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Speeches, The Western Pacific: Perspective and Prospective

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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REMARKS OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

at the

San Francisco Area World Trade Association
A Council of the Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce
Hotel Hilton, San Francisco, California
Thursday, May 25, 1967
2:00 p.m. (PDLT)

THE WESTERN PACIFIC
Perspective and Prospective

It is my understanding that at any given time up to 75 ocean-going vessels can be counted in San Francisco Bay. Within a 24-hour period, 50 planes on international schedule will pass through the gateways of this city. In a year, the Bay region moves 13 million tons of cargo in and out of the nation. Over the same period, 400 to 500 thousand travelers enter or leave by way of its portals.

These are figures which add to the cosmopolitan luster of this magnificent city and I know they are a delight to the Chamber. They are also figures, may I say, which are not calculated to grate on the ears of this distinguished group of world traders.
As a Senator of the United States, I share your pleasure in an immense volume of international trade. Since Montana lacks ocean ports, moreover, it is quite agreeable that a lion's share move through the waters which lie within the jurisdiction of the sponsoring Chamber. In view of the entrepot which San Francisco provides for this great two-way flow, the name "Old Gold Mountain," which is what I understand the Chinese call the city, seems most appropriate.

There is great value in a thriving intercourse with countries beyond our borders. The exchange of goods and peoples is a contribution to the nation's peace and well-being. It is a source of enrichment of our national life.

In these times, however, any pleasure which comes from international interchange is not unalloyed. Rather, it is tinged with a profound concern because Viet Nam figures in the figure with which I opened my remarks. You and I know that a part of the 13 million tons of cargo is military cargo; it is headed for a brutal struggle in distant jungles and rice paddies.
You and I know that the travelers using the facilities of this city are not all bent on commerce or pleasure. The travelers include tens of thousands of Americans outward bound for war or homecoming from war, many bearing the scars of conflict and some in the stillness of death. The latest casualty figures show more than 10,000 Americans killed and 55,000 wounded in Viet Nam.

So the satisfaction which comes from a flourishing international exchange, I repeat, is diluted by the implications of Viet Nam. Viet Nam casts a shadow not only over your commercial preoccupations; in the same way, it also dims other aspects of our national life. As Majority Leader of the Senate, for example, I have had some association with the enactment of the legislative programs of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. These programs, in my judgment, make exceptional contributions to the nation's approach to the problems of older citizens, public health, education, conservation of natural resources, recreational facilities, taxation and economic growth, international trade, transportation, communications,
power supply, and many other long-neglected public needs of the American people.

Some of you may regard these programs in a different light. However they may be judged, I can assure you that from the point of view of a professional legislator, the enactment of the Kennedy and Johnson programs represents, in terms of volume and scope, a unique legislative achievement.

The satisfaction which might be found in the achievement, however, is dulled by the deepening concern with Viet Nam. And whatever contribution the enactment of the Kennedy and Johnson programs may have made to the public life of the nation lies largely in the engulfing shadow of Viet Nam.

The Vietnamese conflict has something of the same effect on the nation's foreign relations. It throws into doubt, for example, the fragile beginning in the improvement of relations with the Eastern European nations. It introduces a note of diffidence into our associations with the Western Europeans who are unwilling--to say the least--to immerse themselves in the
question of Viet Nam. It obscures the unfolding of events in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and even in other parts of Asia which may have great significance for this nation.

That American interest should be concentrated on Viet Nam is as inevitable as it is understandable. The implications of Viet Nam are stark and immediate. More and more the war involves the young man next door. Already it touches directly a great number of American hearts. It demands much from many in the way of tangible personal sacrifice. Millions of Americans have been in Viet Nam or know someone who has been in Viet Nam. Millions more can expect to be exposed to a similar experience.

Viet Nam is war and war takes precedence over other affairs of the nation. On that point there ought to be no ground for confusion or doubt. The support which the American forces in Viet Nam have received has been unstinting. They are the best equipped and supplied military organization in the history of warfare. Whatever has been sought by the President
for the conduct of operations in Viet Nam has been granted by
the Congress and by overwhelming votes. Congress is on record
by a resolution, which I myself happen to have introduced,
assuring to the men in Viet Nam the unequivocal support of the
nation.

That will continue to be the case for as long as
necessary. Let neither friend nor foe be under any misapprehen-
sion on that score. Americans in Viet Nam shall receive what-
ever they may require to carry out their assignments. They did
not choose to go to Viet Nam; they were sent there by the poli-
cies of the United States government. To differ with the poli-
cies in no way inhibits a sense of obligation to the servicemen
in Viet Nam. Nor, may I add, does full support of these men
require rote endorsement of the policies which sent them there.
To insist that the two are inseparable is to equate the open
heart of patriotism with the closed mind of political conformity.

