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Recommended Citation

Mansfield, Mike 1903-2001, "Memo - Sending Troops to Vietnam - Opposed" (1961). *Mike Mansfield Speeches, Statements and Interviews*. 453.

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Nov 1961

MEMORANDUM

The question of the possibility of sending American troops to Viet-Nam has occurred a number of times in the past. First, in 1954, at the time of the battle of Dienbienphu, then last May, when the Vice President made his visit to Southeast Asia, and most recently, on the occasion of General Maxwell Taylor's visit to Viet-Nam. In my opinion, this is a matter which should be approached with the greatest caution.

On several occasions we have made commitments using our own troops, while the Russians have carefully avoided using theirs. The sending of American armed forces to Viet-Nam may be the wrong way too, and probably would be, because on a man-for-man basis, the Chinese Communists, who might well be drawn into the fray, could outmatch us many times. If American combat units land in Viet-Nam, it is conceivable that the Chinese Communists would do the same. With shorter lines of communication and transportation, with much more manpower available, Viet-Nam, on that basis, could become a quicksand for us. Furthermore, it would weaken our military capability in Berlin and Germany and again leave the Russians uncommitted. It appears to me that American combat troops in South Viet-Nam could be misinterpreted in the minds of millions of Southeast Asians and could well be considered as a revival of colonial force.

While Viet-Nam is very important, we cannot hope to substitute armed power for the kind of political and economic social changes that

offer the best resistance to communism. If the necessary reforms have not been forthcoming over the past seven years to stop communist subversion and rebellion, then I don't see how American combat troops can do it today. I would wholeheartedly favor, instead, a substantial increase of American military and economic aid to Viet-Nam, but leave the responsibility of carrying the physical burden of meeting communist infiltration, subversion, and attack on the shoulders of the South Viet-Nameese, whose country it is and whose future is their chief responsibility.