

# JFK Decided in '63 to Order Viet Pullout After Election

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Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield has confirmed a report appearing in the new issue of Life magazine that President John F. Kennedy decided in 1963 that he would order "a complete military withdrawal from Vietnam" after the 1964 election.

"He had definitely and unequivocally made that decision," Mansfield told The Washington Post.

He was commenting on an excerpt in Life from a new, unfinished book by one of the late President's closest political associates, Kenneth P. O'Donnell, who is now a candidate for governor in Massachusetts.

O'Donnell makes other original disclosures in his manuscript:

- That Kennedy chose Lyndon B. Johnson for the Vice Presidency in 1960 because he feared he would be unable "to live with Lyndon Johnson as the leader of a small Senate majority."

O'Donnell writes that he



**KENNETH O'DONNELL**  
... reveals JFK plans

was "vehemently against the Johnson selection because it represented precisely the kind of cynical, old-style politics we were trying to get away from."

It was in the Kennedy suite in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles, O'Donnell

writes, that Kennedy, "realizing that I was about to explode," said to his brother Robert, "I'd better talk to Kenny alone in the bathroom."

O'Donnell accused John Kennedy of making "... the worst mistake you ever made" and he recalls that Kennedy "became pale, livid with anger, so upset and hurt that it took him awhile before he was able to collect himself."

O'Donnell gives this account of Kennedy's response:

"I'm 43 years old and I'm the healthiest candidate for President in the United States. You've traveled with me enough to know that I'm not going to die in office. So the Vice Presidency doesn't mean anything.

"I'm thinking of something else, the leadership in the Senate. If we win, it will be by a small margin and I won't be able to live with Lyndon Johnson as the leader of a small Senate majority.

See O'DONNELL, A4, Col. 3

## O'DONNELL, From A1

"Did it occur to you that if Lyndon becomes the Vice President, I'll have Mike Mansfield as the Senate leader, somebody I can trust and depend on? . . .

"If Johnson and (Sam) Rayburn leave here (the convention) mad at me," Kennedy said, "they'll ruin me in Congress next month. Then I'll be the laughing-stock of the country. Nixon will say I haven't any power in my own party, and I'll lose the election before Labor Day. So I've got to make peace now with Johnson and Rayburn, and offering Lyndon the Vice Presidency, whether he accepts it or not, is one way of keeping him friendly until Congress adjourns.

"All of this is more important to me than Southern votes, which I won't get anyway with the Catholic thing working against me. I doubt if Lyndon will even be able to carry Texas, as Dave Lawrence (then governor of Pennsylvania) and all those other polls out in the other room are claiming we will . . ."

• That Robert Kennedy, contrary to popular legend, endorsed Johnson's selec-

tion as a "shrewd political move" ensuring that Johnson would be "safely tucked away."

• That President Kennedy had no intention of dumping Mr. Johnson as his running mate in 1964 and that only a week before his death he reassured former Sen. George Smathers of Florida on that point. Smathers confirms O'Donnell's account.

• That as early as 1961, French President Charles de Gaulle and retired Gen. Douglas MacArthur urged Kennedy not to get involved in a war in Vietnam. "MacArthur," according to O'Donnell, "implored the President to avoid a U.S. military buildup in Vietnam or any other part of the Asian mainland because he felt that the domino theory was ridiculous in a nuclear age. MacArthur went on to point out that there were domestic problems, the urban crisis, the ghettos, the economy that should have far more priority than Vietnam.

• That President Johnson, early in 1964, sounded out both Sargent Shriver and Sen. Eugene McCarthy on the vice presidential nomination because he wanted a Catholic on the ticket and because he didn't want Robert Kennedy as a running mate. Both Shriver and McCarthy were interested, O'Donnell writes, but the White House staff and party leaders insisted to Johnson that Hubert Humphrey should be chosen. Robert Kennedy, according to O'Donnell, agreed to help Humphrey get the nomination by keeping Johnson guessing as to his own intentions.

• That one week before the 1964 Democratic convention, President Johnson called O'Donnell and said that Sen. Mansfield was his choice for vice president, not Humphrey. This move was blocked by Mansfield, O'Donnell writes. After reading vice presidential speculation about himself, Mansfield went to Johnson and told him that he would not accept a place on the ticket.

Mansfield confirms O'Donnell's account of the incident.

