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## Senator Edmund S. Muskie Interview for "Issues and Answers"

Edmund S. Muskie

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EXCERPTS FROM THE REMARKS OF  
SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE (D. MAINE)  
"ISSUES AND ANSWERS"  
APRIL 26, 1970

QUESTION: Senator Muskie, the President is still weighing his big decision this weekend on whether to provide American aid to Cambodia, any form of American aid. You have expressed strong concern against any widening of the war. Would you be opposed to military aid of any sort to Cambodia?

ANSWER: Yes. With respect to Cambodia, for several years the military has pressed President Johnson and then President Nixon to move in across the Cambodian border to get at the sanctuaries which were supplying staging areas and supplies to the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam.

President Johnson resisted that. He would not expand our involvement using ground forces across the Cambodian border. We have now had a relaxation of that position. We have had ground forces, South Vietnamese, essentially, moving across the border. We are not talking about adding to that assistance, and it just seems to me this is counter to what the thrust of our policy ought to be.

The second point I would like to make is that we have learned this lesson before.

First, we give arms. Then we send advisors and instructors to be sure that the arms are effectively and efficiently used and then when our advisors and instructors come under attack we send troops to protect them. This is the escalating pattern that we have seen in our experience in Southeast Asia and we have vowed to avoid that or any repetition of it.

The third point I would like to make is this: that we have decided as a result of these four years, five years, in Southeast Asia and South Vietnam, to withdraw. We have made that commitment to withdraw, and to leave the problems of the area to the people of the area.

Now, as we seek to implement a policy of withdrawal aimed at leaving the affairs of Southeast Asia to the people of that area, then it seems to me we have got to avoid the temptation, to react to another incident, or another opportunity, as our military people may see it to, once again, exert a beneficent influence upon the area. We can only get sucked in, it seems to me.

And the final point I'd like to make is this: Here we have a new situation in Cambodia. A government -- a coup which ousts one government and substitutes another in an area which is very close to our present involvement.

Now, our reaction to that instability is what? Our reaction is military activity on our part. Why shouldn't it be, rather, to call upon the United Nations to get involved here? I have not seen any suggestion from any source that this instance of aggression, as the administration is now describing it -- and this is something more than civil war, if it is a fact, this certainly is something that falls within the jurisdiction of the United Nations. And it seems to me that's a wiser, more restrained and more effective reaction to this incident than any arms reaction.

QUESTION: The argument is being made, Senator Muskie, that some American aid to Cambodia could actually hasten the withdrawal process. What would be your response to that?

ANSWER: That kind of illusive cantation has influenced our policy before in Southeast Asia. The bombing in the north. Another effort here, another effort there. We have constantly been tempted by the suggestion that a little more military effort might be just enough additional effort to do the job. And so, as we have taken these limited additional steps, we have found ourselves escalating from 16,000 advisers in late 1963 to over a half million troops in 1968. That is what a succession of limited response led us to and we ought to avoid its repetition.

QUESTION: Senator, you have put forth two proposals since we have been talking. The first was that we should somehow try to involve the United Nations in the Cambodian mess, in helping to bail everybody out, and the second that the President should appoint a new chief negotiator in Paris. Now one of the first, we have tried for many years and President Johnson tried and President Nixon tried, to get the United Nations involved in bailing us out of Vietnam, and we never got anywhere. President Nixon did have Henry Cabot Lodge sitting in Paris for the best part of a year and he didn't get anywhere with the Hanoi representatives on the other side of the table. What makes you be more optimistic at this stage that either course of action would work?

ANSWER: Well, it isn't a question of optimism. I am not optimistic about ending this war by any of the means available to us, or apparently available to us. Military, diplomatic, Geneva Conference, United Nations. But the important point is that we understand, or have a clear understanding of what it is we think is the best culmination of our effort, there.

We have all agreed, I take it, following the President's speech, that a negotiated settlement is the result to be hoped for. Well, if this is the result to be hoped for, how do we move toward it? With military means or diplomatic means?

Until now, we have relied on military means. The policy of Vietnamization, to try to move toward a negotiated settlement. I don't think it is going to work. I think we must take diplomatic initiatives as well.

Now a year may seem like a long time and it is, but it is a shorter time than we devoted to the military pursuits in South - East Asia. We have been in there militarily for five years and we have made a meaningful effort for eleven months under Henry Cabot Lodge. I think we need to have a man there probing. We say, and we get optimistic reports from South-East Asia, now, that, militarily, our situation looks better all the time. Well, if these reports are accurate, then presumably they generate heat on the other side to seek a negotiated settlement. If we don't have a chief negotiator there, the other side is not going to believe that our interest in a negotiated settlement is credible and the other side is not going to take the initiative, itself. Of that I am convinced.

QUESTION:

How are any diplomatic initiatives going to have any effect, whether at the United Nations or Paris, on the critical situation we face at the moment in Cambodia?

ANSWER:

Well, have we forgotten already all of the optimistic projections, military projections we have had in Vietnam over the years, the "light at the end of the tunnel" syndrome that we got from Secretary McNamara, that we got from General Taylor? We were always told if we just keep the pressure on a little longer, if we just add another increment of troops, not too large -- in other words, if we made just a little more of an effort, that we could win a military victory.

I am just a little cynical about this, not because it is President Nixon or a Republican Administration, but because there has been so much of this in the past that hasn't materialized, that hasn't paid off, and that each time it has resulted in the escalation of the American involvement to a new level, a new and higher level until we move from 16,000 advisors to half a million troops.

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