

VIETNAM NEWSLETTER

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KENNAN ON VIETNAM

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Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the Foreign Relations Committee, the subject on which I am invited to give my views this morning is, as I understand it, the complex of problems connected with our present involvement in Vietnam.

I would like to explain in undertaking to speak on this subject, that Southeast Asia is a part of the world for which I can claim no specialized knowledge. I am not familiar with the official rationale of our policy there except as it has been revealed in the press.

I cannot recall that I have ever, either during my official service in government or subsequently, been drawn by the executive branch of our government into consultation on the problem of our policy in Southeast Asia, or even been made privy to the official discussions by which that policy was decided.

I am sure that there are many data that are relevant to any thoroughly founded judgment on these matters which are not available to me, and this being the case, I have tried in recent weeks and months not to jump to final conclusions even in my own thoughts, to remain sympathetically receptive, both to our government's explanations of the very real difficulties it has faced and to the doubts and questions of its serious critics.

I have not been anxious to press my views on the public but I gladly give them to you for whatever they are worth, claiming no particular merit for them except perhaps that they flow from experience with Communist

affairs that runs back now for some 38 years, and also from the deepest and most troubled sort of concern that we should find the proper course, the right course, at this truly crucial moment.

The first point I would like to make is that if we were not already involved as we are today in Vietnam, I would know of no reason why we should wish to become so involved, and I could think of several reasons why we should wish not to.

Vietnam is not a region of major military, industrial importance. It is difficult to believe that any decisive developments of the world situation would be determined in normal circumstances by what happens on that territory.

If it were not for the considerations of prestige that arise precisely out of our present involvement, even a situation in which South Vietnam was controlled exclusively by the Viet Cong, while regrettable, and no doubt morally unwarranted, would not, in my opinion, present dangers great enough to justify our direct military intervention.

Given the situation that exists today in the relations among the leading Communist powers, and by that I have, of course, in mind primarily the Soviet-Chinese conflict, there is every likelihood that a Communist regime in South Vietnam would follow a fairly independent course.

There is no reason to suspect that such a regime would find it either necessary or desirable in present circumstances to function simply as a passive puppet and instrument of Chinese power. And as for the danger that its establishment there would unleash similar tendencies in neighboring countries, this, I think, would depend largely on the manner in which it came into power.

In the light of what has recently happened in Indonesia

and on the Indian sub-continent, the danger of the so-called domino effect, that is the effect that would be produced by a limited Communist success in South Vietnam, seems to me to be considerably less than it was when the main decisions were taken that have led to our present involvement.

Let me stress, I do not say that that danger does not exist, I say that it is less than it was a year or two ago when we got into this involvement.

From the long term standpoint, therefore, and on principle, I think our military involvement in Vietnam has to be recognized as unfortunate as something we would not choose deliberately, if the choice were ours to make all over again today, and by the same token, I think it should be our government's aim to liquidate this involvement just as soon as this can be done without inordinate damage to our own prestige or to the stability of conditions in that area.

It is obvious on the other hand that this involvement is today a fact. It creates a new situation. It raises new questions ulterior to the long term problem which have to be taken into account; a precipitate and disorderly withdrawal could represent in present circumstances a disservice to our own interests and even to world peace greater than any that might have been involved by our failure to engage ourselves there in the first place.

This is a reality which if there is to be any peaceful resolution of this conflict, is going to have to be recognized both by the more critical of our friends and by our adversaries.

But at the same time, I have great misgivings about any deliberate expansion of hostilities on our part directed to the achievement of something called "victory"—if by the use of that term we envisage the complete disappearance of the recalcitrance which we are now faced

the formal submission by the adversary to our will, and the complete realization of our present stated political aims.

I doubt that these things can be achieved even by the most formidable military successes.

There seems to be an impression about that if we bring sufficient military pressure to bear there will occur at some point something in the nature of a political capitulation on the other side. I think this is a most dangerous assumption. I don't say that it is absolutely impossible, but it is a dangerous assumption in the light of the experience we have had with Communist elements in the past.

The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong have between them a great deal of space and manpower to give up if they have to, and Chinese can give them more if they need it.

