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Congressional Record

United States
of America

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 86th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Tribute to President Ngo Dinh Diem, of Vietnam, on "Double Seven"

SPEECH
OF

HON. MIKE MANSFIELD

OF MONTANA

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Tuesday, July 7, 1959

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, almost 5 years ago I was in Saigon, the capital of Vietnam, for the second of three visits. The visits spanned the years 1953 to 1955. Those were the years of crisis in Indochina. They were the years of transition from colonialism to independence, the years in which the military advance of Asian communism into the Indochinese Peninsula came to a halt.

I remember particularly the period September 1954, and conversations at that time with Ngo Dinh Diem, who had become Prime Minister of Vietnam just a few weeks earlier. Despite the impressive title which he held, Mr. Diem, for all practical purposes, was a prisoner in the palace in which we met. He had been given the job of saving South Vietnam from imminent collapse but little real power with which to do this job.

In those days, Saigon was a city of intrigue and counterintrigue, thick with rumors and counterrumors. The odds were heavily against the survival of a free Vietnamese state, and even heavier against the survival of Mr. Diem as its leader. His government had little or no support from the various groups with power to give. On the contrary, the political plotting of his downfall went on in army circles, Government circles, foreign circles, in party headquarters, in police headquarters and even in the demimonde of gangsters, pirates, and extortionists. Over the teacups, each group

chose his successor and some even had several candidates. All the while, the Vietminh Communists waited north of the 17th parallel and in hidden pockets throughout South Vietnam for the total collapse of the free state. Almost all observers at that time thought that they would not have very long to wait.

So serious was the situation that I was prompted to write in a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations—October 15, 1954—as follows:

Should the Diem government be forced out of office, it is doubtful that under the pressure of time a more satisfactory substitute, subscribing to the same principles, will be found. Yet, these principles (national independence, an end to corruption, internal amelioration) must prevail in South Vietnam, if an alternative to the Communist Vietminh that is likely to be acceptable to the people of Vietnam is to exist. In the event that the Diem government falls, therefore, I believe that the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature, preliminary to a complete reappraisal of our present policies in free Vietnam. Unless there is reasonable expectation of fulfilling our objectives, the continued expenditure of the resources of the citizens of the United States is unwarranted and inexcusable.

Fortunately for Vietnam and for the cause of freedom in Asia, Ngo Dinh Diem survived the intrigues and the plotting. American policy finally coalesced in support of him and the kind of decent, independent government which he was trying to establish.

Just a year later—October 6, 1955—I was able to report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, after a third visit to Vietnam, that—

The tide of totalitarian communism has slackened. A year ago it was on the verge

of overrunning the entire country and much of the rest of Southeast Asia. That threat has now been reduced. There is today a reasonable chance of the survival and development of a free Vietnam. It should be emphasized, however, that what has been gained during the past year is a chance not a guarantee. It has been gained largely through the dedication and courage of Ngo Dinh Diem.

I have not been in Vietnam since 1955. All reports indicate, however, that Mr. Diem and the Vietnamese people have used well the slim chance of free survival and development which they had in 1954 and 1955. To be sure, the Vietnamese have had assistance from the United States and other free nations. But, Mr. President, a nation does not get out of the swamp of decadent rule, corruption, and war devastation of the kind which characterized Vietnam prior to 1954, except primarily by its own efforts and by its own leadership. Help may come from abroad but inspiration and dedication to the hard work of freedom must come from within.

Ngo Dinh Diem has been fortunate in having a steadfast and capable people such as the Vietnamese to lead, and they have been fortunate in having a man of Diem's vision, strength, and selflessness as their leader. We, in turn, and other free nations, have been fortunate in having grasped the opportunity to form an association with this young nation and its capable leader.

On July 7, 5 years will have passed since Ngo Dinh Diem took office as President of Vietnam. These years have brought internal stability and economic rehabilitation in Vietnam. They have brought the beginnings of a free government responsive to those governed in a country where no such government ever before existed.

It is a pleasure, therefore, on this July 7 celebration, this double seven, to recall from personal remembrance some of the stirring events which marked the foundation of the Republic of Vietnam. It is a privilege to extend greetings and best wishes to Mr. Diem and to Vietnam and to express the hope that the next half decade will witness still another great stride in the peaceful progress of the Vietnamese people.

Mr. SPARKMAN. Mr. President, I am glad that the distinguished Senator from Montana took the opportunity to make these remarks with reference to the fine young nation of South Vietnam which, in the years it has existed as a free and independent nation, has done so much toward furthering the cause of democracy. I join with him in extending greetings and best wishes to President Diem and those who are working with him and have been working with him during the few years South Vietnam has been an independent sovereignty.

I had the pleasure of visiting with President Diem on two or three different occasions. I was in that country in the fall of 1957. No one can visit there and see the things that are taking place, and talk with this dedicated public servant

who is the president of that Republic without having a good feeling as to the progress that is being made, at least by some countries, in that area of the world.

The little country of South Vietnam has done a remarkable job, as the Senator from Montana has pointed out, in taking hold of things and solving some of the most difficult problems. The Senator from Montana will recall that a great multitude of people moved in there from the Communist-held part of Vietnam, namely, North Vietnam. It was a stupendous job to assimilate those people and settle them in productive enterprise. I believe it has been an outstanding accomplishment.

We should feel proud of the part we played in helping that little country get started; but, as the Senator from Montana has pointed out, it could not have been done without the dedicated leadership which has been given to his people by the president of that country.

This is one of the countries which receives a goodly portion of the aid we give in the form of defense support. It has faced up to its responsibilities. It has overcome what many of us, in the beginning days, regarded as an impossible sit-

uation. I think it stands today as an outstanding example, and a great bastion of democracy and freedom in that part of the world.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. SPARKMAN. I yield to the Senator from New York.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. President, we hear a great deal about the attacks on our mutual security program, and about the areas where it has not done as much as was anticipated. Is not South Vietnam an outstanding example of the credit side of the ledger, so far as our mutual security program is concerned?

Mr. SPARKMAN. I think the question answers itself. It certainly is.

It is unfortunate that the few bad examples capture the headlines and the thinking and talking of so many people, when, as a matter of fact, as measured by the positive accomplishments, or the credit side of the ledger, as the Senator has so well stated, they are minor. Of course, they are bad. We admit that. We do everything we can to clear them up, but occasionally we should look at the credit side of the ledger. The Senator from New York has brought out a good point.

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