President Johnson, may I say, was among the first
to reject any suggestion that the two are linked. I know from
personal knowledge that he welcomes responsible discussion of
the question of Viet Nam and that he is prepared to listen to all reasonable suggestions on how the conflict may be terminated in honor.

It must be faced frankly, however, that the end is not in sight in Viet Nam. It is not in sight, by military action or negotiations, or any visible combination. The question of Viet Nam has taken on ever increasing significance to Americans as the massive buildup of forces in Southeast Asia has proceeded. That buildup gives to the matter another dimension by underscoring the depth of the commitment of the United States to help the people of South Viet Nam preserve a choice over their political future.

In view of the sacrifices which already have been made, Viet Nam is now embedded in the feelings of the nation. That is all the more reason for responsible public discussion of the issues which are posed by this situation. Unless it ensues, the conflict in Viet Nam cannot be placed in accurate perspective in terms of the domestic needs and other problems abroad which confront the United States.
I would emphasize that Viet Nam is not the sum of our national difficulties. Notwithstanding Viet Nam, smog will still settle over the cities of the nation. There will be no letup in the pollution of rivers, streams, and tidewaters. Viet Nam will not spare us a long summer of racial and other tension in the smoldering cities. Viet Nam will not reduce the pressure of population on the police, transport, educational, housing, and other facilities of the great urban centers. What is required to maintain a prosperous and inflation-free economy and a flourishing international exchange—as you well know—will not be lessened by Viet Nam.

Problems of this sort have been the preoccupation of the Congress for the past several years. I believe the legislation which has been enacted goes to the heart of many of them. But this legal machinery must be used energetically and it must be used wisely. If it is neglected, if it grinds to a halt because of the preoccupation with Viet Nam, the nation will suffer the consequences in the years ahead. A concentration on
Viet Nam may obscure the public needs of the nation but it will not alleviate them. On the contrary, Viet Nam will complicate and exacerbate all of them.

In a similar vein, it should be noted that the flow of events throughout the world will not wait upon a disposal of the problem of Viet Nam. There are questions of foreign relations elsewhere which the stake of the nation is also very great, but which tend to be overlooked in present circumstances. One has only to note, for example, the current turn of developments in the Middle East. We may well ask ourselves is the change in that situation as sudden as it now appears? Or did the crisis gather while our preoccupations were elsewhere?

I would stress, therefore, that it is vital to consider Viet Nam in the context of the nation's worldwide interests. In particular, we need to see this conflict in Southeast Asia in the perspective of the nation's over-all position in the Western Pacific.

Certain similarities between Korea and Viet Nam are relevant to that perspective. Both, for example, lie at
extremities of an antagonistic mainland China and both are on the Asian littoral of the Pacific Ocean. Both are former colonial dependencies. Both were set free but were divided in the wake of the collapse, respectively, of Japanese and French power.

Our military involvements in the two conflicts developed as a response to aggressive incursions from a Communist-linked north into an American-linked south. These incursions were launched, however, not in the name of Communism but under the banner of nationalism--of national liberation and unity.

Both the conflict in Korea and in Viet Nam have pitted us in brutal struggle against peoples for whom we have had no tradition of hostility. Both conflicts have exacted a heavy toll of suffering and destruction amongst those people and a large price in American lives and resources. Our direct military involvement in each instance began as a limited effort, on top of a prolonged period of economic and military aid to a
weak indigenous government. With U.N. sanction and support, we sought to assist the South Koreans to repel an invasion from North Korea. This initial and successful campaign was then pushed beyond its original purpose and led, against expectations, into a massive and indecisive clash with mainland Chinese forces.

In Viet Nam we have had the support of certain allied Asian and other Western Pacific nations but, to date, the United Nations has maintained a formal silence. It has not sanctioned the U.S. action. Indeed, the U.N. has not yet even taken formal note of the existence of the conflict. That is, may I say, an immense understatement of a massive oversight.

If I may digress for a moment, I would express the hope that steps will be taken to bring the U.N. into this question in the near future. At the very least, the U.N. Security Council should recognize the existence of the struggle and seek to bring all the disputants into a cards-on-the-table confrontation.
As in Korea, our military involvement in Viet Nam began as a limited support undertaking. By air and sea, however, the military effort has now been expanded into North Viet Nam. At the same time, the war in the south has become, increasingly, an American military operation which pits our forces against both North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong guerrillas.

