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Statement of Senator Mansfield - Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

I have had a chance to study in more detail the proposal made by Madame Binh, the Chairman of the Viet Cong Delegation, which evidently has the full support of Xuan Thuy, the Chairman of the North Vietnamese Delegation. In my opinion, these proposals have been made with the approval and, perhaps, at the instigation of Le Duc Tho, a member of the ruling hierarchy in Hanoi. These proposals could well be the reason for his return to Paris after a fourteen-month absence.

It appears to me that the 7-point statement, for the first time, contains within it the elements of a prospective breakthrough in the impasse up to last Thursday which marked the previous 118 meeting in Paris. The call for a ceasefire and mutual agreement on the phased withdrawal of American troops (which has been the policy of this government for the last two and a half years) and concurrently the phased release of U. S. POW's; the settling of the problem of "Vietnamese armed forces" by the Vietnamese themselves; the question of the country's reunification to be a matter to be settled among the Vietnamese only; the recognition that South Viet Nam after our withdrawal would set up relations with all countries including the United States indicated its independence would be retained at least into the indeterminant future; and that seems to be reinforced and emphasized in Point #7 which states "parties will find agreement on the forms of respect and international guarantee of the accords that will be concluded."
Proposal #2 in the 7-point statement is indeterminate as to what it means or implies. This refers to the question of "tri-partite government," and with the organizing of general elections.

Proposal #6 relative to the U. S. being held liable to paying an indemnity for "for the losses and the destructions it has caused to the Vietnamese people in the two zones" is also open to question though I think that if it were transposed into "rehabilitation and reconstruction" that would be subject to negotiation.

My over-all reaction is that for the first time, a "meat and potatoes" proposal has been made, that the talks at Paris--there have been no negotiations--have moved off dead-center and that now for the first time we do see a real possibility of that outworn phrase "light at the end of the tunnel," becoming a reality.

I can understand the White House reserved reaction, but I am glad that they are holding the door open. I can well understand Ambassador Bruce's request that he be given a week or so to consider the 7-point proposal.

I only hope that this "straw in the wind" will be given every possible consideration before it slips away, and I am pleased at this time that that seems to be the reaction of the Administration. I am happy that the President's probes over the past several months are creating this movement, and I am hopeful that out of this latest proposal will come the ways and means to bring this tragic war to a conclusion at the earliest possible date. We all realize, of course, that the final decision will be the President's, and we all--the Congress and the people--would like to be helpful in achieving that objective.

The govt of S. Vietnam has been given a reasonable chance and elections will take place in October for the President. (over)
STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

July 12, 1971

Mr. President:

I have had a chance to study in detail the proposals made by Madame Binh, the Chairman of the Delegation of the National Liberation Front, which evidently have the full support of Xuan Thuy, the Chairman of the North Vietnamese Delegation. These proposals have been made with the obvious approval and, perhaps, at the instigation of Le Duc Tho, a member of the ruling committee in Hanoi who has returned to Paris after a fourteen-month absence.

It appears to me that the 7-point statement, for the first time, contains elements of a breakthrough in the impasse which had marked, previously, the 118 meetings in Paris. The statement calls for a ceasefire and a mutual agreement based on the phased withdrawal of American troops (which, in any event, has been the aim of this government for the last two and a half years) and, concurrently, the release of U. S. POW's which is also the basic aim of the Administration.

As for the problem of the "Vietnamese armed forces," it is proposed that settlement be by the Vietnamese themselves. It is also proposed that Vietnamese alone work out the problem of reunification. The statement notes that after a U. S. withdrawal, South Viet Nam would be prepared to establish relations with all countries including the United States, an indication that some form of independence is envisioned at least into the indeterminate future. That point seems to be reinforced in Point #7 which states "parties will find agreement on the forms of respect and international guarantee of the accords that will be concluded."
Proposal #2 in the 7-point statement is indeterminate as to meaning. It refers to the question of an interim "tripartite government," and the organizing of general elections. Presumably, negotiations could serve to clarify the implications of this point.

Proposal #6 relative to U. S. liability to pay an indemnity "for the losses and the destruction it has caused to the Vietnamese people in the two zones" is open to question. If it were transposed into a postwar effort at "joint rehabilitation and reconstruction," however, it might well be subject to negotiation.

In any event, my over-all reaction to Madame Binh's statement is that it constitutes, for the first time, a substantial proposal. The talks at Paris--there have been no negotiations as yet--have been moved off dead-center. Indeed, we may be seeing, at last, a real possibility in the outworn phrase "light at the end of the tunnel."

I can appreciate the reserved reaction on the part of the White House but I am glad that the door is being held open. In the same way Ambassador Bruce's request that he be given time to consider the 7-point proposal is also understandable, along with his initial "yes, but" response.
Nevertheless, I hope that this straw in the wind will not slip away as, I am confident the Administration has no intention of permitting. It seems to me that the President's probes for peace over the past several months have created this stirring in the first place, and, hopefully, out of this latest proposal will come the ways and means to bring the war to a conclusion. The final decisions remain with the President, but all of us--the Congress and the people--are, I am sure, ready and willing to sustain the efforts which he made to achieve a negotiated peace.

Insofar as South Viet Nam is concerned, any commitments which we may have had to the government in Saigon have long since been discharged. We have given to the present government and to every predecessor government after that of President Ngo Dinh Diem whatever support could be given for the past 17 years. As for the election which is scheduled to take place in October for the Presidency, that will be the business of the Vietnamese not ours. If the outcome is based upon a free and open contest, the results can only be respected. Whatever the outcome, our principal concern, at this point, it seems to me, must center on the American POW's and the MIA's (the Missing in Action). It has been proposed that we consider the situation of these Americans in juxtaposition to a phased withdrawal of U. S. forces and that these two matters be treated apart from the other considerations in the 7-point proposal. Why not? The U. S. withdrawal has already been in process for the past 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) years. Why not speed up the withdrawal to full completion if it means, reciprocally, as indicated in the 7-point proposal that Hanoi will be willing to match it with a rapid release of all POW's.
Our primary obligation in this situation is to our own country and to our own people. That has been, is, and will continue to be the basic consideration which has underlain my own position as a Senator from Montana. In this case, the obligation has to do with the fate of the American POW's as the Administration has made clear many times.

There may well be in these proposals of the National Liberation Front some "light at the end of the tunnel," for these men. The proposals may also contain light for a final peace settlement. As I see it, the time to find out is now.