

Rough Draft
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THE CHOICES IN VIETNAM

You may or may not have forgotten the event but last week, to be precise, on May 7, we had an anniversary. It was the twenty-first anniversary of VE Day, Victory in Europe. That was the beginning of the end of World War II.

I'm sure generally you remember that we finally came to a conclusion in August of that same year, 1945, when a nuclear bomb fell on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. But VE Day, the Victory in Europe, came just twenty-one years ago this month.

I remember it quite well. I was in Paris at the time and never did you see such madness, such jubilation, so many people flocking in the streets of downtown Paris. It was madness if I ever saw it and of course you can understand. Here they had been in darkness so to speak for all these years while this war went on. They had to block out the lights because of the danger of the bombers at night and here the lights came on that night in the Academy of Music in their celebrating the end on the Champs Elysses and the flame in the Arch of Triumph, the eternal flame to the unknown soldier.

So I drank it in and I thought about it and I thought, where is there a sentiment that just fits this occasion, and then I thought of the great man of Galilee and one of his last words. For you see when life was about to end, he just simply said, "it is finished." It meant that his destiny had been finished, and I thought with some reverence it is finished and mankind would be eternally grateful that that had come to an end.

Was it a lesson for the world or was it? Well, I began to doubt it. Here five years later on the twenty-seventh of June, and as I recall that was a Sunday afternoon, I remember when radio and television suddenly removed the picture from the screen whatever it was and said stand by for an announcement and then there was the announcement that President Truman had sent troops into Korea and I thought well, here we go again. Destruction and all that goes with it. Sometimes we refer to it as World War II^{1/2}. Generally speaking it was called a police action. Well, we lost 33,000 in Korea and I'll never forget the moment when I stood in that cemetery of all nations along Pusan road because there were the flags of all nations and buried in that cemetery were soldiers of all nations who had come to serve in Korea and to roll back the red tide.

So I thought, well World War II didn't seem to be a lesson for mankind and then came Korea and that didn't seem to be a lesson and then came the intervening period when there were so many struggles all over the Universe.

Doubtless you remember the Congo. We didn't actually send any soldiers to the Congo. Those were sent as a part of the so-called Expeditionary Force of the United Nations. First time we ever tried that. But we did send planes and put them right on the border of the Congo so that they could be used for transport purposes and here first one ruler then another succeeded to the authority of that country.

All you had was instability after the Belgians moved out and a lot of death and massacres.

Then we had the struggle between Israel and Egypt, as you recall, centered around that water course and that lake and that's when they sunk the barge of cement in the Suez Canal. We had to send engineers to lift it.

Then came the struggle between India and Pakistan and that made even less sense because we had sent weapons to Pakistan and we had sent weapons to India never thinking for a moment that they were going to use our weapons against each other. But that's precisely what took place.

Then I thought of China, Red China, moving into a humble country like Tibet, very mountainous country, they never bothered anybody, there was no aggressive spirit about them, very religious as you know, and given so generally to prayer. But that didn't keep the Red Chinese from moving in and virtually reducing them to a state of serfdom.

Then the struggle between France and Algiers. Oh, the money that went into it. Why President DeGaulle even took our artillery equipment without asking us about it and sent it down to Algiers. I remember going out to the Supreme Headquarters out on the edge of Paris and I made a good deal of inquiry from our own Generals at that time. But that was a long drawn out struggle.

Then came the struggle between Indonesia and Malaysia. Sukarno was so arrogant about it all. He was bound and determined to reduce the little country of Malaysia. You remember you have Singapore at the Straits of Singapore and then right behind it is Malaysia. Well that has finally been overcome and you wonder whether any of these where so much blood has been spilled and so much resource and treasure has been dissipated, whether there is any lesson in it for mankind at all.

Now of course we have Vietnam. We've got over 250,000 there now and you'll see various estimates that it will go to 300,000. Even estimates up to 500,000. For only one purpose, not to conquer North Vietnam, that's not our business. Our business is a very simple one and I want to emphasize it. It's to help South Vietnam. It's not our war. I made that point at a luncheon with the Assistant Secretary of State. I said I want you to tell me now whether this is or isn't our war. He said, "It is not our war." They sent up the Macedonian cry, they said we need help, you can come and help us and we said we would and then in addition to that we of course had an obligation under the so-called SEATO Treaty, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and we do have an obligation there and so we sent in a handful. We had helped the French before, seven hundred million of our money was invested in Vietnam, then known as Indo-China. That's money we loaned to the French or gave to them in the hope that they would still come out on top. But finally when their one last fortress at Dien Bien Phu fell that was the end of it.

So they went to Geneva and there they sat around the conference table and drew up a convention or an accord. They drew a line along the 17th parallel of latitude. That cut the country half into, at it's waist line, only about one hundred miles across there at that point and then they said each side will pull back ten miles. That's a demilitarized zone. But almost as quickly as it

happened, the North Vietnamese began to infiltrate. They wanted to destroy the freedom of the South Vietnamese and undertake to subdue them and convert them to Communism. That's about as simple I suppose as I can make it. So they asked for help and we said we promised to help and now we'll help you with weapons. You supply the manpower. We thought at first perhaps they had enough manpower.

When I was last there, I remember when that General whom we affectionately called "Iron Michael Daniel" was whipping the Vietnamese Army into shape and he really turned out an Army, 125,000 strong. I thought they were equal to any task and to any challenge, but it wasn't enough so they needed more help and we gave it to them. Now that's it, and the real issue, just to drive the North Vietnamese back and to stop their infiltration and to bring them to the conference table and get a pledge that they will stop it. That's as simple, I think, as you can make this issue. They won't come to a conference table. They have answered none of our notes, none of our invitations, whether directly or indirectly, and we have no choice except to do what we do.

Now just what are the choices. We can retreat and I hear that. What do you think would happen if we retreated? How we would lose face all through the Oriental world! Why almost over night we would be engaged in some other barricade of freedom whether in Malaysia or Thailand or Burma, but it would come just as surely as the sun rises in the morning. That's one choice, but what a catastrophic choice that would be.

Now one of the Generals came before the Committee and suggested a war of attrition. You know what that means, that's a holding war, get all your ducks in a row and get them all down that costal plain that runs along the South China Sea, that flat, and there you stage all the operations. You get your heavy artillery there and you keep your enemy off and then you can fly over with your bombers now and then. But I dread to think what the casualties would be. If we tried to encamp in a single place and then become the victims of howitzer fire, I'm not at all sure just what would happen under those circumstances.

So there it is, withdrawal, a war of attrition, or we can fight through. Now as to objectives, we have no choice. Somehow we've got to fight through either to a victory or to a conference table, and then of course maybe we can do some business with them and bring this to an end and even that is not a happy choice. But insofar as I know, we're beginning to do better over there and the infiltration will be shut off and then of course things will be better.

Now I say that one issue, the freedom of this little people, fifteen, sixteen million people, and how important is it? Well, I'll give you a little couplet as I remember it, "few men escape when freedom fails, the best men rot in filthy jails and those who cry appease, appease, are hanged by those they try to please."

That's it.