The expansion of this conflict in Viet Nam, in my judgment, carries the strong possibilities of another massive clash between China and the United States and even the seeds of World War III. It is not that all concerned do not remember the Korean experience. It is not that this nation would deliberately enlarge the Vietnamese conflict into a provocative challenge to China. It is simply that military actions once launched tend to establish their own momentum in which one step leads inexorably to the next. We may well ask ourselves before we go much further in this process how many steps have already been taken in this fashion since the first American bomb fell on North Viet Nam scarcely three years ago?
The successive steps have drawn U.S. military power deeply into Viet Nam. In this involvement, as with the Korean conflict a decade and a half ago, we have made an immense military commitment in a region in which our national interests were minimal before World War II. A quarter of a century ago, Viet Nam and Korea scarcely piqued our national curiosity.

American foreign policy found little of relevance to our national security and welfare in Korea. The same was true of Viet Nam or, for that matter, of Indo-China as a whole, except perhaps as that region came under the control of the Japanese war machine after 1940. Pre-World War II trade with these two Asian peninsulas was almost non-existent. Americans did not travel to either of them in any great numbers. In fact, in 1953, when I visited Laos with an associate, the two of us doubled the American population there. Even at that late date, there were only two young American vice-consuls living in the entire country. And in Viet Nam, that year, the total of Americans certainly did not exceed two hundred, almost all
government officials and including several in an American consular establishment in Hanoi.

The contrast, today, is staggering. We have mobilized in and around Viet Nam in Southeast Asia an American military force in excess of half-a-million men. We have thrown into this conflict an enormous quantity and assortment of military materiel. We have consigned great air and naval power to the struggle. Expenditures for military operations in Viet Nam have now reached an annual rate which is estimated at $25 billion and is still rising.

As I have noted, this great commitment has been undertaken in a region which, a few years ago, was scarcely visible on the spectrum of the nation's interests in the Western Pacific and of even less significance in terms of the world-wide position of the United States. The precipitous increase to the present level of concern with Viet Nam raises certain fundamental questions. We must ask ourselves whether the Vietnamese involvement (and, for that matter, the Korean
involvement) signifies a new concept of American interests in the Western Pacific? Do these incursions into the Asian mainland signal a permanent recasting of our policies?

Before trying to answer these questions, let me refer briefly to the pattern of American policy in the Far Pacific prior to World War II. To put it succinctly, U.S. policy traditionally resisted the commitment of substantial American military power anywhere on Asian soil and, particularly, anywhere much beyond the reach of naval support and supply. Even during World War II, the number of Americans who fought on the Asian mainland was but a fraction of the forces which we have at the present time in Viet Nam.

In setting the Philippines free in 1946, moreover, this nation turned its back on a colonial role in Asia. To put it another way, we rejected once and for all a dominant responsibility for the affairs or future of any Asian people. Rather than chase the illusions of imperialism, this nation saw its interests in the Far East as lying precisely in the activities
which many in this group pursue for a living. We saw those interests in commercial and other exchange with an Asia of peaceful, independent and developing nations. To that end, we were prepared to join with others in a judicious transfer of the skills, knowledge and capital of modernization.

In my judgment, the present involvement in Viet Nam in no way, shape, or form signals a substantial recasting of our position in the Far East. The Vietnamese conflict, as the Korean conflict before it, is a consequence of the collapse of Japanese and French imperial power. It is a consequence of the understandable weakness of the successor states. Above all else, it is a consequence of the Chinese revolutionary sweep of the mainland and the ideological fears and other uncertainties which were engendered by this cataclysmic change.

However, neither the involvement in Viet Nam nor in Korea, I would reiterate, reflects a permanent change in our position. The role of American power on the Asian mainland was and will one day, again, be limited. We did not shake loose of
the costly responsibilities in the Philippines only to assume them in Viet Nam by a new name. Our extraordinary military incursion into the Asian mainland will end as soon as the extraordinary circumstances which have evoked it have also ended.

In the second half of the 20th century, this nation is a world power, not a colonial power. The global scope of our current interests requires us to exercise the responsibilities of the former even as it compels us to reject the trappings of the latter. In a similar vein, I would suggest to you that the United States occupies the position of a Pacific power, not that of an Asian power. The difference is more than semantic.