Fidelity to the Communist tradition would dictate that if really pressed to extremity on the military level these people should disappear entirely from the open scene and fall back exclusively on the underground political and military existence rather than to accept terms that would be openly humiliating and would represent in their eyes the betrayal of the future political prospects of the cause to which they are dedicated.

Any total rooting out of the Viet Cong from the territory of South Vietnam could be achieved, if it could be achieved at all, only at the cost of a degree of damage to civilian life and of civilian suffering generally, for which I would not like to see this country responsible.

And to attempt to crush North Vietnamese strength to a point where Hanoi could no longer give any support for Viet Cong political activity in the South, would almost certainly, it seems to me, have the effect of bringing in Chinese forces at some point.

whether formally or in the guise of volunteers, thus involving us in a military conflict with Communist China on one of the most unfavorable theaters of hostility that we could possibly choose.

This is not the only reason why I think we should do everything to avoid the escalation of this conflict. There is another one which is no less weighty, and this is the effect the conflict is already having on our policies and interests farther afield. This involvement seems to me to represent a grievous misplacement of emphasis on our foreign policies as a whole.

Not only are great and potentially more important questions of world affairs not receiving as a consequence of our involvement in Vietnam the attention they should be receiving, but in some instances assets we already enjoy and hopefully possibilities we should be developing, are being sacrificed to this unpromising involvement in a remote and secondary theater.

Our relations with the Soviet Union have suffered grievously as was to be expected, and this, at a time when far more important things were involved in those relations than what is ultimately involved in Vietnam and when we had special reason, I think, to cultivate those relations.

And more unfortunate still, in my opinion, is the damage being done to the feelings entertained for us by the Japanese people, the confidence and the good disposition of the Japanese is the greatest asset we have had and the greatest asset we could have in East Asia.

As the greatest industrial complex in the entire Far East, and the only place where the sinews of modern war can be produced on a formidable scale there, Japan is of vital importance to us and indeed to the prospects generally of peace and stability in East Asia.

There is no success we could have in Vietnam that would conceivably warrant, in my opinion, the sacrifice by us of the confident and good will of the Japanese people.

Yet, I fear that we abuse that confidence and good will in the most serious way when we press the military struggle in Vietnam, and particularly when we press it by

means of strategic bombing, a process to which the Japanese for historical reasons are peculiarly sensitive and adverse.

I mention Japan particularly because it is an outstanding example, both in importance and in the intensity of the feelings aroused, of the psychological damage that is being done in many parts of the world by the prosecution of this conflict, and that will be done in even greater measure if the hostilities become still more bloody and tragic as a result of our deliberate effort.

Our motives are widely misinterpreted, and the spectacle, the spectacle emphasized and reproduced in thousands of press photographs and stories that appear in the press of the world, the spectacle of Americans inflicting grievous injury on the lives of a poor and helpless people, and particularly a people of different race and color, no matter how warranted by military necessity or by the excesses of the adversary our operations may seem to us to be or may genuinely be, this spectacle produces reactions among millions of people throughout the world profoundly detrimental to the image we would like them to hold of this country.

I am not saying that this is just or right. I am saying that this is so, and that it is bound in the circumstances to be so, and a victory purchased at the price of further such damage would be a hollow one in terms of our world interests, no matter what advantages it might hold from the standpoint of developments on the local scene.

Now, these are the reasons, gentlemen, why I hope that our Government will restrict our military operations in Vietnam to the minimum necessary to assure the security of our forces, and to maintain our military presence there until we can achieve a satisfactory peaceful resolution of the conflict, and these are the reasons why I hope that we will continue to pursue vigorously, and I may say consistently, the quest for such a peaceful resolution of the conflict, even if this involves some moderation of our stated objectives, and even if the resulting settlement appears to us as something less than ideal.

I cannot, of course, judge the military necessities of our situation. But everything that I can learn about its political aspects suggests to me that General Gavin is on the right track in his suggestions that we should, if I understood him correctly, decide what limited areas we can safely police and defend, and restrict ourselves largely to the maintenance of our position there.

