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Hearings Held in Minneapolis on War in Vietnam—II

EXTENSION OF REMARKS OF

HON. DONALD M. FRASER

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 19, 1966

Mr. FRASER. Mr. Speaker, continuing the presentation of the views expressed at the Minneapolis hearings on Vietnam, I have the pleasure of presenting the testimony of Romeyn Taylor, associate professor of history at the University of Minnesota, and Rodney C. Lochr, professor of history at the University of Minnesota.

These hearings were an attempt to look beyond the day-to-day events of the way and to analyze its implications for the people of Vietnam and its lessons for the United States. The testimony illustrates the excellent insights of the expert witnesses into the problems. The wisdom presented here will be important far into the future.

The testimony of Romeyn Taylor and Rodney C. Lochr follows:

Romeyn Taylor: "This statement prepared by me for Representative DONALD FRASER's hearings in Minneapolis, December 7, 1965 represents my own views only and not that of any organization."

U.S. Foreign policy in the Far East since WW II appears to have been focused, as in other parts of the world on the containment of Communism. The practical definition of containment, however, cannot be the same in different time and different areas. In Europe, the policy of containment was generally successful. Here, military assistance, the NATO system of collective security and the programs of economic aid got good results. The states we supported in central and western Europe were already committed to non-Communist traditions of government and representative institutions. Moreover, they possessed, at least collectively, the skills and natural resources necessary to create and maintain military power on a very large scale. Little more than an infusion of U.S. capital and a certain amount of enlightened cooperation among the nations concerned were needed to create a firm obstacle to Russian expansion westward. At the same time, economic recovery prevented the massive social disturbances without which Communist revolution could hardly have been attempted. The definition of the problem of containment and the means used to implement it in Europe, however, cannot easily be transferred to Southeast Asia. This is not mere speculation: we have tried it and on the whole, it has worked poorly.

In Southeast Asia, several economically weak and politically unstable states are arranged on or near the southern periphery of China, a nation that outnumbers all the Southeast Asian states together by about four to one in population and is relatively stable politically. The problem here was to prevent these peripheral states from aligning themselves with China to our own strategic advantage. Two general approaches to this problem have been, one: the neutralization of the area under collective guarantee by the leading states on both sides of the cold war. This approach is represented by the Geneva Conference of 1954 and was strongly advocated at that time by India, itself a neutralist state. While the United States participated in this conference, it appears to have done so with some reluctance

and proceeded to implement the other approach, namely the application, or misapplication, of the methods employed successfully in Europe. This was expressed in SEATO, the South East Asia Treaty Organization, which was created in the same year. SEATO was logically incompatible with the Geneva approach since it implied a Western alignment, instead of neutrality, of the Southeast Asian members.

It may be argued, therefore, that we have made it impossible to give neutralization a fair trial. Our course in this regard can only be justified if it can be shown to have been highly successful. For a number of reasons it has, on the contrary, worked poorly. The weakness of the Southeast Asian members has resulted in their having to permit the establishment of U.S. military bases on their territory, in some cases close to the Chinese frontier. This has furnished China with a strong reason to apply pressure by taking advantage of their extreme vulnerability to organized internal opposition from the left. Other states, such as Cambodia and Burma have avoided alignment with the West for this reason and have remained outside of SEATO, thereby greatly weakening the organization. Moreover, the advantages of alignment with the U.S. seem uncertain at best. Our enormous investment in defense of the various Saigon regimes has not only failed to nullify the effectiveness of the militant left, but has escalated the internal struggle to a degree that threatens the devastation of the entire state. Far from encouraging other Southeast Asian states to associate themselves with us in this manner, it is more likely in the long run to persuade them that this is the most dangerous of all possible policies.

Another defect of the containment approach is that its economic phase necessarily produces results very different than in Europe and may sometimes work against our political objectives. In Europe, we were underwriting the restoration of developed industrial societies. In Southeast Asia, we hope to foster the industrialization of predominantly non-industrial societies. This demands a profound change in their cultures and their institutions. Such change in turn results in sharp internal conflicts that may take political or even military form. Since internal order is necessary for economic development, this creates a presumption in favor of authoritarian governmental forms as against the kind of open and representative forms that we would favor on ideological grounds. Moreover, the authoritarian left has a distinct advantage over the right.

