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Congressional Record - Withdrawal from Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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WITeDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM

Mr. MANSFIELD Mr. President, I have come across a column by Joseph C. Harsh 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.
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE

December 22, 1969

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this column and a very worthwhile one written by Hedley Donovan, entitled “Winding Down the War on Our Own,” which explains realistically the situation in which the President finds himself 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]

WINDING DOWN THE WAR ON OUR OWN

By Joseph C. Harsch

WASHINGTON.—In one sense the issue between President Nixon and the peace demonstrators is now narrow. Everybody (almost) agrees that American combat forces should be withdrawn.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 probably 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 do this in a matter of time. Everybody (almost) wants peace. Everybody (almost) agrees that American combat forces should be withdrawn.

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

POLITICAL CRISIS

And time is an essential element in the capacity of the South Vietnamese Army to provide that protection. A sudden withdrawal would almost certainly mean political chaos in Saigon followed by the breakup of the South Vietnamese armed forces. The retreat from the Yalu during the Korean war is an example of what could all too easily happen under such circumstances. Zemach’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 been said that a withdrawal must depend on the capacity of the South Vietnamese 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 MENT

The moral deadline is the end of 1970. Mr. Nixon would be delighted to get every last American out of Vietnam by November of 1970, but a deadline would mean 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 radical right wing sheet. It says he should send home all conscripts and use only volunteers in Vietnam. The idea has great theoretical merit and should be wellcome in many quarters at the Pentagon, if enough time is provided. It would probably not be as bitterly resented as the move to take more men home faster. You can’t risk the breakup of mixed volunteer-conscript units at the front.

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

WINDING DOWN THE WAR ON OUR OWN

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 decide to risk the element of surprise, settle for a tie. The others were James Madison (War of 1812) and Dwight Eisenhower (Korea), perfectly respectable candidates for any President to keep.

The President was strangely tense and rigid in his speech on Vietnam on the Viet Nam Moratorium (he would “under no circumstances ... 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 of the criticism of the war has reached so high an emotional pitch. The President ran a unilateral withdrawal of the bulk of American forces from Vietnam.

The President has in fact relied 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 far further than many Vietnam dissenters were demanding only a year ago.

But the point is, of course, that now is a year later. Love believes there is more the President could do to forestall the prospects for a tolerable outcome in Vietnam. In his dealings with his own men in Washington, LBJ, and Hubert Humphrey, as the author of the resolution concurred with the president. But Mr. Nixon should consult the press-conference reflex that leads him to try to outwit the Johnsons and Chechers by pretending that such critics interfere with his hopes of getting out sooner. We have little enough to do. Power is not likely to be so clear so that we are disengaging, and since it is unthinkable that we could re-escalate shortly to some monstrous provocation.

The American public, we would guess, is willing to support 12 to 18, maybe 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 difficult about entering the numbers game, for it is unthinkable that we could re-escalate shortly to some monstrous provocation.

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October 22, 1969

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE
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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 standstill 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 policy.

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, at Secretary Laird’s press conference, when he announced the new “protective reaction” policy.

General Barnes until recently was in command of most heavily Communist-infested areas in the country. He told newsmen he gave his 7,000 troopers strict orders on their pacification experiment. 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 in hostile acts such as throwing a hand grenade.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record an editorial entitled “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 cease-fire in Vietnam are encouraging, as an indication of a continuing search for ways to scale down the intensity of the war. The American efforts in this direction—steps which include the cessation of the bombing in Cambodia and revision of the “search and destroy” tactics—which have undoubtedly been major factors in the general reduction in 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 contemplates another way in which the war may be ended; that is, by a steady dwindling of fighting until an undeclared state of peace is established. For several years now, some authorities have thought that the war may well be brought to a close, rather than through an openly negotiated settlement.

Mr. Nixon has strong support in this country, now, we believe, for 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 willing to support the President with additional steps. The simple fact is that it becomes more and more difficult to justify continuing an armed battle despite the number of casualties has been greatly reduced, after the major decision has been made to withdraw American troops.

This, we suggest, was uppermost in the minds of most of the members of the Administration 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 a position for several years, both under the previous administration and under this administration. I hope that is the direction in which we are moving."

STATEMANSHIP 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 counselor from Montana (Mr. Polar). 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:

As Democratic Majority Leader in the Senate, and a long-time advocate of peace in Vietnam, Mr. Mansfield has been one of the most influential members of that body in its struggle to prevent the wider war from spiraling into a nuclear nightmare.

Mr. Mansfield has been one of the few members of the Senate with the courage to speak out publicly against the war, and to demand that the United States take a more rational approach to the problem. He has been one of the most consistent advocates of a negotiated settlement of the war, and he has been one of the most outspoken critics of the policies of the Johnson Administration.

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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.