

Speeches and messages: 1965-1967: The Story of South Viet-Nam

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS BY
SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
KAILUA HIGH SCHOOL--KAILUA, OAHU, HAWAII
Sunday, June 6, 1965

THE STORY OF SOUTH VIET-NAM

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I wish you Godspeed in whatever you decide. The training and education you have received here at Kailua High School are advantages which should provide you a good headstart in the long journey ahead.

But whatever you may do, and however difficult may be your task, I am certain that you will all realize that there are community and world-wide problems which will affect your future, just as surely as your monthly paychecks and your semi-annual academic grades will decide what kind of a car you will get and what type of professional training you may be interested in.

How much you will make and what kind of grades you will receive in college may be very important to you for we all have our individual goals and desires in life.

But how much you will make and what kind of grades you will have in school are not going to mean very much if the very world we live in were suddenly to become involved in the kind of inferno that was Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Buying a Ford or a Chevvie, or making a B or an A, will then become relatively minor issues.

And that is why I want to talk to you about the world situation today. That is why I want to talk to you about one of the hottest spots in that world situation - South Viet-Nam.

Much of the future of the United States and the world will depend on what happens in South Viet-Nam. Much of your future will also hinge on the outcome of the present conflict in that strife-torn part of Southeast Asia.

There are many questions being asked, especially by the youth of our country: Why are we in Viet-Nam? Why is it necessary for so many to die? Why must we be involved in a country separated by thousands of miles from our own?

I am sure that there are some of you who have already asked these questions as you have seen friends and relations being ordered overseas to various parts of the Far East in recent months.

And if you haven't asked these questions, you will soon be asking them...for many of you sitting here will soon be of age to participate either directly or indirectly in this struggle.

Much as I personally abhor war and much as I am saddened by reports of deaths and casualties daily coming in from Saigon, I strongly feel that our actions in Viet-Nam are not only justifiable but necessary. And I take this position because of my deep desire for lasting peace.

Let us briefly retrace recent history in order to understand the situation today.

About a decade and a half before you were born, important events were witnessed by the world in Western Europe. A man called Hitler was playing upon the fears and insecurities of people, exploiting them to his own advantage in order to assume dictatorial power. In fact, he became brazen enough to outline in detail his low assessment of mankind and how he would manipulate them in a book entitled: Mein Kampf, or my struggle.

Only it was not his struggle he was writing about but the struggle of those he would eventually come to dominate in his drive for conquest and power. Interwoven throughout the pages of the book was the theory of racial superiority which eventually resulted in the tragedies of Dachau and Buchenwald where people, whose only crime was Judaism, were mercilessly starved and executed.

Although we in the West were greatly disturbed over the implications of the book and his overt designs for conquest of the world, some of us were convinced that the problem could be handled diplomatically without recourse to violence and conflict. Part of this feeling was the result of our great desire for peace...peace at any price, we loudly proclaimed. We had learned of the terrible price of wars during World War I and we were not about to pay that price again.

And so we thought we made our pact with peace at Munich.

But we found out soon enough that "you can't do business with Hitler."

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the city in shambles.

And also before we knew it, the Nazi design for conquest enlisted the aid of its Eastern ally, Japan. We suddenly found December 7 upon us. We had no choice then but to launch a massive global counter-attack upon that which the more prudent foresaw coming in the 1930's.

Of course, many of you were either not born or were too young to realize the impact of these events...events which have conditioned all of our lives since then. But I cite them as an ominous indication of what can happen if we were to misread the signs of the Viet-Nam situation. I cite them as a reminder that "it can also happen here."

What are the facts in South Viet-Nam? Too much has been said in the heat of emotions rather than on the basis of fact.

President Johnson plainly stated on April 7, 1965:

Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves--only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.

We must realize that we are there because the people of that embattled country requested our help. Even before President Johnson, President Eisenhower pledged United States help in 1954...a pledge which was renewed by President Kennedy.

As the State Department 'White Paper' issued in February of this year clearly documents with evidence, the nub of the problem is the fact that South Viet-Nam has been infiltrated by thousands of trained military personnel from the North who are schooled in Communist ideology and tactics. The ultimate aim is the complete subjugation of the people of South Viet-Nam. Towards that end, these personnel have been supplied with tremendous quantities of arms and ammunition traced with evidence to Communist China, the Soviet Union, or other Communist countries.

The North Vietnamese Viet Cong is undoubtedly controlled by its Communist majority. It is not simply made up of South Vietnamese who fled to the North.

These are not only our conclusions. Members of the International Control Commission for Viet-Nam have protested that..."the events which have taken place in both North and South Viet-Nam since February 7, 1965, are the direct result of the intensification of the aggressive policy of the Government of North Viet-Nam." It went on to point to "the continuing fact that North Viet-Nam has increased its efforts to incite, encourage, and support hostile activities in South Viet-Nam, aimed at the overthrow of the South Vietnamese administration."

