



## “Our National Honor’s at Stake”

**Date:** 1964-06-11

**Conversation:** WH6406-05-3680-3681

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Richard B. Russell Jr.

**Start Time:** 12:26

**Duration:** 02:00

**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: Long before President Johnson sent the first American ground troops to Vietnam, one of the senators whose judgment he valued most, Richard B. “Dick” Russell Jr. [D–Georgia], expressed doubts about that nation’s strategic importance to the United States.

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**President Johnson:** [Michael J. “Mike”] Mansfield’s [D–Montana] got a four-page memo saying that I’m getting ourselves involved, and I’m going to get in another war if I do it anymore.

**Richard B. “Dick” Russell Jr.:** Yeah. Yeah, he’s taking that attitude down there all the way. And I, in a way, share some of his fears.

**President Johnson:** I do, too, but the fear the other way is more.

**Russell:** I don’t know what in the hell to do. I didn’t ever want to get messed up down there. I do not agree with those brain trusters who say that this thing has got tremendous strategic and economic value and that we’ll lose everything in Southeast . . . in Asia, if we lose Vietnam. I don’t think that’s true. But I think as a practical matter, we’re in there, and I don’t know how the hell you can tell the American people you’re coming out. There’s just no way to do it. They’ll think that you’ve just been whipped, and you’ve been run, you’re scared, and it’d be disastrous.

**President Johnson:** I think that I’ve got to say that we’re—I didn’t get you in here, but we’re in here by treaty, and we can’t—our national honor’s at stake, and if this treaty’s no good, none of them are any good. Therefore, we . . . we’ve . . . we’re there, and being there, we’ve got to conduct ourselves like men. That’s number one. Number two, in our own revolution, we wanted freedom, and we naturally look with other people—sympathy with other people who want freedom, and if he’ll leave them alone and give them freedom, we’ll get out tomorrow. That’s the second thing. The third thing, I think that we’ve got to try to find some proposal some way that . . . like [Dwight D.] Eisenhower worked out in Korea that we can—

**Russell:** Yeah, I wouldn’t eliminate the United Nations or some agreement, because if . . . I think people, if you get some sort of agreement all the way around, would understand it. And I don’t think that they’re so damned opposed to . . . they . . . to the United Nations getting in there. And I don’t think they’d be opposed to coming out. I don’t think American people want to stay in there. They got

enough sense to realize it's just a matter of face that we just can't walk off and leave those people down there [*unclear*] without some agreement.

*End of excerpt.*

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Full information about this conversation: ["Our National Honor's at Stake"](#)