3-1-1968

Vietnam - Desirability of a Resolution of our Involvement in Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches/698

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Mike Mansfield Papers at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mike Mansfield Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Senator made the fundamental point that—

There is no obligation to continue to pour 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 649 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 in the war, 470 deaths have occurred. This brings us to a total of 18,769 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 is not the 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 contest 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 clashes—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 welfare of the people of Vietnam; they have been fought over for so long that it has worn them out. The ancestral places seeking refuge where there is quiet. Vietnam, the ancient civilization, is of the utmost urgency. The war in Vietnam has been deeply divisive in its effects. It has diverted energy and resources from the needs of our own society. The vast difficulties of the urban areas have only increased, and the cry for more help is heard across the land. But the cry is barely heard above the din of the distant conflict.

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 the opposing forces war and other foreign commitments have introduced into the nation's balance of payments.

In the context of the rest of the world, the war in Vietnam has placed formidable blocks in the way of further progress in international affairs. While it has brought to the world its new threats to the stability of peace, as in the case of the U.S.S. Pueblo incident which was a blow to the precarious balance.

In these points of instability, moreover, there are ever-present threats to the frail domestic balance against nuclear catastrophe.

It is said not to arrive at this situation over-night. Our involvement in Vietnam is not new born. If we are at a crossroads, today, it is a repetition of crossroads which extends backwards for many years. There comes to mind, for example, the moment of the French collapse and the Geneva Conferences of 1954; the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963 and the replacement of civilian government in Saigon by a series of unstable regimes, drawn even more steadily from military sources, ever more dependent on the United States. Finally, there comes to mind the Tonkin Bay incident and the large-scale direct military engagement of the United States thereafter in the war in Vietnam.

In retrospect it is apparent that at each of these crossroads our American military involvement has deepened. It is also apparent that at each situation our American military commitment have led, so far, not to peace, but rather to an increase in counter military commitment on both sides. These situations, including myself visited Vietnam. In a report made public at the conclusion of our six-week tour, we found that this nation's military effort was "...pressing against a military situation which is, in effect, open ended. How open is dependent on the extent to which North Vietnam and its supporters are willing and able to meet increased force: any increased force.

How open the war? How able and willing the United States to meet increased force by increased force?

Our armed forces in Vietnam have increased more than 23,000 at the beginning of 1965 to more than half a million today. The invading of North Vietnam by air and sea has given birth to the Vietnamization programs which the Viet Cong acts of offense against our forces into the most systematic air and naval bombings and the destruction of exploitations which has fallen upon Vietnam is already higher than in Korea, or, for that matter, the entire Pacific Theatre during World War II and probably close to that unloosed in Europe. Moreover, one by one, the remaining targets—the in the Vietnam have been removed until a mere handful is all that now stands against us. Some of these targets for the military advantage of life and land. Indeed, the search for this elusive victory has led some to clamor for that indiscriminate destruction, even to the point of returning Vietnam to the Stone Age.

With escalation has come mounting losses of life and property. Casualties are already longer in the first five or six weeks of 1968 than during the entire year of 1965. In all of 1965, 1,369 Americans were killed. By February 10, this year, 1,674 Americans had been lost. According to reports issued in Saigon on yesterday, 543 additional Americans were killed in the last seven days of the war. The over-all figures now stand at 18,230 deaths and the wounded total 112,469. Among the opposing forces, of course, there are reports of astronomical increases in men killed, wounded, prisoner, or deserters.

I cite these gruesome figures to indicate the immense growth in the scope of the conflict, particularly as it has involved the United States. I find it most inappropriate that this effort and these great sacrifices are, in effect, called inadequate in some quarters. The fact is that, short of what Prime Minister Wilson has called the "lunacy" of nuclear war, this nation has already committed more men, more resources to Vietnam than to any other Foreign effort in Vietnam. The effort has been made by dedicated Americans, ably led, who have carried out their mission with the highest skill. At this late date, it ought at least to be clear that if the situation has not changed as anticipated, it has not been for want of an extraordinary military effort by the United States. The forces may well have done too much but by no stretch of the imagination it can be said that they have done too little.

Nevertheless, the reality is that the situation has not changed as anticipated. At the time of my last visit to Vietnam in 1965, available estimates indicated that 22 percent of the population of South Vietnam had anger for the United States, 19 percent for the Viet Minh, and 69 percent for the American forces. Today, that situation has changed, and the American forces are now a minority. The American forces may well have done too much but by no stretch of the imagination it can be said that they have done too little.

It is the case that whatever we may do, the future of Vietnam depends not on us but on the Vietnamese themselves. In this connexion, the best we can do is to help the Vietnamese to help themselves, to take over a war that has been thrust upon them.

In this connexion, the best we can do is to help the Vietnamese to help themselves, to take over a war that has been thrust upon them.

Our responsibility is to sustain, not to submerge. To strip the Vietnamese struggle of its American character would be to shift the war to be won or lost by this nation, is to detract from its relevance both to the people of Vietnam and to the people of the United States. To do so is to consolidate an American involvement on the Southeast Asian mainland of indefinite duration and obscure purposes whose terminus is not visible—not in Vietnam, not in Laos, or in Cambodia. Indeed, it may well be an involvement which is without exit except in World War III.

The situation is deeply rooted in South Vietnam but let us not make the mistake of interpreting that commitment as compelling—the enemy anywhere, ever—to see it to that every last member of the NLF is either dead, defeated, or in captivity. That course clearly leads to an endless succession of violent belligerence.

An inextricable involvement of American forces in Vietnam may meet the needs of some but, it accords neither with the interests of the United States or the people of Vietnam. In this connexion, President Johnson has repeatedly stated that this nation's objective is "...only that the people of South Vietnam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way." He has stated that he is willing to move at any time in negotiations which might bring about that result. He has stated that we are prepared to move out lock, stock, and barrel in a matter of months after a satisfactory settlement is achieved.

It should be clear, therefore, to all concerned—Americans and Vietnamese in Washington and Saigon, and to whoever, wherever—that that the accurate and genuine wishes of the Vietnamese people. There is no obligation to continue to pour out the blood and resources of this nation until South Vietnam is free, and Vietnam is free.