3-2-1970

Congressional Record S. 2729 - Laos

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

the direct election because I believe that fully one-half of the Members of the Senate are opposed to the direct system but they would be unable to agree on any substitute plan.

For that reason, it seems likely to the junior Senator from Alabama that there will be no reform at this point. Does the Senator feel that that is a likelihood?

Mr. CURTIS. I do. There are 34 of the 50 States that would be adversely affected if we changed to the direct election of the President. I do not believe they have any such mandate from the people back home to lessen the power of their sovereign States in choosing the President.

Mr. ALLEN. The Senator's argument is that the voter in Nebraska wants to go to the polls feeling he is going to be a part of the Nebraska vote, and when the Nebraska vote is counted it will count for something because it will be represented in the electoral vote of the State of Nebraska. It will not be commingled with 75 million other votes, and will be identified with that single State.

Mr. CURTIS. When I cast my vote in Nebraska, it will not be buried under a tombstone in Chicago.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HART in the chair). Under the previous order, the Senator from Montana is recognized for 15 minutes.

LAOS

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I take the floor of the Senate at this time because of the serious situation in Laos. I do so not to criticize, but, if possible, to be constructive, to be helpful, and to wave a warning flag about this area which might perhaps be helpful in preventing our becoming involved too deeply and in too costly a manner. When I speak of costly, I do not mean money alone, but total cost, including manpower.

Perhaps, the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies may stop the offensive on the Plain of Jars, short of the cities of Vientiane and Luang Prabang; that would be in the pattern of previous operations. Then again, they may push forward against these two capitals and press to the border of Thailand. Only time will indicate what plans and objectives may be involved. In any event, the question of the "nonwar" or the "secret-war" or "interlude war" in Laos cannot be avoided any longer.

Notwithstanding the Geneva accord of 1962, the North Vietnamese are deeply involved in this military situation. So, too, is the United States. Press reports indicate that the Thais may also be engaged. The involvement is so transparent on both sides as to make less than useless the effort to maintain the fiction of the accord or even to exchange charge and countercharge of violations. We are both in it—North Vietnamese and Americans—and we are in it up to our necks.

What disturbs me is that it is not only that both nations are forbidden by the Geneva agreement to use forces in Laos

but that the President has also made clear that he does not desire to see U.S. forces used in Laos. May I add that I have every confidence in the President's intentions. Yet the presence of American military advisers and others in Laos cannot be camouflaged any longer, notwithstanding the situation of the Symington hearings.

The military operations about which we know so much, and yet so little, seem to depend heavily on hill people from the Lao-Vietnamese border highlands. With these tribesmen, who are not Lao but Meo, there has been a close U.S. military or paramilitary, connection which predates the Geneva Accord of 1962. According to the press, the connection is still there.

In any event, neither the Meo nor the Lao regular armies have been able to hold back the combined North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao pressure. The result is that a further "Americanization" of the war in Laos has taken place which now seems to be matching the effort to "Vietnamize" the situation in South Vietnam. It has been estimated that American bombers make 500 or more sorties daily over Laos and that the United States is spending something on the order of $200 to $300 million for aid to Laos.

It needs to be recalled at this time, therefore, that the full-scale U.S. involvement in Vietnam evolved from much smaller beginnings. First, it was a little more aid and a few more military advisers, then it was the supply of transportation, then air support, and then GI's.

I am sure that the President does not want that sequence to be repeated. The Defense Department has been at pains to gainsay it. In that respect, this President's intentions are not unlike those of his predecessor at the beginning of the Vietnamese involvement; the protestations of this Secretary of Defense also have a not unfamiliar ring. Nevertheless, a parallel can develop in Laos. Will we hear next what became the fateful rationale of the war in Vietnam? Will we hear next that a larger war is not up to us but up to them? Will we submerge in that rationale, once again, our responsibility to decide where and when in consideration of national interests we shall risk the lives of Americans? Will we affirm that fundamental responsibility or leave it to others who have no reason to use it for this Nation's well-being?

