University of Indiana Convocation - Assessment in Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
Mr. PELL. Mr. President, the problem of Vietnam and what we should do in achieving a decent resolution of our involvement in that war torn, unhappy land is a problem that looms over the thinking, the plans, and the aspirations of us all.

There is no Senator amongst us who is more familiar and knowledgeable concerning this problem than is the senior Senator from Montana (Mr. MANSFIELD), whose knowledge of the area and whose experience with its people is great.

The distinguished Senator from Montana made a singularly perceptive and forthright speech at the convocation of the University of Indiana a week ago today. In the course of that speech, the Senator made the fundamental point that—

There is no obligation to continue to pour out the blood and resources of this Nation until South Vietnam is made safe for one Vietnamese faction or another.

The Senator also cited the sad statistics when he made his speech a week ago that reveal that there were 543 young American men who had been killed in the preceding 7 days. That was the highest weekly total of deaths in the war. Today, only 1 week later, we find that we have reached the second highest total of deaths of the war, 470 deaths have occurred. This brings us to a total of 13,709 young men killed and 115,144 wounded in this unhappy war—a total that is not far from the total young men killed and wounded in the Korean conflict.

These mounting casualty figures of the United States alone—figures that do not include the young Vietnamese men, women, and children that have been and are being killed in North and South Vietnam—I believe show, stress, and underline the importance of the speech of the Senator from Montana and make it singularly significant today.

I call the speech to the attention of my colleagues and ask unanimous consent that it be printed at this point in the Record.

There being no objection, the speech was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

ASSESSMENT IN VIETNAM
(Remarks of Senator Mike Mansfield, of Montana, at the Indiana University Convocation, Bloomington, Ind., February 23, 1968)

The struggle in Vietnam has turned grim, pitiless, and devastating. The casualty figures are staggering. The physical damage is enormous. Men, women, children, soldiers, guerrillas, weapons, machines, cities, towns, and villages—all are thrown together in an inferno of destruction.

It is not surprising that the situation has been interpreted in some quarters as approaching some sort of climax. It may well be, as has been suggested, the beginning of the end. The question is what beginning and what end? Peace by military victory? Peace by negotiations? With whom? For what? There is no certainty at this point as to what will emerge in Vietnam, or for that matter, whether the end of this war is to be found in Vietnam.

I have no desire, therefore, to indulge, today, in what has become a kind of parlor game called "Who's winning in Vietnam?" It is offensive to me, as I know it must be to you, to hear this deadly conflict treated as some sort of athletic contest. The lives of too many young Americans are on the line in Vietnam. Too many bewildered men and women and children are being burnt, bloodied and broken by this war. Too much is in ruins. Too many lie dead. Vietnam is not a game. There can be no winners; there are only losers and the longer the war persists the greater are the losses for all concerned.

The tragedy of Vietnam constrains us all to great sobriety in discussion. There is little point in speculating on the current situation—\( \text{who is winning and who is not or what is being won and what is not.} \) The need is to try to define accurately the character of the present tragedy and, in that way, hopefully, to see more clearly what the interests of this nation will require in the days ahead.

In this respect, seldom has a problem presented greater difficulties than Vietnam and seldom has the need for a solution been
greater. A restoration of peace is imperative for the well-being of people of Vietnam, because they have been fought over for so long that, in the millions, they are torn from their ancestral land and are without refuge where there is no refuge. For us, too, an honorable solution is of the utmost urgency. The war in Vietnam is both divisive and destructive of vital interests on this nation. It has diverted energy and funds from the great needs of our own society, but it is also a signal to the world that there is a way to create, for example, cry out for attention, but the cry is barely heard above the din of the world.

The nation's economic equilibrium is in danger of being thrown out of kilter by the immense demands of the war. In this connection, we have already suffered a significant degree of inflation. Furthermore, we are confronted with what can only be called the embarrassment of having to discourage the travel of Americans abroad, because of difficulties which the war and other foreign commitments have introduced into the nation's balance of payments.

In our relations with the rest of the world, the war in Vietnam has placed formidable blocks in the way of further progress in international cooperation. It has brought in its wake new threats to the stability of peace, as well as Peking's charges and which may be but the precursor of others. In these pinchpoints of instability, moreover, the world is feeling the structural defenses of the world against nuclear catastrophe.

In retrospect it is apparent that at each of these crossroads the American military involvement has deepened. It is also apparent that the successive increases in military commitment have not been due to an increase in the pressure of the war but rather to an increase in counter military commitment. At the end of 1965, five Senates rejected a report which, if the conclusion of our study, we stated that we had found that the architects of war had not been able to plan against a military situation which is, in effect, open. How open is dependent on the extent to which North Vietnam and its supporters are willing and able to meet increased force by increased force.

How open the war? How able and willing the opposing forces to meet increased force by increased force?

Our armed forces in Vietnam have increased from 6,000 at the beginning of 1965 to more than half a million today. The bombing has increased from specific retaliation for specific Vietnamese actions which have been carried out by the Viet Cong. The Saigon government has increased from 3,000 to 34,000. The Saigon government now has more than 300,000 forces, of which, 250,000 are under the control of the Viet Cong. The Saigon government now has more than 300,000 forces, of which, 250,000 are under the control of the Viet Cong.

