

TEXT OF STATEMENT BY McGEORGE BUNDY

I greatly regret that it is impossible for me to take part in the discussion this afternoon of our policy in Vietnam. I have looked forward to this meeting, and I hate to miss it. When I accepted your invitation, I did so with the warning that I might be unable to attend because of other duties. It gives me no pleasure that this warning has come true.

I regret my absence the more because I wholly disagree with those who have argued that it is inappropriate for a Government official to take part in a discussion of this kind. It may be true -- although I have no first-hand knowledge -- that some of your meetings on Vietnam have failed to meet the standards appropriate to university and college discussion. It may also be true -- and I have thought so once or twice myself -- that a few of those who feel strongly about the situation in Vietnam have been more interested in pressure upon the Administration than in fair discussion with its representatives. But the preliminary arrangements for this particular meeting so far as I have knowledge of them, have been fair to a fault. I am confident that the discussion this afternoon under the Chairmanship of Professor Nagel will be a model of its kind. Members of the academic community and members of the Administration share a deep interest in the encouragement of such fair and open discussion.

It has been argued that debate of this kind should be avoided because it can give encouragement to the adversaries of our country. There is some ground for this argument, since it is true that Communists have little understanding of the meaning of debate in a free society. The Chinese will continue to pretend -- and perhaps in part to believe -- that American policy is weaker because 700 faculty members have made a protest against our policy in Vietnam. The American people -- whatever their opinions -- know better. They know that those who are protesting are only a minority -- indeed a small minority -- of American teachers and students. They know also that even within that minority the great majority accept and respect the right and duty of the American Administration to meet its constitutional responsibilities for the conduct of our foreign affairs.

The American people know that the real day of danger will come when we are afraid of any unpopular minority, or unwilling to reply to its voices. They understand what Communists cannot understand at all -- that open discussion between our citizens and their Government is the central nervous system of our free society. We cannot let the propaganda of totalitarians divert us from our necessary arguments with one another -- any more than we should let them be misled by such debates if we can help it.

I will not take your time in this brief message for a rehearsal of the policy of this Administration on Vietnam. Let me take only a word to speak of our purpose there. That purpose is peace -- for the people of Vietnam, the people of Southeast Asia, and the people of the United States. We evidently differ on the choice of ways and means to peace,

in what we all must recognize to be a complex, ugly and demanding situation. Those differences may go deep to the nature of the politics of Asia, to the legitimacy of force in the face of armed attack and to the true prospects and purposes of the people of Vietnam themselves.

But my own assessment is that what divides us is less than what unites us. None of us wants the war to be enlarged. All of us want a decent settlement. None of us wants other men to be forced under a totalitarian political authority. All of us seek a solution in which American troops can be honorably withdrawn. None of us -- I hope -- believes that these are easy goals. All of us -- I trust -- are prepared to be steadfast in the pursuit of our purposes.

I recognize the entire sincerity of the great majority of those who now disagree with our policy in Vietnam. I think many of these critics have been wrong in earlier moments of stress and danger, and I think many of them misunderstand the hard realities of this dangerous world. But their good faith and good intent are not in question -- and on other issues at other times their efforts have been of great service to their country.

Having said this much, perhaps I can ask in return that these critics should recognize that the Administration which now bears responsibility for the conduct of our foreign affairs does not admire force for its own sake, or "brinkmanship" of any sort. The purpose of its foreign policy -- in Vietnam as elsewhere -- is that diplomacy and power and progress and hope shall be held together in the service of the freedom of us all. So I trust that the discussion this afternoon will not turn upon charge and countercharge against the motives of those with whom we disagree. Let it turn instead upon analysis of the situation as it is and of choices for the future which can serve the purposes we share.

I repeat my apologies for my enforced absence, and I take comfort in the thought that I shall miss the meeting more than you will miss me.

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