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S.J. Res. 166 - Relating to a Foreign Policy Reappraisal Vietnam and Beyond

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all committees be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tem­pore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tem­pore. Under the previous order, the Sen­ator from Maryland (Mr. MATHIAS) is recognized for half an hour.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 166—
INTRODUCTION OF A JOINT RESOLUTION RELATING TO A FOREIGN POLICY REAPPRAISAL—VIETNAM AND BEYOND

Mr. MATHIAS. Mr. President, I send to the desk a joint resolution for appropriate reference.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tem­pore. The joint resolution will be received and appropriately referred.

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 166), to repeal legislation relating to the use of the Armed Forces of the United States in certain areas outside the United States and to express the sense of the Congress on certain matters relating to the war in Vietnam, and for other purposes, introduced by Mr. MATHIAS (for himself and Mr. MANSFIELD), was received, read twice by its title, and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.
Mr. MATHIAS. I yield.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I join the distinguished Republican leader of the Senate and the distinguished senator from Kentucky in what they have just had to say about the remarkably well thought out, temperate, and sound speech which the distinguished Senator has just made.

I am very much interested, very much intrigued, and very much impressed with the proposal suggested by the distinguished Senator from Maryland (Mr. MATHIAS). As I understand his resolution, what he is doing is, in effect, stating that the Congress should have a hand in bringing about the ending of the war in Vietnam and that the responsibility should not be continued to be placed in the hands of the President alone. That was the interpretative effect of the administration at the time of the Tonkin resolution, an interpretation with which I thoroughly disagreed at its inception and disagree with just as much today.

The distinguished Senator from Maryland is not seeking to repeal the Tonkin Gulf resolution alone but all the other resolutions which have been passed by the Congress in haste with little discussion and practically no study and, certainly, very little sound interpretation over the years since the Second World War. I refer, for example, to the Formosan resolution, the Mid-East resolution among the better known as examples of what should perhaps not be in existence now and, therefore, should be looked into to see if any validity remains for their retention.

The restudy of all these resolutions would be a most worthy endeavor for the Congress to undertake because, unless the Congress does so, they remain on the books and as long as they remain on the books, they give any President unprecedented power.

In addition, Senator MATHIAS supports President Nixon’s efforts “to achieve a political solution in Vietnam” and he also asks that the Congress declare itself in favor of “accelerated withdrawal of all U.S. forces in South Vietnam” and I agree.

These are worthy objectives and they call for a step-up in U.S. troop withdrawal. May I say, incidentally, that the President is exceeding his 60,000 withdrawal rate set for no later than December 15 by continued withdrawal above and beyond that figure. I commend him for this unpublicized action. It would be my hope, Mr. President, that the Congress would be able to work with the President to bring about a speedy end to the tragic war in Vietnam, a withdrawal of all troops as soon as possible and a settlement on the basis of which we would be able to get out of Southeast Asia on a lock, stock, and barrel basis.

Mr. President, it is my practice to give as much support as I can on matters of foreign policy to an incumbent President. Whether Democrat or Republican, a President’s responsibilities are very heavy in these matters and he carries them on behalf of the entire Nation. I have tried, therefore, to present my personal views to the President in private and in public.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?
to give him the benefit of any doubts which I may have on a particular course of policy.

That has been my practice ever since I became majority leader of the Senate. It was followed with President Kennedy and President Johnson. However, even as the President has his responsibilities, I have mine as a Senator of Montana and of the United States. When it is incumbent on me, in my judgment, to express my views on an issue, in public, I must do so in the discharge of the duties which are vested in my by the Constitution.

With respect to the Tonkin Gulf resolution, I joined with all Members of the Senate present, except two, in voting for the measure. I did so because President Johnson asked for the resolution to provide a display of Government unity in an effort to prevent the initial U.S. military involvement from widening. Other Members were similarly persuaded despite personal and long-standing doubts as to any U.S. military involvement on the Southeast Asian mainland. It was not my understanding, then, nor of any Member of the Senate so far as I am aware that a blank check was being written for an involvement of whatever depth or extent the State and Defense Departments decreed. When it appeared that the resolution was being interpreted as a blank check, Members of the Senate began increasingly to express their opposition to that interpretation and to the tragic U.S. involvement in the war which stemmed from it.

That there are now grave reservations about the resolution has nothing to do with partisan politics. The reservations are expressed by Members of both parties. On my part and on the part of other Democratic Members of the Senate, these reservations began to be expressed during a Democratic administration.

One can never reconstruct a situation precisely as it was several years ago, and what has been done cannot be undone. However, I do know that I supported the Tonkin Gulf resolution in 1965 because it was what President Johnson had sought as a way of preventing our deep military involvement, and it obviously failed in its purpose. I would be happy, indeed, to consider repeal of this resolution if President Nixon or Congress, or both together, were to request it as a step toward shortening the path to peace—in the words of the distinguished Senator from Maryland, making a small step in that long-sought direction.

Mr. President, it is time to break with the past, to face up to the present, and to prepare for the future. This, the Senator from Maryland seeks to do, and I commend him for his initiative and ask that I be allowed to join him as a cosponsor. The Senator has come up with what could be the ideal resolution and has pointed the way to peace for all of us. I congratulate him for the statement he has made this morning. He has earned the thanks of the Senate, the people of this country, and the administration.

Mr. MATHIAS, Mr. President, I am more than grateful—I am very humble—