I have listened with interest to the arguments that have been brought forward in opposition to his views, and I must say that I have not been much impressed with some of them. When I am told that it would be difficult to defend such enclaves it is hard for me to understand why it would be easier to defend the far greater areas to which, presumably a successful escalation of our military activity would bring us.

I also find it difficult for reasons that I won't take time to go into here to believe that our allies, and particularly our Western European allies, most of whom themselves have given up great territories within recent years, and sometimes in a very statesmanlike way, I find it hard to believe that we would be subject to great reproach or loss of confidence at their hands simply because we followed a defensive rather than an offensive strategy in Vietnam at this time.

In matters such as this, it is not in my experience what you do that is mainly decisive. It is how you do it, and I would submit that there is more respect to be won in the opinion of this world by a resolute and courageous liquidation of unsound positions than by the most stubborn pursuit of extravagant or unpromising objectives.

And finally, when I hear it said that to adopt a defensive strategy in South Vietnam would be to rat on our commitment to the government of that territory I am a little bewildered.

I would like to know what that commitment really consists of, and how and when it was incurred. What seems to be involved here is an obligation on our part not only to defend the frontiers of a certain political entity against outside attack, but to assure the internal security of its government in circumstances

where that government is unable to assure that security by its own means.

Now, any such obligation is one that goes obviously considerably further in its implications than the normal obligations of a military alliance. If we did not incur such an obligation in any formal way, then I think we should not be inventing it for ourselves and assuring ourselves that we are bound by it today.

But if we did incur it, then I do fail to understand how it was possible to enter into any such commitment otherwise than through the constitutional processes which were meant to come into play when even commitments of lesser import than this were undertaken.

Now, just two concluding observations: I would like it understood that what I have said here implies nothing but the highest respect and admiration for the fighting qualities of our forces in the field.

I have the greatest confidence in them, men and commanders alike. I have no doubt, in fact, that they can and will, if duty requires, produce before this thing is over military results that will surprise both our skeptical friends and our arrogant adversaries. It is not their fighting qualities, it is the purpose to which they are being employed that evokes my skepticism.

Secondly, I would like to say I am trying to look at this whole problem not from the moral standpoint but from the practical one. I see in the Viet Cong a band of ruthless fanatics, partly misled, perhaps by the propaganda that has been drummed into them, but cruel in their purposes, dictatorial, and oppressive in their aims, I am not conscious of having any sympathy for them.

I think their claim to represent the people of South Vietnam is unfounded and arrogant and outrageous. A country which fell under this exclusive power would have my deepest sympathy and I would hope that this eventuality at any rate would be avoided by a restrained and moderate policy on our part in South Vietnam.

But, our country should not be asked, and should not ask of itself, to shoulder the main burden of determining the political realities in any other

country, and particularly not in one remote from our shores, from our culture, and from the experience of our people.

This is not only not our business, but I don't think we can do it successfully.

In saying this, I am only paraphrasing and very poorly the words once uttered by one who had at one time been a member of the United States Senate, and who, had a Foreign Relations Committee existed in his day, would unquestionably have been a member of it. This was John Quincy Adams, and I would like your permission to recall, before I close, the words of his that I have in mind. They were spoken in this city 145 years ago on the 4th of July, 1821.

"Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there," Adams said, "will be America's heart, her benedictions, and her prayers. But she goes not abroad," he went on, "in search of monsters to destroy."

"She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and by the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banner of foreign independence, she

would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standards of freedom."

"The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force . . . she might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit."

Now, gentlemen, I don't know exactly what John Quincy Adams had in mind when he spoke those words, but I think that without knowing it, he spoke very directly and very pertinently to us here today.

Thank you sir.

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Send Contributions
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AMERICA in an Age of Revolution

SENATOR J. W. FULBRIGHT

THE PROGRESSIVE February, 1966

THERE ARE moments in world affairs when a new atmosphere and a new direction can be perceived for the first time. I am apprehensive that we are now at such a turning point in international relations. I fear that we may be moving from a time of adjustment and accommodation to a time of tension and conflict, from a time of international community building to one of chauvinism and militant nationalism, from a time of peaceful civilian programs for the advancement of human welfare to a time of armed might for the suppression of aggression, subversion, or revolutions.