Every significant development in, on, and over the Pacific Ocean has direct relevance to the security and well-being of the United States and we have a substantial capacity to exercise a rational influence over the course of these developments. We do not live, however, on the mainland of Asia
and the practical reach of our influence in the Far Pacific does not extend very far inland from littorals. We do not have a unique or unilateral interest in what transpires on the Asian mainland. To the extent that we have an interest at all, it is an interest which is shared with other nations, in the peace, stability, and progress of one of the great regions of the world.

In this context, our involvement in Viet Nam will be seen to be a temporary phenomenon. Indeed, the President has made this point over and over again. He has emphasized that we shall not pursue the course of a bankrupt and bankrupting colonialism in Asia. He has emphasized that as soon as an honorable settlement can be negotiated we will reverse the extraordinary deployment of our military power into Southeast Asia. He has said time after time that we seek neither territory nor permanent bases in that region.

Once peace is restored in Viet Nam, there could emerge the conditions which will allow us to resume fully the pursuit of our traditional interests in the Western Pacific.
In particular, it is to be anticipated that the prime international events of the Western Pacific will once again revolve around the triad of Japan, the Soviet Union, and China. Indeed, there are signs that this restoration is already underway.

I would note, for example, that the clash of historic border claims and other differences between China and the Soviet Union has shattered the abnormal monolithic pattern of relations between these two nations. Yet only a few years ago it was commonly thought that through Communism, Russia could fasten a permanent yoke on China. Indeed, we find, today, that there is not even a common Communist ideology within China, much less one which binds the Chinese in inseparable subservience to the Russians.

To be sure, a mutual interest in the conflict in Viet Nam has restrained differences to some degree between the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic and additional extensions of the war, moreover, could act to strengthen the bridge between them. If, as, and when the Vietnamese conflict
is settled, however, the normal difficulties between China and Russia may be expected once again to come into full play.

Japan's relations with mainland China have also developed from the total alienation two decades ago in the direction of a reassertion of natural cultural and economic affinities. It might be noted, for example, that mainland China's trade with Japan now surpasses that of Taiwan. The total reached $600 million in 1966, almost evenly divided between exports and imports. In that year, China also became Japan's fourth largest trading partner.

Similar tendencies towards normalization are to be found in relations between Japan and the Soviet Union. Under a five-year trade agreement which was initiated in 1965, total trade between the two nations will approach half-a-billion dollars for the year 1967, a large increase over last year. There is also under discussion at high levels in the Japanese and Soviet governments plans for the joint development of Siberia.
These involve the exploitation of gas resources on Soviet Sakhalin, the building of an immense pipeline in Siberia, and, possibly, the exploitation of Soviet timber and copper resources.

International developments of this kind, as I noted at the outset of my remarks, tend to be overlooked in our concern with Viet Nam. Yet, we cannot afford to ignore them, particularly when they may indicate changing situations which are of great significance to our national interests.

In my judgment, the re-emergence of a free interplay among Japan, China, and the Soviet Union is a welcome development. It tends to restore the normal core of relations in the Western Pacific. It tends also to bring closer the day when this nation may rechannel its energies fully into the pursuit of our traditional interests in that region. President Johnson, in fact, has already begun to put emphasis on these interests. He has been, for example, a prime mover in taking the multi-nation Mekong River Development Project from the drafting boards where it had rested for many years to the
construction sites of Southeast Asia. He has given strong but appropriate U.S. support to the creation of the Asian Development Bank. He has pledged our contribution to the enormous tasks of reconstruction and development in all of Southeast Asia which must surely follow the conflict in Viet Nam. In these and other ways, he has made it abundantly clear that what we seek are the lasting achievements of peace and not the fleeting triumphs of war.

Peace in Viet Nam will pave the way for a reduction and return of our military forces from the Southeast Asian peninsula. One would hope that it might also pave the way for a reduction and return of our forces from the Korean peninsula. These pull-backs of American power, of course, cannot and will not occur in a vacuum. As a prerequisite, they will require satisfactory political settlements of the problems of the Korean partition and the Vietnamese division. They will require assurances of stability in the Formosan Straits which, in effect, would involve a settlement of the questions of the
Chinese partition. They will require the establishment of effective international guarantees of the peace and security of nations both large and small throughout Eastern and Southeast Asia. In short, they will require the liquidation of the problems left over from World War II and the Chinese Revolution.

I do not know when all involved will be prepared for the face-to-face negotiations which are necessary to restore and maintain a durable peace in the Western Pacific. I do know that the sooner there can be a rendezvous with realities in Asia on the part of all involved, the better for this nation, for the Asian nations and for the world.