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OPENING STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE

BY

MIKE MANSFIELD, MAJORITY LEADER, UNITED STATES SENATE

Thursday, March 15, 1973, Room S-207, U. S. Capitol, 9:30 A. M.

On Tuesday, the Policy Committee met and considered several matters, but the concern of the Committee centered on the inordinate waste of billions of dollars abroad for antiquated and obsolete military purposes. This concern is heightened by the unwillingness of the Administration to shut off the foreign drain even as it has demanded that Congress accept destructive cutbacks in domestic programs of urgent need to Americans in the rural areas no less than in the cities and towns of this nation.

This month, wholesale prices climbed at rates more excessive and inflationary than at any time in over two decades. Food prices alone went up by 3.2%. To the consumer, the cost of fuel, lumber and basic commodities and services are going out of reach. Abroad, the value of the dollar continues to shrink. The Senate is about to revalue gold by 10% to cover the last dollar devaluation—the second in about fourteen months. Still, monetary stability remains in doubt.

It was in part to accommodate to this financial situation that the Administration says it was forced to cut back domestic priorities. Nevertheless, the Administration has continued to pour even more money into the military budget and foreign assistance.
In the past, Senators have taken the lead in efforts to have the Executive Branch pare back superfluous foreign military and other involvements. Time and again, this Administration has been urged from the Senate floor to act, and to no avail. Finally, with the support of the Democratic Policy Committee, amendments to compel cuts in U.S. forces in NATO were offered to legislation in the last Congress. The first attempt on May 19, 1971, called for a straight troop reduction of 50%. It was defeated by a margin of 25 votes. The second try came late that year. It would have provided staged reductions, removing 50% of our forces from Europe over a three-year period. The amendment was again defeated 39 to 54 but the idea had gained strength and the losing margin shrunk to 15 votes.

It costs the people of the United States about $30 billion annually to maintain bases, troops and facilities abroad. Using the Administration's own figures, the price to the United States of NATO participation is about $17 billion. The balance of payments impact of NATO is in the neighborhood of $5 billion, considering official expenditures and dollar usage by dependents of servicemen.

While Europe receives the greatest portion of the defense dollar outflow, the United States maintains well over 600,000 uniformed service people around the globe at $10,000 per man in pay and allowances alone. Our naval forces carry tens of thousands more to foreign ports, appearing on station in nearly every body of water on earth that is deep enough to float a vessel. More dollars go out through that channel.

As this calendar year opened, increases in U.S. troop strength were even recorded in Britain—2,000 more U.S. servicemen were deployed there, presumably to defend the British Isles from foreign aggression. We also increased our presence in the Indian Ocean, Australia, and elsewhere.
While in some areas there were downward adjustments of our military presence, the fact remains that overseas, there are still too many Americans, too many dependents, too many bases, too many facilities at too great a cost to the people of this nation and at little or no cost to those whose security, presumably, is being defended. Indeed, one German state is in the process of levying taxes on certain U.S. installations. As if to add insult to injury, the American taxpayer is forced to listen to a government which wastes billions for antiquated and irrelevant purposes of this kind tell him that the nation’s resources are just not big enough to provide adequately for domestic services—whether for health, education, welfare or rural services—to the people of this nation.

It is true that talks on mutual force reductions, after being first urged from the Senate over eleven years ago, are now being pursued, finally, by the Executive Branch with the Russians. At this late date, however, insofar as they involve U.S. forces deployed in Western Europe, they are not much more, in my judgment, than a last ditch stall. If the present deployment of men is too high in Europe—and it is—talking with the Russians about reducing them simply prolongs what is already an unnecessary and wasteful drain on this nation. If these U.S. forces in Europe are an excess and a waste to us they cannot increase by one iota our bargaining power with the Russians. Nor can they make any contribution commensurate with cost to our security or to Europe’s. If these talks delay what are clearly desirable reductions of our forces, then the talks actually act contrary to our national interests by intensifying the financial debilitation of the United States.
In any event, the possibility of mutual force reductions ought in no way to inhibit the efforts to cut unilaterally this nation's excessive military involvement abroad, be it in Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia, Australia, in the islands or on the oceans. Actually, unilateral action by the United States to remove an excess of troops from Europe without diminishing our basic commitment to the NATO Treaty might serve to prod a similar move on the part of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. But as long as we stay put in Europe, the Russians will be under no pressure to move out. In short, unilateral action, now, to require a phased reduction of U.S. troops from Europe is needed in our unilateral interest. At the same time, it could very well accelerate the timetable of the mutual force reduction talks.

It has been well over a year since the Senate has addressed this issue. In my judgment, it is particularly appropriate now, with the dollar suffering new declines in confidence abroad and inflation rampant at home that the Senate be given the opportunity again.

In my judgment, no single act which the Congress or the President or both can take at this time would do more to check the inflation at home or the enfeeblement of the dollar abroad than to move without delay to reduce the far-flung and outdated overseas military deployment in an orderly fashion. It is on that basis that the Democratic Policy Committee adopted the resolution which the Secretary for the Majority will now read. I urge its favorable consideration and I pray that the Republican Minority in the Congress and the President will join with us in the pursuit of its contents.