"He (Johnson) never offered me the nomination," Mansfield told The Post. "He joked with me about it on some occasions but there was never any offer. It is true, however,



MIKE MANSFIELD  
... confirms account



JOHN F. KENNEDY  
... planned pullout

## Mansfield Cites Nixon Vow

President Kennedy, Sen. Mike Mansfield recalls, is not the only President to have promised him to withdraw from Vietnam.

Mansfield said President Nixon told him last year that "we would be out of Vietnam" by the end of Mr. Nixon's first term.

"Until Cambodia," Mansfield said, "I thought he was on the right course. . . . But now we've got an Indochina war and we may have a Southeast Asia war."

that after (newspaper speculation)—especially a story on the front page of The Washington Daily News—I went to the President and said I was not interested in the nomination and would not under any circumstance accept it."

Efforts over the weekend to get President Johnson's version of these various events were unsuccessful. Calls were placed to his press secretary Tom Johnson. But they were not answered.

O'Donnell, in the book excerpt in Life, sheds some new light on one of the "credibility" problems attributed to former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. McNamara was often accused, after the fact, of giving optimistic forecasts about the course of the war in Vietnam, forecasts not supported by events.

He predicted on Oct. 2, 1963, for example, that all American forces were likely to be out of Vietnam by the end of 1965.

He made that prediction, O'Donnell writes, at the specific direction of President Kennedy who had by that time decided that a "complete withdrawal" would be ordered after the 1964 election.

President Kennedy would

have ordered the withdrawal even sooner, O'Donnell suggests, except for his fear that he would be accused of "appeasement" and that there would be "a wild conservative outcry against returning him to the presidency for a second term."

O'Donnell said Mr. Kennedy told him:

"In 1965, I'll be damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser. But I don't care. If I tried to pull out now, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm re-elected. So we had better make damned sure that I AM re-elected."

### Easy Way Out

O'Donnell tells another story about Mr. Kennedy's plans for leaving South Vietnam. It would be "easy," the President told him. "Put a government in there that will ask us to leave." The presumption is that he was talking about the installation of a "hostile" government by the CIA.

O'Donnell also recalls President Kennedy's relationship with his Vice President, and says the President . . . was always uncomfortably aware of Johnson's unhappiness in the Vice Presidency and leaned over backwards to keep him in-

volved in important government affairs."

"Johnson often called and asked to see the President with various personal complaints, frequently about Bobby," O'Donnell writes. "The President and I worked out a set routine for handling Johnson's laments. The President would first hear him out alone, and then call me into his office and denounce me in front of Johnson for whatever the Vice President was beefing about. I would humbly take the blame and promise to correct the situation, and the Vice President would go away somewhat happier . . ."

Smathers, commenting on O'Donnell's recollections, said there was frequent speculation in 1962 and 1963 that Mr. Johnson would not be asked to run with Mr. Kennedy in 1964. "Johnson worried about it," Smathers said. "I was kind of a bridge between them (Johnson and Kennedy) and I asked the President if there was anything to these reports. Johnson wanted to know. The President told me on more than one occasion that the reports just weren't true." The last time they discussed the matter was on the Saturday before Kennedy's trip to Dallas.

O'Donnell writes that the President glanced at Smathers and said, "George, you must be the dumbest man in the world. If I drop Lyndon, it will look as if we have a serious scandal on our hands in the Bobby Baker

case, which we haven't, and that will reflect on me. It will look as though I made a mistake in picking Lyndon in 1960, and can you imagine the mess of trying to select somebody to replace him? Lyndon stays on the ticket next year."

#### Evolution Unexplained

President Kennedy's evolution from hawk to dove on Vietnam is not explained in the O'Donnell account. And Kennedy never explained it to Mansfield. "In 1962," the senator recalled, "I gave a private report to the President on Vietnam and advised against military involvement. He became angry for one of the few times I ever saw him that way. His language was sharp. His face was flushed under his tan. He said, 'This is pretty strong stuff, Mike . . . This isn't what I've been led to believe.' Three years later I gave a private report to President Johnson and he was like Kennedy. He didn't like it either."

Mansfield said President Kennedy's pledge to withdraw from Vietnam was made after a congressional leadership meeting and was made with little explanation: "President Kennedy didn't waste words. He was pretty sparse with his language. But it was not unusual for him to shift position. There is no doubt that he had shifted definitely and unequivocally on Vietnam but he never had the chance to put the plan (1965 withdrawal) into effect".