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4-3-1970

## **Era of Negotiation (Part 2) - Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie in the United States Senate**

Edmund S. Muskie

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"ERA OF NEGOTIATION? (PART II)"

Excerpts from Remarks by  
Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine)  
In the United States Senate  
Friday p.m., April 3, 1970

MR. MUSKIE: Mr. President, the day before yesterday the French Cabinet expressed its grave concern about the widening war in Southeast Asia and urged an effort to negotiate a settlement in Indo-China. Yesterday, the Paris Vietnam peace talks went through the motions of their 61st session with no meaningful response to the French proposal. Later reports in Washington indicate that the Nixon Administration is cool to the French proposals. In short, Mr. President, while the war in Vietnam continues and spills over into Laos and Cambodia, our government offers no initiatives to bring about the "era of negotiation" and it is reluctant to respond to the initiatives of others.

One week ago, yesterday, Mr. President, I began a series of speeches in the Senate on the unanswered questions about United States policy in Southeast Asia, particularly as these questions relate to the question of a negotiated settlement of the conflict in South Vietnam and the growing conflict in Laos and Cambodia. My questions were not answered, and I raise them again:

What is the Administration trying to convey by the unfortunate symbolic protocol gap in Paris?

The Administration has now allowed 133 days to go by--more than 30 percent of the time it has been in office--without replacing Ambassador Lodge with a representative of like rank. For more than four months, second rank representation from the United States has led to second and third rank representation from the Communists, and similar representation from Saigon. If this war to be the "era of negotiation," as President Nixon promised in his inaugural address, why is the Administration down-grading the tools of diplomacy?

How does the Administration propose to deal with the instability and conflict in Laos and Cambodia, which is directly related to the war in Vietnam?

The impossibility of ending the war by Vietnamization, which I have pointed out before, has been further underscored by events across South Vietnam's ill-defined western borders. In Laos, 67,000 North Vietnamese troops continue to operate, despite occasional counter-moves and continuing United States air attacks. In Cambodia, upwards of 40,000 North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops now appear to be involved, in the midst of growing evidence of the risk of civil war.

I do not think the American people will tolerate widened intervention by United States ground forces in these cross border areas. While the South Vietnamese are incapable of settling the situation, they may well succeed in dragging us in to protect them. Laos and Cambodia cannot be expected to deal militarily with the present instability by themselves.

It should be obvious to anyone familiar with Southeast Asian affairs that we ought to be trying to halt the new, dangerous and wider conflict in Indo-China by a negotiated agreement. There is considerable merit in the suggestion that the Geneva Conference be reconvened to consider all aspects of the Southeast Asia situation. There are substantial reasons for exploring the French proposal. But until the United States shows, by the level of its representation and the extent of its initiative in Paris, that it is seriously interested in a negotiated settlement, even the possibility of a Geneva Conference will go begging.

Mr. President, I ask again the questions I raised last week:

Is the Administration so certain, in the face of some contrary evidence, that Hanoi's position in Paris is one of total intransigence? Even if the Administration is so convinced, does this mean it has no obligation to probe and to try? Does it believe the tough bargaining necessary to achieve a negotiated end to the war isn't worth the time of a top-level appointment as our chief negotiator in Paris?

Has the Administration written off negotiations? If not, what are the preconditions for resuming meaningful negotiations? Is it, in effect, asking North Vietnam, to surrender?

Is the Administration playing a game where the next move can be made only by the other side?

Have we given up the initiative toward peace to the other side?

So far, Mr. President, the President's avowed policy of negotiations while we Vietnamize the war has not led to meaningful negotiations and it has not ended the war. It has been carried out against the uncomfortable and threatening backdrop of a widening war. It has reached the point where there are serious reports of an effort to slow-down, or temporarily halt, the removal of United States troops for the next six months, in order to let our forces complete the pacification process in certain key areas in South Vietnam. How often have we heard similar requests in the past? How much longer will we talk of pacification in South Vietnam while the rest of Indo-China goes up in smoke?

The fact is, Mr. President, that while we let the empty gestures at Paris go on--and yesterday was the 61st meeting--the war goes on, and spreads. The Administration seems to be debating not how much faster we can withdraw, but how much slower. We have given no real incentive for the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong to negotiate, and we have allowed the Thieu-Ky regime to continue on the assumption that we will support them indefinitely. And, to add insult to injury, we have stood by silently while the Thieu regime jailed a South Vietnamese political leader who had been helpful to us. Mr. Chau's offense was alleged "neutralist" sentiments in contacting his brother, a North Vietnamese intelligence operative.

Remember, Mr. President, that this act was carried out by Mr. Thieu, who said last July 11, "there will be no reprisals or discrimination after the (promised free) elections." Those words, which President Nixon hailed, have a hollow ring, today.

Mr. President, what possible justification is there for this Administration to refuse to speak out publicly in opposition to this action by the Thieu regime. The arrest and subsequent conviction of Chau without public protest on our part completely erodes the pretensions of the Saigon Government of magnanimity towards its own people, unless they are all-out supporters of the Thieu-Ky Administration.

Ambassador Bunker apparently did as he pleased on the case, in spite of State Department instructions. President Nixon has refused comment on this case. The State Department has refused comment. But questions will continue to be asked until there is a satisfactory response. We cannot and must not be subservient to the Saigon regime.

President Thieu's every word and action in recent months indicates that he places his trust in winning the war by force and not by negotiations. In his press conference at the beginning of the year Thieu predicted, as he has done many times before, that the Communist military effort in South Vietnam will collapse "within two or three years." The war will "fade away" he predicted, and he did not foresee Progress at the Paris talks. It was in this same press conference that he warned that "many years" will be required to remove all U. S. troops from South Vietnam. Is President Thieu dictating our withdrawal timetable?

Is it this attitude, Mr. President, which accounts for the forays of South Vietnamese battalions into Cambodia in recent days as reported in the press? Does the Administration condone such actions by our allies? If not, what is it doing to prevent the further spread of the conflict by these means?

Mr. President, I will continue to ask these questions each week until some meaningful answers are given, and our government again makes a genuine and reasonable effort to obtain a negotiated settlement of this tragic conflict.

I ask that recent articles which have appeared in the press relating to the military request for delay in further U. S. troop withdrawals, to the South Vietnamese attacks against Cambodia, and to the Chau case be inserted in the Record at this point.