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Congressional Record - Withdrawal from Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I have come across a column by Joseph C. Harsch entitled "How Fast?" having to do with the situation in Vietnam and the practical and realistic difficulties in which the President of the United States finds himself. The article reads, in part:

There can be no clear or sure answer.

That is, to the question of withdrawal.

It has to be a variable. It must depend on the capacity of the South Vietnam armed forces to provide the necessary security for the withdrawal. And that certainly does mean more time than either the President or the "moratorium" marchers would like to leave.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this column and a very worthwhile editorial by Hedley Donovan, entitled "Winding Down the War on Our Own," which explains realistically the situation in which the President and we find ourselves in Vietnam, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Oct. 21, 1969]

HOW FAST?

(By Joseph C. Harsch)

WASHINGTON.—In one sense the issue between President Nixon and the peace demonstrators is now narrow. Everybody (almost) wants peace. Everybody (almost) agrees that American combat forces should be withdrawn. What remains as an issue is only the speed of the withdrawal.

If Mr. Nixon would even fix a specific date, much of the opposition to him would disappear. If he fixed an early date, most of it would disappear.

At this point there are some very real and serious military factors.

ABSTRACT THEORY

In abstract theory it would be physically possible to pull the entire half-million men out in a month.

By commandeering cruise liners from the sea and passenger air-liners from the sky a mass lift in 30 days could be done.

Obviously, no sensible person would dream of doing the withdrawal that way. The equipment could not be taken out at any such pace. To leave the equipment behind in a crash withdrawal program would probably amount, in effect, to giving most of it, perhaps all, to the Viet Cong and North Vietnam forces.

The essential military point is that a sudden withdrawal could all too easily degenerate into a fighting withdrawal.

The present Nixon plan calls for the gradual withdrawal of United States combat forces, leaving air support, communications, and supply until the last.

But leaving perhaps a quarter of a million Americans of those types in Vietnam without American infantry protection could be extremely dangerous. It would be possible only if the South Vietnam Army could be relied upon to provide the necessary security for the noncombat people.

POLITICAL CHAOS

And time is an essential element in the capacity of the South Vietnam Army to provide that protection. A sudden withdrawal would almost certainly mean political chaos in Saigon followed by the breakup of the South Vietnam armed forces. The retreat from the Yalu during the Korean war is an example of what could all too easily happen under such circumstances. Zenophon's fighting retreat from Asia Minor is another. Mr. Nixon, understandably, dare not order the kind of withdrawal program which could lead to a Dunkirk.

So how fast can the withdrawal be managed without running the serious risk of a Dunkirk?

There can be no clear or sure answer. It has to be a variable. It must depend on the capacity of the South Vietnam armed forces to provide the necessary security for the withdrawal. And that certainly does mean more time than either the President or the "moratorium" marchers would like to leave.

THEORETICAL MERIT

The moratorium deadline is the end of 1970. Mr. Nixon would be delighted to get every last American out of Vietnam by November of 1970. Such a deadline would be manna from heaven for every Republican running for reelection that month.

But a November, 1970, deadline would probably not be safe.

What then could Mr. Nixon do with safety to American troops beyond what he has already done?

One useful idea is provided by Human Events, the right-wing information sheet. It says he should send home all conscripts and use only volunteers in Vietnam. The idea has great theoretical merit, and would be welcome in many quarters at the Pentagon, if enough time is provided. It would probably take most of a year to do it safely. You can't risk the breakup of mixed volunteer-conscript units at the front.

Another measure would be to announce a deadline for final withdrawal at a safe time in the future. December, 1970, is probably not safe. November of 1972 ought to be safe.

WINDING DOWN THE WAR ON OUR OWN

(By Hedley Donovan)

Richard Nixon has said he does not propose to be the first American President to lose a war. He might, however, if he and we are lucky, become the third President to settle for a tie. The others were James Madison (War of 1812) and Dwight Eisenhower (Korea), perfectly respectable company for any President to keep.

The President was strangely tense and rigid in his advance comments on the Vietnam Moratorium (he would "under no circumstances . . . be affected whatever"). Many of the Oct. 15 people, to be sure, would not be appeased by anything Mr. Nixon could do, short of immediate and total withdrawal. Yet Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policy is a great deal more realistic and humane than he is getting credit for, in part because he and his administration explain it so badly, in part because criticism of the war has reached so high an emotional pitch.