In other words, this is not simply a civil war, but a war directed with the single purpose in mind of ultimate subjugation of South Viet-Nam by Hanoi-directed Communists.

We must also remember what President Johnson said in his Baltimore speech: that it is the Communists, and not ourselves, who have wanted the turmoil in South Viet-Nam to continue; that it is the Communists and not the United States who have refused all offers of peaceful negotiations. We are always ready to meet at the conference table...but, so far, have not met with success from Hanoi...or Peking...or Moscow.

As much as we desire to negotiate, it takes two to do so.

Meanwhile, we are providing all the help we can in the way of medical and economic aid to the people of South Viet-Nam. All the technical resources of our country are being made available for development of the crucial Mekong River delta area. President Johnson has pledged help to any and all countries of Southeast Asia who desire this way out of the miseries of poverty rather than the Communist way.

However, simply providing moral or economic support to countries under the threat of Communist subversion in Southeast Asia is not enough. Sophisticated means of infiltration and highly developed technical weapons of war must be countered with all the resources at our command.

Although many of you may disagree, I am personally convinced that our intercession in South Viet-Nam is the only logical course of action. I am convinced that the penalty for neutrality in this conflict is to see not only South Viet-Nam, but the whole of Southeast Asia rapidly falling into Communist hands...Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Philippines, and Laos. Indonesia and Cambodia may already be on the brink.

It has been argued that for the downtrodden and poverty-stricken peoples of these countries, there is no other alternative than Communism. It has also been said that even Communism is better than some forms of corrupt governments seen in this part of the world.

But, I would have to reply, such arguments run counter to fact and experience. These arguments fail to take into account the hatred held for Communism by the peasants of South Korea. They fail to take into account the dislike of Chinese Communism harbored by the Malaysian and the Thai. They do not face up to the intense battles waged by Filipinos against the Communist Hukbalahap movement within their own country. And they certainly run counter to the actions and feelings of the South Vietnamese themselves against the Communists from the north.

The South Vietnamese would not endure the sacrifices they have made if they do not believe in their cause. More Vietnamese are fighting and

dying than Americans. Since 1959, they have suffered 80,000 combined military and civilian casualties - equivalent to nearly one million casualties in our population. 200,000 of them have fled to South Viet-Nam controlled areas.

Given a free choice, I am positive that the majority of the peoples of Southeast Asia, not to mention those in the world at large, would far prefer some other form of government than Communist subjugation. I am convinced that we have an obligation to insure at least that freedom of choice...a freedom which cannot be guaranteed by the Communists...a freedom which they have long denied in Germany, in Poland, in Hungary, in North Korea and North Viet-Nam, and, of course, in China and the Soviet Union.

Depending on our actions in South Viet-Nam, depending upon the Asians' estimate of how far the United States is willing to go to face up to its commitments against Communist conquest, we may retain or lose our friends in Thailand, the Philippines, and the rest of Southeast Asia. We are facing a most crucial test not only in South Viet-Nam but in the whole of Southeast Asia. Are we willing to stand up and be counted? Are we willing to pay more than lip service to the idea of halting the spread of Communism in this part of the world?

The answer must be a resounding "Yes!" if we are to continue to enjoy the trust and confidence of these peoples.

If not, it will be South Viet-Nam today, Thailand tomorrow, and the rest of Asia in the not too distant future.

I am well aware that such a point of view has been criticized and downgraded by some who sarcastically refer to it as the "falling domino" theory of Communist take-over. They argue that there is nothing to guarantee that with the fall of South Viet-Nam, the rest of Asia will soon follow suit for we do not know Communism's real intentions nor can we really gauge the ability of these countries to ward off its ambitions.

To these people I would simply remind them that this was also the argument of those who profess to see little danger in the rantings and ravings of the mad man from Austria. I need not remind you that these were the very same arguments heard on English college campuses just before the Nazi march in Europe.

The noted cellist and composer, Pablo Casals, once said that much as we would like to, none of us can live by himself. A tree cannot survive without the nourishment provided by its leaves, and the leaves cannot develop without the roots and the trunk from whence they derive their life sustenance.

In much the same way I would answer those who see no reason why we should not withdraw from South Viet-Nam. As much as we would like to live by ourselves, as much as we would like to close our eyes to the problems of the world, we cannot. What happens in South Viet-Nam will affect all the other countries of Asia. What happens in Asia will undoubtedly affect the rest of the world, including the United States.

In a very real sense, what we choose to do, or not do, in South Viet-Nam, will affect our own national interest.

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