

Undated: Drafts: Peace Negotiations in Vietnam

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers
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In two months we shall mark the third anniversary of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution and be able to survey in perspective the frustrations and progress of those years. I have chosen this moment, with more than a decade of bi-partisan commitment to South Vietnam behind us and amidst a war that *termino* succeeds at an accelerating pace, to look forward to that time when substantial steps ~~toward~~ ^{will} peace negotiations begin.

Without trying to ~~recapitulate~~ the history of our commitment to South Vietnam, I must nevertheless emphasize the justice of our presence in that country. It was thought that the 1954 Geneva accord would be the cornerstone of peace in Southeast Asia - and so it might have been if genuinely free elections had been permitted. Instead South Vietnam was harassed by religious and political dissension until peace was restored under the late President Diem.

It was also more than a decade ago that Hanoi and local Communists made the momentous and fateful decision to reconstruct a military-political front capable of subverting the Saigon government. There are those - honorable men and women, to be sure - who believe that the rise of the Viet Cong was part of the civil war, but the fact remains that North Vietnam openly trained and armed Southern ~~s~~ to overthrow the South Vietnamese government,

At this time the United States was not militarily engaged

in South Vietnam. The bulk of our aid was financial and technical, designed primarily to encourage the development of a viable democracy. In 1959 Hanoi expanded its program of isolated terrorism into a broad program of subversion designed to topple the South Vietnamese government. It was only after the intensification of guerilla terror in 1960 that the United States increased its financial and military aid to its present size.

Since 1960 the North has engaged in an overt and callous attempt to infiltrate as many men and supplies as necessary to destroy the Saigon administration. It has only been in the face of open aggression and outright attacks on American forces that the United States has kept its commitment to South Vietnam to halt the Northern-directed forces. Each step undertaken by our government has been calculated to insure the independence of South Vietnam with the minimum of internal interference in accordance with our promises.

The United States has committed its men and treasure to the struggle to protect the vital principle of national self-determination. Half a century ago, one of America's greatest statesmen, Woodrow Wilson, made this concept the cornerstone of his program for world peace. Today it is no less significant and no less vital. We must maintain our vigilance to insure

that no nation will succumb to violence directed from without and blatant interference with its internal affairs.

Two years ago at Johns Hopkins University, President Johnson defined clearly the aims of America's Southeast Asia policy. We do not want permanent bases. We do not seek to impose our political beliefs on the Vietnamese people. We seek only an honorable peace in a South Vietnam free from coercion and intimidation. We seek a Southeast Asia in which the problems of hunger and disease are of foremost concern. And we seek a demonstration that aggression over frontiers will not be a solution to international problems.

In seeking an end to the Vietnamese conflict, we must simultaneously^{ly} be aware that since our aims are limited, we must not risk a nuclear holocaust in an effort to end the war. In an age when we could kill every person on the earth several times over, the slogan "victory at all costs" sounds hollow indeed, for at every moment we stand on the edge of a thermo-nuclear abyss.

With this warning in mind, I view rather confidently the Vietnamese elections scheduled for September 3rd. This election has been roundly criticized by numerous prominent American

politicians and commentators, and ^{perhaps} yet they fail to realize or give credit to the fact that South Vietnam is an extremely young country with only 13 years of independence. We cannot view smugly, with our 180 year old democratic tradition, the accomplishments of a struggling ^{new} ~~young~~ country battered by two decades of war.

Moreover, the accomplishments of the South Vietnamese regime have been substantial since the September 11, 1966, elections for the Constituent Assembly. A constitution has been written and ratified. A voice in the government has been given to the people, and finally the framework for a genuinely free election has been established.

The forthcoming elections offer a shining ray of hope that peace is not distant. Eleven of the twelve presidential candidates, including General Nguyen Van Thieu, have stated publicly that they would be willing to conduct peace negotiations with Hanoi. If these negotiations are begun, however, they must not be conducted in a hostile and unfavorable atmosphere. All the circumstances must be conducive to peace. Therefore, I respectfully urge the United States to end the bombing of North Vietnam during the course of the negotiations so long as the Hanoi government evinces a sincere desire to implement a cessation of hostilities in South Vietnam. Such a move will demonstrate

our sincerity without hampering our military efforts to preserve South Vietnam's independence

I do not deny that such a course is fraught with danger, but we cannot afford the deadly, and perhaps fatal, risk of reckless escalation. The President will be free to re-instate the bombing the moment Hanoi shows its unwillingness to negotiate in good faith. If, however, this effort were to succeed, the rewards for our courage and perseverance shall be the return of our troops and the return of peace to embattled but independent South Vietnam.