To be sure, there is no question that the North Vietnamese have ignored the Geneva accord of 1962 to which they are signatory. Does that compel us to take it upon ourselves to do the same? There are other signatories of the accord. Have the others immersed themselves in the war? Has the Soviet Union? The United Kingdom? France? Indeed, has China? How can a deepening involvement in Laos accord with the vital interests—and I use the word advisedly—of this Nation? Does it accord with the new Nixon doctrine—which I fully support—which propounds a reduction of our military involvement on the Southeast Asia mainland? Does it fit with the need for resources to meet the inner needs of this Nation?

The North Vietnamese have long since moved troops into the border areas of Northeastern Laos to guard the so-called Ho Chi Minh trails. These are the routes by means of which men and supplies move down into South Vietnam. By the same token, American planes have long since been bombing the trails. The bilateral violations of the Geneva accord in this case at least have been directly related to the war in Vietnam.

Of late, however, both Americans and North Vietnamese have expanded military activities further into Laos, in the region of the Plain of Jars. There is reported to be something on the order of 45,000 to 50,000 North Vietnamese now on the northern border of Laos. According to reports, not only has manpower increased but antiaircraft missiles have been implanted. On the part of the United States the bombing in Laos is reported to be heavier than it was in North Vietnam and that there could now be as many as 20,000 sorties a month.

In short, the war seems to be pouring out of South Vietnam through the Laotian panhandle into the rest of Laos and the rest of Indochina. Even Cambodia, which has sought wisely, behind the wall of neutrality, to hold back the jungle of war has felt, of late, the intensified pressure of this flow of destruction.

As in 1965, the events in Laos caution that the threat of a continuing inconclusive involvement in Southeast Asia remains unchanged. Indeed, it may be enlarging to embrace Laos. If the military seesaw goes down in Vietnam only to rise in Laos, our situation will not have improved; it will have worsened. In my judgment, only the utmost vigilence, on the part of the responsible officials of this Government, of the President, and the Senate in particular, and of the press will counteract this inevitable tendency.

Prince Souvanna Phouma has said that he was going to ask cochairmen of the Geneva accord, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, to call a meeting of all the signatories to put into effect the agreement of 1962. This renewed call is to be commended, and certainly it should be supported in every possible way. It would be my hope that all signatories to the Geneva accord would meet in an effort to restore a measure of stability to the situation in Laos. Moreover, the scope of any such meeting mught be enlarged to include th esituation in all of Southeast Asia, with the participation of other affected nations, such as Cambodia and Thailand.

If the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, as cochairmen, would call this conference, it might be possible to draw still useful guidance from the Geneva agreements of 1954 which involved the three Indochinese States. As for Laos, the agreement of 1962 seems to me, still, to be valid. In retrospect, this agreement was never given a full opportunity to get off the ground. Negotiations in Paris or in Geneva but, in any event, at an authoritative level, seem to me still to offer the best prospect for a settlement which would enable the United States to withdraw completely from the present military enmeshment on the Southeast Asia mainland.

When that has come about, it would be my hope that, as one of the signatories outside of Southeast Asia, we would join with the others in bona fide multilateral guarantees of the neutrality of that region. In that manner the small nations of that part of the world might have an opportunity to develop in an independent manner—an opportunity which they have not known for centuries.

The time is short; the time is now to face up to the implications of this worsening situation in Laos. The danger of our over-extended commitment in Southeast Asia needs to be considered frankly and without delay. The fact is that the President and the Congress have still not corralled an open-ended military involvement in a part of the world which is not directly vital to our security, in a part of the world in which the involvement was a misfortune to begin with and every day of its continuance a tragedy.

Mr. GURNEY. Mr. President, will the distinguished majority leader yield?

Mr. MANSFIELD. Yes, indeed.