Change is in the air. A year or two ago people concerned with foreign policy were talking of Atlantic community and bridges to the east, of India's five-year plan and of land reform in Latin America. None of these ideas has been abandoned; they are still being pursued with varying degrees of enthusiasm and energy. But they are no longer the principal focus of public and official interest; instead we are preoccupied with matters of military escalation and counter-insurgency in southeast Asia, with the unforeseen consequences of a military intervention in Latin America, with warnings and threats among the great powers.

Nowhere is the new atmosphere more in evidence than in the nation's universities. On the one hand students and professors conduct marches and teach-ins to protest the war in Vietnam. On the other hand the campuses are inhabited by proliferating institutes and centers with awe-inspir-

ing names which use vast government contract funds to produce ponderous studies of "insurgency" and "counter-insurgency"—studies which, behind their opaque language, look very much like efforts to develop "scientific" techniques for the anticipation and prevention of revolutions, without regard for the possibility that some revolutions may be justified or even desirable.

The spirit of crusading anti-Communism, which poisoned our politics in the early Fifties, is once again on the rise, threatening to undermine the hard-won gains of the past decade toward better East-West relations. Our policies have been distorted again and again since the end of World War II by a tendency to confuse Communist ideology with Communist imperialism. It is the latter which threatens us, just as German and Japanese imperialism threatened us twenty-five years ago. Because Russia was expansionist under Stalin and China is expansionist under Mao, we have inferred that all Communist regimes by their very nature are expansionist and that, therefore, they must be regarded as threats to our security regardless of how they actually behave.

Experience of the last twenty years shows that some Communist regimes are aggressive and others are not and that all, including the Soviet Union, are subject to change. This is not a theory but an inference from experience. Unless we act on this inference and make the clearest possible distinction between the ideology and

the actual behavior of Communist states, war is virtually certain to result. We must recognize, as many Americans are not now recognizing, that Communist totalitarianism as practiced within Communist countries, though profoundly distasteful to us, is no more a threat to our security than the right-wing authoritarianism of Spain or South Africa. Our prospects for avoiding a third world war depend largely on our willingness to distinguish between ideology and policy, and to act toward Communist countries according to how they act toward us.

We are threatened with a situation somewhat like that of 1914, when the great powers of Europe, largely to prove their loyalty to weak and irresponsible dependent states, allowed themselves to be drawn into a conflict that none of them really desired. In the coming months it will take a high order of statesmanship in Moscow and in Washington to save the two great powers from being drawn toward catastrophe.

Our policy makers face the task of resisting pressures that are certain to mount while the war continues for an indiscriminating "tough" policy toward all Communist countries. Difficult as it will be, we must apply the test of policy rather than ideology, and bear in mind that the Communist countries of Eastern Europe have had little to do with the war in Vietnam and that the Soviet Union itself has been restrained in support of its North Vietnamese ally.

We must bear these facts in mind and we must act on them. We can alleviate the strains on East-West relations by negotiating at Geneva for an underground nuclear test ban and a nuclear non-proliferation agreement and by expanding our commercial and cultural relations with those Communist countries such as Rumania that demonstrate a desire to pursue independent foreign policies.

At the same time, in addition to repeating our willingness to negotiate an end to the Vietnamese war, we might also begin to indicate what we would consider honorable terms for ending the war. Looking beyond the war in southeast Asia, it would seem to be time for us to re-evaluate the policy toward China which has proved so unsatisfactory over the past decade.

A new emphasis in American foreign policy is apparent in our relations with Latin America as well as in our relations with the Communist countries. Since President Kennedy took office in 1961, the United States has been concerned both with economic development and social reform in Latin America, and with the need for security against Communist subversion.

Our government remains concerned with both social reform and security, but in recent months, partly because of the influence on our thinking of the war in Vietnam, there has been a marked shift in emphasis. We are not hearing much about the Alliance for Progress these days, although it was reported prior to the Dominican crisis to be doing quite well. Instead United States officials seem to be pre-occupied with the danger of Communist infiltration of reform movements in Latin America and accordingly are showing more interest in counter-insurgency techniques than in housing and road building and land and tax reform.