While there have been some durable authoritarian regimes of the right, these have generally occurred in Europe, where there was a relatively secure conservative middle-class base, as in Spain or Portugal. Such a social base is largely absent in Southeast Asia, and where it exists, it is likely to be partly Chinese, and therefore to this extent, by attraction of the home country, inclined to the left. Moreover, rightist dictatorships have not generally had a good record in economic development. Nationalist China might be cited on Taiwan as a small example to the contrary, but here there are the peculiar circumstances of rule by cohesive and powerful refugee elite and investment of U.S. capital on a scale which it might be impossible to repeat for other states. The political left, on the other hand, by involving great numbers of the population in revolutionary political or even military action, achieves strong psychological identification with many or most of the population. This in turn makes the party or governmental organization strong enough to carry out the costly and difficult tasks of capitalizing industrial and agricultural development. On this score, the Asian Communist states of China, North Korea and North Vietnam appear to have done fairly well. The authoritarian left,

therefore, has real solutions for real problems. Whether the price paid in the form of state control of much social and intellectual activity is really worth the gains is hardly a question we should presume to answer for other peoples. In terms of their cultural traditions, which are very different from our own, the cost may not be as high as it would seem to us.

In the fact of these adverse factors, our application of the containment principle to the National Liberation movement in Vietnam and perhaps elsewhere amounts to the exercise of a U.S. veto with military force over certain real and not wholly unreasonable political tendencies in some of the economically underdeveloped countries. One effect of this is to place leadership of anti-western nationalism in the hands of the left, and under certain conditions, as in Vietnam, this may help them greatly. In passing, it should be noted that the arguments sometime advanced in support of our present policy that the NLF's resort to violence creates a moral obligation for outside powers to intervene against it is absurd. If this principle were generalized, all nations would be obliged to keep the democratic practices of their neighbors under critical review and intervene when they found force being used improperly. Moreover, it would be difficult in Vietnam to say whether Ngo Dien Diem or Ho Chi-Minh was the more responsible for the non-existence of political democracy in their country, since both appear to have been opposed to it from the start. To define the revolutionary war in Vietnam as an instance of international aggression is a transparent effort to force it into the category of problems that our policy of containment was intended to cope with.

Our failure in Vietnam does not mean that we should cease to support democratic leaders against their authoritarian rivals on the left and right, but it does mean, that we must distinguish between those cases where such support has a reasonable chance of achieving its intended result and those cases where our intervention is simply destructive. We must also recognize that we cannot substitute for or create indigenous leadership as we have tried to do in Laos and Vietnam with uniformly disastrous results. This necessary condition of democratic development is one that must be provided by the people in question. Where it is lacking, we must try to live with the result and not try inappropriately by military means to force upon them governmental forms that have no relation to their culture and experience. What are the implications of such a change in policy toward SEAsia? In a general sense, this points to a return to the Geneva approach of protected neutrality for those states that desire it and the acceptance of leftist control where it is already an accomplished fact. It also calls for the gradual replacement of the Western oriented system of collective security in SEATO by joint guarantees by the major Communist and non-Communist powers. China's adherence should become a major goal of our policy and to secure it, we should show our readiness to discuss all major issues now dividing the two countries.

We must also face the fact that to hope for neutralization of Vietnam at this very late date may be unrealistic. Our war there can probably be ended only if we make it clear to the Saigon Military that we will not win their war for them and they will either have to win it themselves with limited assistance or, which is more likely, make their own arrangements with the NFL and Hanoi in a reconvened Geneva Conference. If, as is likely, this results in a leftist or even Communist government in the south under Hanoi's political control, we should then undertake to encourage Vietnamese independence of Peking as we have encouraged Yugoslavia's independence of Moscow. This