

Partial Text of Kennedy

*Partial text of remarks
by Sen. Robert F. Kennedy
on Vietnam:*

... Neither the acts of the past nor the commitments of the present are now at issue here. The issue is how best to preserve the right of the people of South Vietnam to guide their own land while putting an end to war and violence. The issue is how we can best support the goal which President Johnson has proclaimed of a middle road between withdrawal and ever-widening war.

Let us reflect for a moment not on the wisdom and necessity of our cause nor on the valor of the South Vietnamese, but on the horror. For although the world's imperfections may call forth the acts of war, righteousness cannot obscure the agony and pain those acts bring to a single child. The Vietnamese war is an event of historic moment, summoning the grandeur and concern of many nations. But it is also the vacant moment of amazed fear as a mother and child watch death by fire fall from the improbable machine sent by a country they barely comprehend. It is the sudden terror of the official or the civil guard absorbed in the work of his village as he realizes the assassin is taking his life. It is the refugees wandering homeless from villages now obliterated, leaving behind only those who did not live to flee. It is the young men, Vietnamese and American, who in an instant sense the night of death destroying yesterday's promise of family and land and home.

For years, President Johnson has dedicated his energies in an effort to achieve an honorable peace.

However, we are now at a critical turning point in pursuit of our stated limited ob-

Speech Urging

Halt in Bombing

jectives: balanced between the rising prospects of peace and surely rising war, between the promise of negotiations and the perils of spreading conflict. For our attacks are mounting in intensity, just as the evidence mounts that a new, and more hopeful moment of opportunity for settlement has been at hand.

Before reawakened hope is lost in renewed and evermore far-reaching assault, we should test this moment with new initiatives and acts in pursuit of peaceful settlement.

We need not wait timidly for a certain outcome and sure guarantees, fearful for our dignity and anxious for our prestige. No one is going to defeat us, or slaughter our troops, or destroy

our prestige because we dare take initiatives for peace.

Peace Program

I speak today for this purpose: to explore the possibilities of peace which recent weeks have illuminated.

Our Government has unequivocally said that our objective in Vietnam is a negotiated settlement with the Communists. . . The question is whether we are doing everything possible to reach that goal.

The steps I am suggesting are intimately related. They stand together, each dependent on the other. It will do little good to go to the conference table if discussions are simply used to mask continued escalation of the war. Nor will negotiations be fruitful unless they lead to a reasonable and honorable settlement with some hope of lasting peace. Therefore, I propose that we test the sincerity of the statements by Premier Kosygin and others asserting that if the bombardment of the North is halted, negotiations would begin—by halting the bombardment and saying we are ready to negotiate within the week; making it clear that discussions cannot continue for a prolonged period without an agreement that neither side will substantially increase the size of the war in South Vietnam—by infiltration or reinforcement. An international group should be asked to inspect the borders and ports of the country to report any further escalation. And under the direction of the United Nations, and with an international presence gradually replacing American forces, we should move toward a final settlement which allows all the major political elements in South Vietnam to participate in the choice of leadership and shape their future direction as a people.

If we can follow this course, we cannot be certain that negotiations will take place, or that they will be productive. No one can give such a guarantee. But measures such as these will enhance the chances of peace while the risks are comparatively slight.

Let us explore this program in greater detail.

There are three stages to

ward final resolution of the war in Vietnam; beginning negotiations, continuing those discussions without increasing conflict, and a final settlement which liberates the people of South Vietnam to govern their own future.

First, we must get to the negotiating table . . .

Two weeks ago in London, Mr. Kosygin, the Premier of the Soviet Union, the principal ally of North Vietnam,

said that the first step toward peace "should be the unconditional cessation of the bombing of and all other aggressive acts against (North Vietnam). As the Foreign Minister of (North Vietnam) declared recently, this step is necessary to enable talks between (North Vietnam) and the United States to take place. The Soviet government welcomes this statement and regards it as an important and constructive proposal for ending the war."

Recurrent Theme

This declaration comes from a man of enormous authority in the Communist world, whose country helps sustain North Vietnam's effort. It does not demand that we withdraw our forces, slow down our military effort on the ground, or even halt the bombing of South Vietnam. It does not demand an indissoluble and binding guarantee that we will never use our planes again at any future time no matter what our adversary does to enlarge his effort or change the nature of the war. There is no longer a demand that we accept any terms or conditions, such as the Four Points, in advance of talks. We are simply informed that "to enable talks" we should stop bombingsomething we have done before.

The same message has come to us in recent weeks from friends and adversaries alike, in public interviews and private communications. It was repeated again this week in a statement by Soviet President Podgorny. Often the statements are more obscure than that of Mr. Kosygin. Some have been conflicting. Yet the temper of attitudes and events has been changing and we should reach for the

moment of promise which may have come.

Let us, therefore, accept the public declarations of Mr. Kosygin and Mr. Podgorny—which in this respect were identical to the counsel offered us by Secretary General U Thant. Let us halt the bombing and bombardment of the North as a step toward a negotiated peace, and say to Mr. Kosygin, to the National Liberation Front and to Hanoi, that we are ready to begin discussions within the week. Let us place on the Soviet Union, on North Vietnam, the obligation to demonstrate the sincerity of their declarations by coming to the conference table. If their statements and hopes are founded in reality, discussions may begin. If not, we will have proven to ourselves and our friends around the world that we are willing to take the initia-

tive for peace; that it is our adversary, not America, that bars the way. . .