The President has in fact begun a unilateral withdrawal of the bulk of American forces from Vietnam.

The President has in fact reined in his commanders so closely that in some areas of Vietnam a kind of unilateral cease-fire prevails.

What else should he do? Nixon's acts of de-escalation go further than many Vietnam dissenters were demanding only a year ago. But the point is, of course, that now *is* a year later. LIFE believes there is more the President could be doing to further the prospects for a tolerable outcome in Vietnam: in his dealings with his own men in Washington, with the Saigon government, with Hanoi, and in his dealings with U.S. opinion, which is his most critical negotiation of all.

To start with, we propose that the policymakers of the Nixon administration begin treating with U.S. opinion *in its own right*, not as though its chief importance lay in the interpretation Hanoi places upon it. Mr. Nixon, much to his credit, has never since his inauguration put public blame on the Johnson administration for his Vietnam burden. But he has allowed his administration sometimes to sound like the dug-in L.B.J., equating the Vietnam dissent with aid and comfort to the enemy.

It is a profound question how—and whether—a democracy should conduct a war with only, say 60% of public opinion in support. Our Constitution specifies no fewer than nine matters, none as serious as a war, which require a two-thirds vote for congressional approval. When we are in a war which has never had explicit congressional sanction, and never even been legally "declared," being fought in good part by draftees (chosen by a fantastically capricious system), a war which many (LIFE included) have thought important to win but almost nobody has ever claimed was imperative, and when this war has dragged on inconclusively for years, the wonder is not that there is protest but that there is so much willingness to serve and sacrifice. Mr. Nixon, and Mr. Agnew, too, would do better to marvel at the stability and patience of the nation they are privileged to lead, rather than purse lips and wonder how Hanoi is reading our students today.

Once we start thinking of American attitudes about Vietnam as important for their own sake, not as mirror messages being flashed from here to Hanoi and back, several things fall into place.

We should stop expecting anything out of the Paris peace talks. In recent months the North Vietnamese have not budged one centimeter. (How could a Harvard demonstration make them *more* intransigent?) We should proceed on the assumption there will be no formal settlement with the North. We should of course keep our delegation in Paris, talking and listening. There are some things the U.S. government should be saying to America itself, to South Vietnam and to Southeast Asia that might conceivably interest Hanoi. If so, fine; but if not, our policies must proceed for our own good reasons.

We should be withdrawing our troops, in Hubert Humphrey's good word, "systematically." This means a fairly firm presidential timetable, which no doubt exists. The President is right to resist any public promise to be totally out of Vietnam by some early, exact date, despite the 57% Gallup Poll in favor of Senator Goodell's resolution committing us to be gone by the end of 1970. But Mr. Nixon should conquer the press-conference reflex that leads him to try to outbid the Goodells and Clark Cliffords, suggesting that such critics interfere with his hopes of getting out *sooner*. We have little enough bargaining power vis-à-vis Hanoi since it is so clear that we are disengaging, and since it is unthinkable that we could re-escalate, short of some monstrous provocation.

The American public, we would guess, is willing to support 12 to 18, maybe at most 24, more months of military effort in Vietnam if withdrawals are in progress and if casualties and costs are declining steadily.

The President has already ordered withdrawals of 60,000 men from our peak strength of 540,000, and there are hints that he may announce another cut before the end of the year. Civilians need not be too diffident about entering the numbers game, for it is essentially an appraisal of American sentiment rather than a technical military judgment. For our part, we hope that the President is aiming at a force no bigger than 150,000 by mid-1971. (We still keep 50,000 men in Korea, 16 years after the truce.) Whether there should be such a rear guard at all (chiefly in logistics and air support) could indeed be a subject of negotiation, and is not a point to be given away for nothing.

The hope is that as we withdraw the South Veitnamese army will be improving fast enough to take over more and more of the fighting and the South Vietnamese government will be broadening its support. It may just work. We should press Thieu and Ky on bureaucratic corruption, land reform and political imprisonments.

