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Shooting Down of the U.S. Plane over Russia

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Mr. MANFIELD. Mr. President, I assume that at this time I may proceed for 6 minutes in addition to the time permitted under the order of the Senate, through a statement.

The VICE PRESIDENT. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MANFIELD. Mr. President, the facts in the plane incident are now becoming clear. They are not pleasant facts, and we shall do well to face them as the President and the Secretary of State are doing. Acknowledgment of the identity of the plane and its general purposes was the only honorable course to pursue in this situation. I commend both the President and Mr. Herter; and I commend the Soviet Premier, too, for his perspicacity in recognizing that the President had no advance knowledge of this action.

These attitudes may help to put the incident in the larger perspective of the critical need of mankind to find a way out of the deadly morass of incident nuclear war. The attitudes would appear to make possible the convening of the summit conference as scheduled and we should permit the President, if he so desired, to go to Russia this summer.

Let it not be assumed, however, that this incident will soon be forgotten and that, after a little while, we can go back to cold war as usual. I hope the Russians will begin to see themselves as grasping the larger and lasting significance of this incident. If I may say so, that signifies to be found in these acts on the immorality of spying. It is not for the Russians to lecture us on that subject. For there is spying and there is immorality and he who is with sin in this matter ought not to cast the first stone.

I shall not take the time of the Senate, nor Mr. Khrushchev's—if the remarks should come to his attention—to review the history of Soviet espionage in this country and throughout the world during the past quarter century. If one wishes to speak of immorality and provocations, there is more than enough to go around. But there is no point in taking recriminations out of the sorry ashes of the past.

That is precisely the point which this incident should bring home to the Russians no less than to ourselves. We are dealing in this incident, as in the many many espionage cases which have already been indulged in by all, not so much with acts of immorality, but with acts of desperation, with unwise, foolish acts, perhaps, but with the inevitable acts of mutual terror, which stem from the fearful situation into which the world has been allowed to drift.

That is the larger significance of this incident. We will make a great contribution to the peace of mankind if we recognize that significance rather than attempt to minimize the incident by proclaiming that the Russians have done wrong in the past. Khrushchev, too, will make a great contribution to the peace of mankind if he concentrates on the fearful world situation which gave rise to the incident. To do so, however, he will have to forego the urge to denounce the robbers of the pupit and deliver sermons on mankind's moral shortcomings, to resist the obvious temptation to milk this incident of the last drop of propaganda value.

That may be asking a great deal, for I cannot say in all honesty that we have done very well on this score in the past. Nevertheless, if the Russians, no less than ourselves, mean to have peace, if we mean to put an end to the fearful situation which gives rise to these incidents, then we, in so far as we, must make an end to the childlike, black-and-white, cowboy-and-Indian, gangster-and-policeman imagery of the world and its peoples and what transpires among them.

For us, for this Nation, there are other responsibilities—national reasons—why this incident cannot and must not be put aside lightly. There are implications in this incident which go to the very heart of our system of representative, responsible government.

The record will show that I have supported, as firmly as I have been able, the preservation of the primary powers of the Presidency, through Republican and Democratic administrations, in matters pertaining to the conduct of foreign policy and defense. The record is available in the debates on the Formosa resolution, on the Eisenhower resolution, and on other matters. That support, Mr. President, however, is contingent on the assumption that the powers of the Presidency would be exercised by the duly elected, duly constituted President. It is one thing to elect a popularly elected, popularly responsive President to exercise these enormous powers. It is another for the non-elected, nonresponsive bureaucracy to take upon itself these powers.

The President has made it quite clear that he had no knowledge of the flight of the plane involved in this incident. Yet somewhere in this Government, in some fashion, orders were given, a chain of command was followed. And the net result was to bring about the most serious damage to our efforts to promote peace.

The President has been underest a moment of world crisis. The worldwide adverse repercussions to the foreign policy of the United States have only begun, but they will be heard loudly and ominously from Norway to Japan. Moreover, this incident or any other of this kind might well have incidently set off the holocaust of nuclear conflict which we have been striving at great cost and sacrifice to prevent.

All of these consequences—these damaging consequences—have derived from the exercise of the powers of the Presidency in foreign relations and defense. But the powers have been exercised without the knowledge of the President and, as far as I am aware, without the knowledge of even a member of the Cabinet. These consequences, in short, may well have derived not from an act of responsible representative government, but from what on other occasions I have tried to define as government by agency rivalry or agency accommodation.

It is this problem to which the plane incident compels us to address our attention firmly and relentlessly. The President played no part in the particular incident, but the administration, any administration, nevertheless, does bear a grave responsibility, for it is incumbent upon us to provide politically responsible leadership to, and to popularly responsible control over, the bureaucracy. Nor is Congress without responsibility. For while the administration conducts the foreign relations and defense of the Nation, Congress can and does color this conduct in providing for the agencies which serve the President in this connection.

The need, now, as it long has been, is to see to it that the actions of the agencies of this Government reflect the foreign policy which should be laid down by the President through the Secretary of State. The need is to see to it that when the President and the Secretary of State give voice to policies of peace, no agency or its servants serve to undermine them. It is a responsibility which will test the will of everyone, at any rate, in the executive branch of this Government, at the ground of irresponsibility which gives rise to incidents of this kind, and put an end to the before irreparable damage is done to the freedom and safety of the Nation and to the prospects for peace.