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Congressional Record S. 6309 - Vietnam - POW'S

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Senate

THURSDAY, MAY 6, 1971

dedicated its interest, if both parties agree in Paris. But, as of this moment, Hanoi has not agreed.

Perhaps, when the time comes, that might be one way to face up to the situation, if an agreement can be reached between Hanoi and Washington in Paris.

However, up to the present time, there seems to be no possibility of such an agreement.

But, Mr. President, the question of the POW's has been receiving significant attention both in this country and in Paris as well as in Hanoi. The number of POW's has been estimated at approximately 1,500 but figures have been given by North Vietnam to the effect that they hold approximately 400 U.S. prisoners of war.

The question of the POW's figures significantly and, in some respects, overridingly in the matter of ending the war in Vietnam. The administration has said that we will maintain forces in Vietnam until all POW's are released. Hanoi has said that they will not even begin to discuss the fate of the prisoners until a termination date has been set and then, according to press reports from the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris, they have indicated this matter could be settled promptly.

If a termination date were set and negotiations in earnest begun, there would be no useful reason, in my opinion, for North Vietnam to keep the U.S. POW's there. If a termination date is not set, then we are confronted with the paradoxical situation which results in more and more American casualties, perhaps more and more POW's and more and more of a determination on the part of North Vietnam to hang on to the POW's.

A terminal date for ending the war could lead to the release of the POW's. A continuation of the war with increased casualties and an increase in the number of POW's would make a bad situation worse. As it is now, it appears to me that both sides of the coin are the same as far as the POW's are concerned. The present approach makes hostages of the POW's with the result that the possibility of their release fades into the distance even as the casualties and the cost increase week by week, month by month, year by year. If we agree to a termination date and the prisoners are not released, we still retain all our options and, thereby, lose nothing in the attempt.

On April 16 the President gave another reason in addition to the POW issue for not fixing a terminal date on the involvement. That was to give South Vietnam at least a chance to defend itself against North Vietnam. With an army which is larger than North Vietnam's, equipped, trained, supplied, paid and advised by Americans over a period extending from 1955 to the present, I would say that if they are not in a position now to have at least a chance to defend them-

VIETNAM—U.S. PRISONERS OF WAR

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, over the past several days, a proposal has been made by means of which prisoners of war from both sides in Vietnam would be interned in Sweden.

President Nixon has indicated his approval. The Swedish Government has in-

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selves, then they never will be. It is their country. It is their future. It is their decision, not ours.

Over the years I have not deviated from my position that we had no business becoming involved, militarily, in Vietnam. We have no foundation and never have had for the pursuit of our intervention there.

As of April 27, 1971, 352,794 casualties, \$120 billion wasted, demoralization and divisiveness at home and abroad, drug addiction, graft, corruption, fraggings, the laying waste of a country and the wasting of lives—that is what Vietnam has entailed, that is what Vietnam means—even now.

Mr. AIKEN. Mr. President, I was quite impressed by the remarks of the able majority leader concerning the advisability of bringing the war in Southeast Asia to a close.

He referred particularly to the matter of prisoners of war. I believe, correctly, that if the President should fix a date for terminating the war and then the prisoners are not released, the date would, of course, become useless, but we would not have lost anything.

The Senator from Montana also referred to the President's statement that we would end the war whenever we felt that South Vietnam had a reasonable chance to look after its own affairs.

It occurs to me with 1 million well-armed men in South Vietnam, that if they do not have a reasonable chance to defend themselves now against a force one-third their size from the north, then the situation would appear to be somewhat hopeless and it would certainly look like something was wrong with it.

Mr. President, I was, however, impressed the other night with the President's statement that on October 15 he would make another statement regarding further withdrawals.

My hope is that by October 15, at the latest, the President would be able to announce a definite date for the withdrawal of our forces from Southeast Asia. If he sets that date and if, as the Senator from Montana has said, the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong do not then live up to their promises, then the situation would not be changed from what it is now.

I am inclined to think that North Vietnam would like to get out of this war as much as most of us would.

Thus, I hope that when the President makes his statement on October 15, which has been set ahead somewhat from the earlier dates which had been named, we will see results which will give this country and the world at large a great deal more hope regarding the Southeast Asia situation than we have had for the past several years.

Mr. COOPER. Mr. President, I, too, had the opportunity to hear the distinguished majority leader and his comments regarding the war in Vietnam and our prisoners of war.

I must say that no one has been more consistent in his approach to this war and his objective of bringing it to an end than has the distinguished Senator from Montana (Mr. MANSFIELD).

I recall in 1954 when it appeared that consideration as being given to the use

of U.S. forces in Vietnam, after the surrender of the French, the Senator from Montana (Mr. MANSFIELD) spoke against our intervention. That was 17 years ago. President Eisenhower refused to send troops. Consistently throughout the years, the Senator from Montana has continued to urge that our participation in the Vietnam war be ended. He has been a great leader in this effort.

I have been happy on several occasions to be associated with him. I know that his efforts will continue.