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Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I have listened with great interest and close attention to the two speeches made this afternoon, first by the distinguished senior Senator from Oregon (Mr. Hat­field), one of the original sponsors of the amendment now under discussion, and second by the distinguished Senator from Kansas (Mr. Dolle), who dealt at some length with the situation as seen from his point of view. May I say that I found both speeches interesting. I found both of them full of facts and I found them both to be free from partisan politics.

As far as the Senator from Montana is concerned, he does not believe he should go by the polls, no matter what they indicate, no matter what they say about the President's popularity or lack of popularity, no matter what they say about Vietnam and the attitude of the people, because polls should be of secondary consideration as far as we are concerned, and our consciences should be our guides.

I commend President Nixon for what he has done in many respects in the field of foreign policy since he took office less than 2½ years ago. If I differ with him—and I do on occasion—I do so most respectfully and with a full recognition of the awesome responsibilities which
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are his in the conduct of this Nation’s relationships with the other countries around the globe. I give the President full credit for bringing about a continued withdrawal from South Vietnam, from Thailand, from the Philippines, and from Japan. I wish it was a faster and more accelerated withdrawal because I think we have been in Vietnam longer than we can stand, and that the United States has already, paid too much and suffered too many casualties. But this was a situation which President Nixon inherited and which he cannot help the U.S. with the beginning of this tragic adventure which marks this country’s situation in that part of the world today.

I would say for the record that at the time President Nixon came into office there were 3.5 million troops under arms and today that number has been lowered to less than 2.7 million men. In other words, over 800,000 military personnel have, in effect, been lopped off the rolls since this administration came into office less than 2½ years ago. I give them credit for it.

Now, the President has put into effect the Nixon doctrine based on the Guam declaration in Southeast Asia, as I have tried to do through this Administration’s withdrawals. Except for Vietnam, he does the nation in a lower profile there as far as this Nation is concerned, in contrast to other parts of the world notably Western Europe, where the profile is still very much in view. The trend is in the right direction in Southeast Asia. Less than 1,000,000 troops remain in Vietnam at the present time—Vietnam, Laos, and maybe there are a few in Cambodia. I do not know. This figure is exclusive of the approximately 40,000 to 45,000 in Thailand.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the Senator has expired.

Mr. HATFIELD. Mr. President, I yield 5 additional minutes to the Senator from Montana.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized for an additional 5 minutes.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Nor am I too much interested in what this amendment is called for. The date, the end, the war, or, as I believe the distinguished Senator from Oregon and from Kansas referred to it, I am sure jokingly, the “lose the peace amendment,” is an amendment which seeks to set a date. If I had my “druthers” I would like to see that date the day after the elections in South Vietnam this coming September. But that is a little too soon and that has no possibility or probability.

Therefore, I fall back on the next best date, which is the date announced by the distinguished Senator from Oregon, and it has enough leeway in it beyond December 31, 1971, to give great consideration to the prisoner of war issue. Now I think that the prisoner of war issue should be mentioned in this debate. I think that the casualties should be mentioned in this debate.

I would refuse to listen to the radio this morning to hear the announcement to the effect that “Only 19 Americans were killed last week, the lowest in the last 15 weeks.” I would refuse to listen to the radio this morning to hear the announcement to the effect that “Only 15 Americans were killed; “only 19,” that is what was said. Well, an American is an American, whether the number is 1, or 19, or 50, or 100, or almost 55,000. The latest figures I have, and they are dated May 29, 1971, issued by the Department of Defense, show that up to that time 299,633 Americans have been wounded since January 1, 1961, in Southeast Asia; 45,231 have been killed in combat; 428 Americans have died from other causes.

The grand total of casualties to May 29, 1971, less than 2 weeks ago, was 354,428 Americans. I believe that the casualties should be mentioned in this debate, not only to cut the casualties, not only to cut the costs, not only to try to stop drug addiction, corruption, fragging, but also to do what we can to prevent an increase in the number of U.S. prisoners of war held by North Vietnam and the Vietcong, because the longer this war continues, the more U.S. prisoners there are going to be, the more significant they will be, the more the cost will increase, the greater the drug addiction will become, and very possibly the number of fraggings will go down also.

