, govern their outcome. We cannot, alone assure that they will move in a constructive direction. What the Russians do or do not do obviously will have a profound influence upon them. What the European nations, east and west, and the Germans, east and west, contribute to or detract from them--directly or indirectly--will have a profound influence on their outcome.

When that has been said, however, let us recognize that no single influence in these conferences will be greater than that of our country. Let us recognize that fact, not with arrogant pride but with a deep sense of humility, with a full awareness of the grave responsibility which it places

upon us. It will rest heavily with those who speak for the nation in these conferences--the President and the Secretary of State, to work with dedication to prevent these conferences from ending in failure. It will rest heavily with them to avoid creating the illusion of settlement when, in fact, there is no settlement. It will rest heavily with them to lead this nation in concert with others towards agreements for an equitable and evolving peace in Germany. If they do so lead they will not lack for support at home or from decent men and women throughout the world.