If the passage of substantial time and events proves that our adversaries do not sincerely seek a negotiated solution, if discussions are used only as a pretext to enlarge the conflict in the south, then we can re-examine our entire military strategyincluding the bombing or the possible erection of a physical barrier to infiltration—in light of the changing nature of the war. Our actions at that time, after such a dedicated effort to secure peace, would have the increased understanding and support of our allies and of our own people. We should be generous in our search for peace, but I am also aware of the precedent of Panmunjon.

Penalizing North

Certainly the bombing of the North makes the war more costly and difficult and painful for North Vietnam. It is a harsh punishment indeed. But we are not in Vietnam to play the part of an avenging angel pouring death and destruction on the roads and factories and homes of a guilty land. We are there to assure the self-determination of South Vietnam, to fight the war effectively, and to protect as many lives as we

can. It should be clear by now that the bombing of the North cannot bring an end to the war in the South; that, indeed, it may well be prolonging that war.

As soon as we halt the bombing of the North—international teams under the United Nations or, perhaps, a strengthened International Control Commission, should be asked to provide detached and objective information to the world about any large buildup of troops or supplies by our adversaries.

They would patrol the borders, ports and roads of Vietnam. Equipment which we now use to watch and monitor enemy movements—such as reconnaissance planes and other intelligence facilities—can be placed at their disposal.

Our next step should be to seek an understanding with our adversaries that neither side will substantially increase the rate of infiltration and reinforcements during negotiations.

Third, we must know and clearly state what kind of Vietnam we would like to see emerge from negotiations, and how we propose these general objectives could be best achieved.

The first task for the negotiators will be to dismantle the war. They will have to establish procedures for a cease-fire, for the laying down of arms and for the gradual withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. This must be accompanied by the political steps necessary to protect the safety of all sides while the war is being dismantled.

More difficult and intricate is the resolution of South Vietnam's tangled politics.

We have not defeated the Vietcong, nor, as President Johnson said in his State of the Union message, is a military victory in sight. We must, therefore, find—and I think we can find—an agreed solution which, however imperfect, protects our basic interest in Vietnam: The self-determination of the people of South Vietnam.

All the people of South Vietnam, Communist and non-Communist, Buddhist and Christian, should be able to choose their leaders,

and seek office through peaceful political processes, free from external coercion and internal violence. All should have the opportunity to seek peacefully a share of power and responsibility through free elections. They should determine their future and the nature of their system and resolve the question of Vietnamese reunification.

We might begin moving toward this future by encouraging the South Vietnamese government, including the present Constituent Assembly, to begin its own discussion with the National Liberation Front. Other political elements, not now represented in the government, should share in this effort.

And as a major combatant, we must also be ready to talk directly to all partisan and non-Communist ties—North and South, Com-alike.

However, if we want non-Communist Vietnamese to take a major role in discussions leading to a negotiated settlement—as I believe essential—and to exert effective force and influence in competition with the NLF for future leadership, we must first encourage a free political process among non-Communist. . . . The forthcoming Communist South Vietnamese elections, if conducted freely and fairly, could result in a civilian government, far

more effective than the military rule which exists at present—one willing and able to take effective part in a negotiated settlement. We should begin now to help bring this about.

Finally, a lasting settlement of the war will be extremely difficult unless all parties to the present conflict are secure in the knowledge that free elections open to all will ultimately be held, and that those who win them will take office.

Therefore it will be necessary to phase out the withdrawal of American and North Vietnamese forces over a period of time and, as our forces depart, to re-

place them by international forces to police the cease-fire, guard against violence and coercion, and supervise the elections.

Moreover, it is both wise and right for other countries to play a part in keeping the peace of Asia. Statements by U Thant and many other leaders prove there is intense world concern about Southeast Asia. This is an opportunity to encourage those concerned to share responsibility and decision.

Once a civilian government has been freely chosen, South Vietnam will be in the hands of its own people; subject to the uncertainties, risks and promise of the political process in a

turbulent land. We can be hopeful that it will re-establish friendly relations and commerce with the other countries with whom it shares Southeast Asia. Indeed, its relationship with North Vietnam, and that of the North with other countries, is critical to any lasting settlement of the conflicts in that volatile area.

For even though the war in Vietnam has its unique difficulties and dangers, its resolution must be viewed against the shifting nature of world communism.

We should, therefore, help to demonstrate the rich possibilities open to all of Vietnam and, indeed, to all

the Southeast Asia once steps are taken down the road to peace. In particular, we must show that peace can lead immediately to an increase in trade and communications between North Vietnam and its neighbors. We must show, perhaps in conjunction with the Soviet Union, that the security and economic welfare of North Vietnam is not in danger. And of great significance, it may be that in such a context North Vietnam will be better able to increase its independence of China, as it has struggled to do throughout much of its history.