A recent expression of this altered emphasis was the so-called "Project Camelot," a study conducted by a research organization at the American University with funds provided by the Department of the Army. This ill-advised project purported to study the likelihood of insurgent movements developing in Chile and means of combating them. As any sensible observer might have anticipated, the Chilean government—and the United States ambassador in Santiago—took offense at this project, with its implicit connotations of counter-revolution and possible intervention. Happily, "Project Camelot" was promptly canceled but there are indications that similar projects are planned for other countries.

It would be a signal service to the countries involved and to the national interests of the United States if the intellectual resources devoted to these dubious "studies" of insurgency and counter-insurgency were diverted to the more constructive projects of the Alliance for Progress—projects of social and economic reform which offer the only real hope of avoiding violent revolution.

In their concern with matters of security, some of our officials seem to have forgotten that virtually all reform movements attract some Communist support, that there is an important difference between Communist support and Communist control of a political movement, that it is quite possible to compete with the Communists for influence in a reform movement rather than abandon it to them, and, most important of all, that in the long run economic development and social justice are the only reliable security against Communist subversion.

This view of American policy is substantially inaccurate, but people act not on objective truth but on what they believe to be true. In fact, what Americans fear is not social reform but Communist aggression. It is our misfortune that we have confused Communist imperialism with Communist ideology and Communist ideology with any reformist doctrine or movement that attracts Communist support. Thus, contrary to our own will and intentions, we sometimes find ourselves arrayed against the forces of political and social reform and on the side of reactionaries whose ideas and actions are an affront to our own democratic values.

The aspiration to national dignity and social justice is the most powerful force in the world today. It would be a tragedy of enormous proportions if the United States, in fear of Communism, were to allow the Communists to make themselves the champions of nationalism and social reform throughout the world. Our interests and our ideals require us not to abandon the field in exaggerated fear of Communism and its power, but to compete with the Communists as vigorously as we can in the advancement of the worldwide aspiration to national dignity and social justice.

This is not and cannot be easy for us. We are not, as we proclaim in Fourth of July speeches, the "most truly revolutionary nation in the world." We are much closer to being the most truly unrevolutionary nation in the world. We are rich and satisfied in a world of desperate poverty and human degradation. We delude ourselves when we suppose that our

own Revolution has any real relevance to the profound social upheavals that are taking place today in Latin America and Asia and Africa. We delude ourselves further if we suppose that the forces of change in the emerging nations are likely to be consummated everywhere without violence and profound social dislocation.

Our own Revolution was a conservative one in the sense that it represented a successful effort by relatively free and prosperous people to recover traditional rights that had recently been infringed. Thereafter the American people acquired wealth and power by the relatively peaceful habitation of an almost empty continent. The point that we must grasp about our own experience is its uniqueness.

The social revolutions of Twentieth Century Latin America and Asia and Africa are not sober efforts to recover traditional rights but angry movements by people who have always been poor to acquire the national dignity and social justice that they have never known. These are total revolutions, like the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 and not like the American Revolution of 1776.

There are no empty and fertile plains waiting for cultivation in India; there is no promised land in Pakistan or Egypt. There are only great numbers of people with limited resources and unlimited needs. They have come awake in the Twentieth Century and they are making revolutions. The aims and ideals of these movements may be similar to those of the American Revolution but their nature and intensity are profoundly different.

We are required by our interests and our ideals to understand things of which we have little experience and to accept and support profound social change, sometimes by means that are contrary to our traditions and our strong preferences. We, an unrevolutionary nation, are required to make ourselves the friends and supporters of fundamental change, with or without revolution. For a time we were moving toward doing so, but in recent months we appear to be moving in a different direction.

It is not an easy thing for a nation like the United States to associate itself with revolutionary change, but neither is it impossible, and a great deal depends upon our doing so. Whether our own domestic values are to be conserved in the world or are to be swept away in a tide of violent upheaval is likely to be determined by America's own ability and willingness to support social revolution.