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Congressional Record re: Armed Services Committee and Reserve Forces

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

Mr. President:

The President of France, General Charles de Gaulle, is in Africa on a journey which will take him around the world. He will soon be in Cambodia. Towards the end of his journey, he will pass through the Americas for a pause at Basse-Terre on the French island of Guadelupe in the Caribbean.

General de Gaulle's visit to Cambodia is of particular interest and importance. His meeting with the Cambodian Chief of State brings together Europe's elder statesman and an authentic popular leader of Southeast Asia. The two leaders will be meeting in what is an oasis of peace and enlightened progress in Southeast Asia. Since achieving independence, Prince Sihanouk has led Cambodia to an outstanding success in modern nation-building. That estimate, may I say, is based, in part, on first-hand observations during several visits. The first visit was 13 years ago, in 1953, a year before Cambodian independence. And the most recent was in December 1965, in the company of several distinguished colleagues (Senators Aiken, Muskie, Boggs, and Inouye).

General de Gaulle and Prince Sihanouk will come together at Phnom Penh in a personal atmosphere of high mutual esteem, trust, and understanding. These two statesmen have been through the great postwar French colonial transition. Indeed, both played major roles in bringing about the transition. Both have surmounted the bitterness which inevitably accompanied it. Both have done much to salvage and to restore what was culturally constructive in the relationship of France and Cambodia.
The meeting between the two leaders, therefore, will mean a great deal to their respective countries. It could also be, moreover, of profound importance to the world. It is a unique occasion for an exchange of views. There will be an opportunity for a close-up review of the devastating war in Viet Nam and the prospects for bringing it to a close. In fact, their meeting will be an imperative as well as an opportunity for such a review. General DeGaulle and Prince Sihanouk owe that review to their respective countries. They owe it to the people of the world.

Cambodia and France have great national interests in the prompt restoration of peace in Viet Nam. Cambodia's stake, in the end, may be as fundamental as national survival in peace, because there is the grim prospect of a spill-over of the war in Viet Nam into Cambodia and all of Southeast Asia. For France, the stake in peace in Viet Nam is the opportunity to give a magnificent new expression to her historic relationship with all three Indochinese nations now that the earlier ties have been freed from the fetters of colonialism. France, moreover, as a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, has a special responsibility to play a constructive role wherever in the world its influence may be brought to bear for peace.

It would appear that both Prince Sihanouk and General DeGaulle already tend to see the problem of Viet Nam in similar perspective. Both are fully aware, moreover, of the inter-relationship of that problem with the broader question of a secure peace in Southeast Asia. Some years ago, General DeGaulle called for neutralization of the entire region, and the full implications of that concept have never been adequately explored.
Prince Sihanouk has expressed similar thoughts. He understands the problems of neutral national survival in Southeast Asia, in a way which can be taught only by first-hand experience. Cambodia is, along with Burma, an effective example of a nation which has managed to live in a progressive independence preponderantly by self-effort and without a one-sided dependence for aid or anything else on any outside nation.

It should be noted that most of the diplomatic channels which may lead ultimately to peace in Viet Nam are open to France and Cambodia. Both are signatories of the Geneva Accords, and are competent, if such is indicated, to call for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference. Both have diplomatic relations with Peking and full access to Hanoi, if the need is for preliminary explorations. Both can arrange ample contact with the leadership of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam. In short, whatever road promises best to lead to negotiations for peace, these two nations are in a position to follow it.

Insofar as the United States is concerned, moreover, the doors are open for any suggestion which may be advanced by President DeGaulle and Prince Sihanouk. The fact is that this nation is not unaware that what began as a limited and local conflict in Viet Nam among Vietnamese has evolved into a major war in which outside nations, and the United States in particular, are increasingly the focus of the struggle. That evolution is already a disaster for the Vietnamese people, north and south; it can readily become a disaster for all of Southeast Asia, if not for the entire world.
So, I repeat, whatever suggestions may emerge from the DeGaulle-Sihanouk meetings will be welcomed. I am confident that if there are suggestions, they will be considered with the utmost of thoughtfulness and respect by this government and weighed by the President with the greatest of care.

There are many potential and acceptable routes to peace in Viet Nam. In my judgement, there can be a U.N. approach, a neutral-nations approach, an all-Asian approach, a Geneva approach, or a direct and limited confrontation, public or private, between any or all of the belligerents. The approach is relevant, but it is certainly not fundamental. What is fundamental is the need to stop the conflict, to forestall its enlargement by whatever approach promises best to supply the first effective step to the restoration of a satisfactory and honorable peace at the soonest possible moment.

I would express, most respectfully, the hope that the DeGaulle-Sihanouk meetings would be addressed, in part at least, to that fundamental question.

I would express the further hope that a personal meeting between President DeGaulle and President Johnson might be feasible at some subsequent time. In a matter of such fundamental importance as the restoration of peace and the future not only of Viet Nam but of Indochina and Southeast Asia, a direct communication between the President of France and the President of the United States would certainly appear warranted. I do not know if arrangements could be made at this time for this purpose. It may be, however, that the scheduled stop at Basse Terre, Guadeloupe might provide a most convenient place for a meeting between President DeGaulle and President Johnson.