The distinguished Senator from Kansas has said that there is a discrepancy between the number of U.S. prisoners held in North Vietnam and the number announced by Hanoi itself. If I remember correctly, the figure enumerated by the distinguished Senator was that we think the figure is somewhere between 1,600 and 2,000 which is a good figure. The number announced by Hanoi is somewhat under 400. So there is a wide divergence of opinion. But it appears to me, that, as long as the question of the POW’s is interwoven in the negotiations, and in the course of the negotiations, and in the press of the country, we ought to give it a little more consideration than has been the case up to this time.

The fate of the POW’s is of concern to this administration and to this Senate—there is no question about that—and neither do I make of it a political issue. We want to do what we can, either singly or together, to bring about the release of these prisoners of war, or, at the least, to see that in the interim, they have their mail privileges restored, that they are given humane treatment, and that their names are released.

Mr. President, may I say in all candor that the distinguished Senator from Kansas (Mr. DOLE) has been one of the leaders in the Senate in the interests of the POW’s, and has done so ever since he has been a Member of the Senate, to my personal knowledge. But the administration has said that we will maintain forces in Vietnam until all the 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. It appears to me that the POW’s issues from Paris by the North Vietnamese delegation, they have indicated that this matter could be settled promptly.

As a matter of fact on April 31 of this year, the Associated Press reported the following from Paris, and I quote:

The chief spokesman of North Vietnam’s delegation at the Paris Peace talks said today...

“there will be no problem about rapid repatriation of all American POW’s and MIA’s held by Hanoi after the announcement—

After the announcement—

deadline for total withdrawal of all American forces from South Vietnam.

If a termination date were set, or even announced, in line with the AP dispatch dated last April, and negotiations in earnest began, there would be no useless reason, in my opinion, for the North Vietnamese to keep the U.S. POW’s there.

But this was not true—President Nixon announced the Geneva Accords in 1954, ending the Indochina war in which the French were involved at that time with the Viet Minh, the forces of Ho Chi Minh, if my memory serves me correctly, the North Vietnamese released all the French prisoners of war they had at that time.

I make that statement advisedly because I have read in the newspapers in recent weeks that there are rumors to the effect that there are still French POW’s in North Vietnam, working with the forces of Hanoi. Whether or not that is not true, the rumor has never been verified, to the best of my knowledge, and, speaking personally, I would be prone to take it with a grain of salt, though I would like to see the information, if possible, looked into closely.

If a termination date is not set, then we are confronted with the paradoxical and inexplicable situation in which our government ispetitive on my part—in more and more
U.S. casualties, perhaps more and more U.S. prisoners of war, and very likely the French will terminate their presence on the part of Hanoi and the Vietcong to hang onto those U.S. POW’s if for no other reason than to hold them hostage—and that is a most pertinent reason.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. HATFIELD. Mr. President, I yield 5 additional minutes to the Senator from Montana.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, does the Senator from Kansas want me to yield to him?

Mr. DOLE. Yes.

Mr. MANSFIELD. I yield.

Mr. DOLE. My reference to the POW’s and the MIA’s is not to get them all intertwined in the argument, but, since the point has been raised, the fact should be mentioned that they say they hold 399 prisoners and we say there are at least 1,488 POW’s and MIA’s in Indochina. In more words, there may be some in countries other than North Vietnam.

I think the Senator was wondering, and I think we should discuss somewhat, how do we determine the right number at some point in time?—and this is relative on my part—in more and more U.S. casualties, perhaps more and more U.S. prisoners of war, and very likely the French will terminate their presence on the part of Hanoi and the Vietcong to hang onto those U.S. POW’s if for no other reason than to hold them hostage—and that is a most pertinent reason.

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America as missing in action? What happens to him? That is why I raised the question.

What about the more than 1,000 Americans who are known POW's? If we fix the deadline, what will be the fate of these men? I think the Senator from Montana shares that concern. Perhaps it should be discussed so we may shed some light on it.