The National Liberation Front has more than 70,000 men, of which, 30,000 are under the control of the Viet Cong. The Saigon government now has more than 300,000 forces, of which, 250,000 are under the control of the Viet Cong.

The Viet Cong has been under attack since the 17th parallel to the southern tip of the peninsula. Its regular forces and guerrillas are organized into units which are able to operate together to make coordinated attacks on the Saigon government. They have been able to operate together in these attacks and are able to operate as a team to make coordinated attacks on the Saigon government. They have been able to operate together in these attacks and are able to operate as a team to make coordinated attacks on the Saigon government.

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ought to be explored fully and with the utmost urgency. The Vietnamese have stated that they will open negotiations if the bombing of the North stops. In connection, it should be noted, first, that the bombing has not achieved the purposes for which it was sanctioned. The bombing has not stopped the movement of men and supplies into the South; on the contrary, the routes of infiltration carry a heavier traffic than ever before and the traffic includes ever more sophisticated weapons. The bombing has done little, if anything, for the morale of the people of South Vietnam and such indications as there are, suggest that it has done a great deal to strengthen the determination of the people of North Vietnam. The Northern Vietnamese has not yet brought Hanoi to the conference table, as a suspension, now, probably will. In short, the bombing has added a vast dimension to the war. It has raised the cost of the war in lives and resources—American and other—but closer, so far, than ever before to a meeting in Geneva or other appropriate forum to consider a peace conference, those approaches, too, are obviously worthy of every consideration.

The Senate voted a resolution on November 30th last, urging that Vietnam be brought actively before the Security Council of the United Nations. The proposal was for a direct approach to the problem by means of the open processes of the U.N. Charter.

At the very least, an initiative in the U.N. Security Council would help to clarify the significance of the words of peace which are raised on all sides. At the very least, it would help to focus on Vietnam’s readiness to take its chances on a peaceful settlement of the conflict in accord with the world-sanctioned principles of the Charter. In my judgment, we should and can make clear, by procedural vote, that we are willing to submit the question of Vietnam to the Security Council. We should and can make clear, by procedural vote, that we are prepared to deal with a group which is of relevance to a settlement, including Hanoi and the NLF and Cao. We should participate in a face-to-face discussion of the war. We should and can make clear, by procedural vote, that the efforts to continue the conflict render undesirable a meeting of the Security Council in New York, we are prepared to see the Council meet in Geneva or anywhere else, as provided for by the Charter. In short, we should and can make clear, by vote, that we are willing to follow the U.N. path to peace.

It would seem that among the 15 member nations of the Security Council, there ought to be found at least the required nine votes to respond to an initiative by the United States, calling for a U.N. effort to open the door to a settlement in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, if such is not the case, it seems desirable to know now, by formal and open test, win or lose, who is willing and who is unwilling. It is an issue of peace in Vietnam before the bar of the world. May I say that it does no service to the United Nations to avoid from bringing before it a situation which involves its fundamental reason for being.

On this point, I would note, too, that the members of the U.N. ought not to overlook the obligations of the organization in connection with the rising tensions in Korea. The U.N. has been involved—deeply involved—for two decades in Korea. It was with the sanction of the U.N. that this nation carried the major burden of the war which was fought in Korea. U.N. guidance that the truce in Korea was achieved. It is still within the competence of the U.N. to evolve and to aid in the solution of Korea, and, in particular, when they pose threats of renewed war.

Insofar as the nation’s unilateral responsibilities respecting Korea are concerned, the firm restraint which President Johnson has exercised from the outset in the Pueblo affair, in my judgment, has set a wise course. The question of the truce at Panmunjom has been a topic of discussion between representatives and those of North Korea. Third-party channels are also being explored. In short, the effort at this time is to seek by diplomacy the release of the crewmen alive—I repeat, alive. It is a prudent course in what is, at best, a delicate and dangerous situation and it deserves every support.

Talks at Panmunjom and the search for third party intercession, however, do not begin to exhaust the possibilities of solution. If these efforts do not bear fruit, other options may also be available. The President has already had the matter raised at the U.N. Security Council by Ambassador Goldberg. If necessary, it can and should be pressed now in that forum. It may be feasible, therefore, to seek an impartial investigation, arbitration or mediation of the dispute or a presentation of the entire matter to the World Court.

Whatever the specific recourse, in my judgment, the efforts to find a peaceful settlement of the Pueblo affair are attuned to this nation’s interests. What matters, first, is the safe release of the crewmen. What matters most is the substance not the shadow of this nation’s interests.

The flare-up in Korea, coming on top of Vietnam, indicates the hydro-headed potential of war on the Asian continent. The new and dangerous confrontation in the former suggests the urgency of ending the conflict on an honorable basis in the latter. I do not know what the prospect for peace may be by way of the U.N. approach which has been suggested. Obviously, a U.N. approach cannot be any less effective than the countless other approaches which have already been attempted without success. On the other hand, it may not be any more effective.

In any event, somewhere, somehow, there must be the beginnings of a negotiated settlement. Until it is found, the fires of conflict will blaze ever more fiercely in Vietnam, the arc of war’s wreckage will continue to open on the Asian continent. And if the fires burn out of control to World War III, what nation will then claim the victory? Indeed, what nation will be left to claim it?