We should continue shifting the U.S. military effort away from the "maximum pressure" concept toward population protection and training of the ARVN. The new policy has contributed to a marked reduction of American casualties, now at their lowest level in nearly three years. Secretary Rogers thinks the enemy, however unyielding at Paris, has carried out a "very significant" de-escalation in the field, cutting down troop infiltration from the North by as much as two thirds. Military brass in Washington and Saigon continue the somewhat ritualistic warning that this may just be the lull before a new offensive. Mr. Nixon should decide whether he agrees with his Secretary of State, and if so, perhaps hasten his next troop withdrawal announcement.

The President has promised a major Vietnam speech for November 3. It is none too

soon. We hope he will redefine what is still at stake for us in Vietnam. We hope he will offer a generous vision of a long-term peacetime American interest in the development of Southeast Asia and friendship for all its peoples. (What an irony that we should be on fairly good terms with Communist Russia, talking cautiously about a possible thaw in relations with Communist China, and still so bitterly embroiled with one of the smallest Communist states.)

It will take even more steadiness than the American people have already shown if they are to persist through this winding-down phase of the war and bear further casualties and costs for modest objectives. In this difficult undertaking, the President deserves our sympathy and support, and the country deserves visible, candid and convincing leadership.

PROTECTIVE REACTION IN VIETNAM

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, there seems to be some difficulty interpreting what Secretaries Laird and Rogers have said about the new military strategy of "protective reaction" ordered last July and put into effect last August. In my opinion, this is a decided shift away from the old "search and destroy" and "maximum pressure" tactics which were employed in the last administration and in the first months of the present administration. To me, the change means we have moved a long distance in the direction of a "cease-fire and stand fast" policy. It is my understanding of the new strategy of "protective reaction" that U.S. forces will fire only when a threat that they will be fired on is developing and that they remain prepared at all times to take whatever action may be necessary to repel any attack which should be in the offing.

It has been charged that this approach would expose U.S. forces to increased casualties and would hand an initiative to enemy forces. It would be my belief that the opposite is the result; that casualties would be decreased as, in fact, they have been reduced since the new strategy has been in effect. As far as the initiative is concerned, U.S. forces remain on guard at all times and take whatever actions are necessary to forestall any attack which might be in the offing but fire only when there is a threat that they will be fired on.

This interpretation of "protective reaction" would appear to be consistent with what a military spokesman in Washington has said:

Our defense activities include allied reconnaissance in force, sweeps and extensive small patrol operations designed to keep the enemy off-balance and to prevent enemy attacks.

Or, even more specifically, what another military officer at the Pentagon is quoted as saying:

We're not terribly far from such a condition today (a "de facto cease-fire"). The enemy has pulled back to sanctuaries throughout Vietnam. Infiltration is way down. We're sending out lots of small patrols but we're no longer crashing through the bush with large units spoiling for a fight. Our concentration is on pacification and on helping the Vietnamese take over more of the war. Our casulaties keep falling, week by week.

This is certainly a far cry from the tactics of "maximum pressure" and "search and destroy" and to me is an indication that the President is moving toward a cease-fire and standfast policy.

I commend the Secretary of Defense for announcing the policy; the Secretary of State for emphasizing it; and the President for initiating this new and highly significant tactic.

Mr. President, in the Washington Star of October 11, just a week or so ago, appeared an article by Mr. Orr Kelly. The article has to do with a press conference held by Brig. Gen. John W. Barnes, former commander of the 173d Airborne Brigade in South Vietnam's Binh Dinh Province. I believe this was the general referred to on Thursday, 2 weeks ago tomorrow, at Secretary Laird's press conference, when he announced the new "protective reaction" policy.

General Barnes until recently was in command of one of the most heavily Communist-infested areas in the country. He told newsmen he gave his 7,000 troopers strict orders on their pacification experiment begun on April 15. General Barnes' 7,000 troopers were ordered to fire only at uniformed enemy soldiers, or men who were clearly not friendly forces and persons engaged in hostile acts such as throwing a hand grenade.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an editorial entitled "Toward a Cease-Fire," which was published in the Baltimore Sun of October 21, 1969.