Mr. MANSFIELD. I would certainly agree with the distinguished Senator from Kansas. That we should discuss it because when I talked about the POW's, I indicated that the problem is in action. Collectively the figure 1,600 or 1,700 comprises that total, and what I was saying about the POW's applies just as strongly to the missing in action. I would like to see further information given.

Of course, we have to accept the very probable fact that some of the missing in action are dead. It is unfortunate, but that is very likely the way it will turn out.

But they should be considered together, and it is my belief that a terminal date for ending the war could lead to the release of the POW's and the identification, wherever possible, of what the Senator from Kansas refers to as the MIA's—the missing in action.

A continuation of the war, with increased casualties and an increase in the number of U.S. prisoners of war, which is very likely as the war continues, the raids are carried on, and the fighting, while declining, still exists—would only 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 costs increase as time goes on.

If we agree on a terminal date, and the prisoners are not released, we still retain all our options, and thereby lose nothing in the attempt.

In other words, I think that the risk is worth the price, and if we mean what we say about bringing about the earliest possible release of the POW's and the identification, wherever possible, of those missing in action, this is a risk in the right direction, it is a risk we should take, and it is a risk which would, I think, be beneficial in looking after the best interests of the POW's.

But this is not the only thesis laid down by the President when the question of a terminal date is discussed. He has also said that he believes that some withdrawal—sometimes going back several months, that we should not withdraw or should not consider withdrawing until South Vietnam—I paraphrase the word—"has at least a chance" to survive.

Well, I do not know what more we can do to help the South Vietnamese. To the best of my personal knowledge—and I stress the word "personal"—we have been helping them since 1954, when we sent out the first advisory group. We have sent general after general after general, adviser after adviser. We have had programs coming out of their ears and ours, and always the rosy reports turn out to be untrue, false, and we start all over again.

I believe that the Army of South Vietnam is the seventh largest army in the world today. I am not certain about that figure. I could stand corrected, but that is my recollection. It is larger than North Vietnam's. It is better equipped, better trained—at least technically, by us—better supplied, paid, and advised—by Americans over a period from 1955 down to the present. The years 1955, 1965, 1971—that is 16 years. If they are not ready now to look after their interests, their country, and their future, in my opinion they never will be.

The President has faced up to his responsibilities. He is withdrawing troops at a more accelerated rate than he announced some weeks ago, at which time he indicated to the American people that there would be a monthly rate of withdrawal of somewhere around 14,200 up to December 1 of this year. I believe that the facts will indicate that rate of withdrawal has been stepped up, so that now it numbers somewhere between 17,000 and 19,000 a month. In other words, he is withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam at a considerably faster rate than he announced in his report to the people.

It may be that the President's position is the right one. Maybe that is what will have to be done to bring about the release of the prisoners of war and the identification of the missing in action. He is exercising his responsibility. I do not doubt that what he is doing he thinks he is doing in the best interest of the Nation. I do not question his sincerity or his desire to get out of Vietnam in an appropriate way at an appropriate time.

But we also have a responsibility, and we have to make up our own minds and do what we think is best in behalf of the people whom we represent and the Nation as a whole. But I would hope that we would support the Hatfield-McGovern amendment, because it does seek to bring about a definite date which will end hostilities and which hopefully will bring about the return of the prisoners of war and the identification of those Americans missing in action.

May I say that in my opinion, I think the President of the United States has a date in mind, and I can understand why he would not be in a position to announce it, because he must have some definitive time at which he intends to bring this war to a close and to withdraw—I hope on a lock, stock, and barrel basis, not with a residual force left behind.

But by the Senate taking an affirmative action and Senators facing up to their responsibilities individually and collectively, I think we can help reinforce the date. I think we can help bring about a more rapid pursuit of the road to peace, and in that way bring about, that much sooner, the return of the POW's, a reduction in casualties, a reduction in costs, a reduction in fragmenting, a reduction in drug addiction, a reduction in troops, and a return of our men to this country, where the costs will be great in rehabilitating them. This war—has cost us not only so much in manpower—which is the primary and first consideration, but it has cost us in excess of $125 bil-