There being no objection, the editorial was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

TOWARD A CEASE-FIRE

Reports from Washington that President Nixon is considering a proposal for a cease-fire in Vietnam are encouraging, as an indication of a continuing search for ways to scale down the scope and intensity of the war. The American efforts in this direction—steps which include the cessation of the bombing in North Vietnam and revision of the "search and destroy" tactics—have undoubtedly been major factors in the general reduction in the so-called level of violence and, more important, in the decrease in battle casualties. A cease-fire proposal could properly be made in line with these steps and in line with the measures being taken to withdraw substantial numbers of American soldiers from South Vietnam.

A proposal of this nature, first of all, would underscore the United States policy, and hope, of bringing the war to an end as soon as possible. A standstill cease-fire, in which all troops would remain in place with combat operations suspended, could possibly open the door to the negotiations for a political settlement which the United States has been seeking, with little or no response, so far as the record shows, from North Vietnam.

But even if serious peace negotiations did not develop, an American initiative toward a cease-fire could point to another way in which the war may be ended; that is, by a steady dwindling of fighting until an undeclared and unnegotiated peace is established. For several years now, some authorities have thought that the war may well be brought to an end in this manner, rather than through an openly negotiated settlement.

Mr. Nixon has strong support in this country now, we believe, for the measures he is taking to control and decrease the level of the war. It seems clear that the American people not only endorse these measures but are urging the President to push on with additional steps. The simple fact is that it becomes more and more difficult to justify continued battle deaths, even when the number of casualties has been greatly reduced, after the major decision has been taken to begin withdrawing American troops. This, we suggest, was uppermost in the minds of many of the Americans who took part last week in the moratorium demonstrations.

Mr. McGOVERN subsequently said. Mr. President, I wish to associate myself with the remarks of the distinguished majority leader with reference to his statement that we are, in fact, moving into a cease-fire. The Senator from Montana (Mr. MANSFIELD) has been advocating that position for several years, both under the previous administration and under this administration. I hope that is the direction in which we are moving.

STATESMANSHIP BY SENATOR MANSFIELD

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an editorial entitled "Statesmanship by Senator MANSFIELD," which was published in the Philadelphia Inquirer this morning. The editorial is very praiseworthy of the positions taken by the distinguished majority leader and the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. FULBRIGHT). While I have not cleared this matter with the majority leader, I would like to have it printed in the RECORD at this point.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. In light of the Senator's statement, the Chair is quite certain the majority leader would impose no objection. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The editorial, ordered to be printed in the RECORD, is as follows:

STATEMANSHIP BY SENATOR MANSFIELD

As Democratic Majority Leader in the Senate, and a long-time advocate of peace in Vietnam, Mike Mansfield took the Senate floor to deliver a statesmanlike address that ought to be a keynote for Americans, whatever their party, who genuinely seek an end to the war.

Noting that the Nixon Administration is pursuing a new policy in Vietnam, dedicated to de-escalating the fighting and reducing casualties and bringing U.S. troops home, the senator from Montana declared: "I would like to see the people of this nation get behind President Nixon. . . . I want to say as a Democrat that it will be my intention to support the President." He went on to express his belief that strong public support for Mr. Nixon at this critical juncture in peace efforts would expedite a "responsible settlement" in Vietnam.

There is great wisdom as well as high statesmanship in Senator Mansfield's remarks. At this time, of all times, with the President of the United States initiating bold steps toward a reduction of the fighting while engaging in delicate diplomatic maneuvers to hasten a settlement, the American people should stand united, rather than divided, and should demonstrate support, instead of protest, for the U.S. peace offensive that is already under way and is being accelerated.

Chairman J. W. Fulbright of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, one of the most outspoken war critics, has acted sensibly in following Senator Mansfield's lead by

postponing committee hearings on Vietnam that had been scheduled to begin next week. They will be delayed at least until after President Nixon's address to the nation on November 3, when he is to discuss the Vietnam situation.

There are, of course, some people in this country who claim to be for peace but really seek a Communist victory. It can be expected that they will continue to fan the flames of dissension wherever they can. Other Americans, those who want to act responsibly in the cause of peace, ought to rally to the call of Senator Mansfield.