



“Where Do You Stop”

Date: 1965-06-08

Conversation: WH6506-02-8107-8108-8109

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Michael J. Mansfield

Start Time: 17:05

Duration: 02:48

Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: In this call, President Johnson asked Senate Majority Leader Michael J. “Mike” Mansfield [D–Montana] for advice on whether to approach Congress about escalating the Vietnam War. The previous day, the U.S. commander in Vietnam, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, had requested an additional 44 battalions of troops—a request that, if granted, would dramatically expand the U.S. combat presence in Vietnam.

President Johnson: Do you have any thoughts about the approach that we might make to the Congress, whether one is wise and, if so, how?

Michael J. “Mike” Mansfield: Well, if you make another approach to the Congress, I think really the roof will blow off this time, because people who have remained quiet will no longer remain silent. And I think it would be too much of the same thing being applied too soon one after the other. You’ve got the resolution. Now, you got the 700 million dollars. Now, you got the Mekong thing. [If] this come[s] up, I think you’d be in for some trouble, that the debate could split right out. [*Unclear*]—

President Johnson: I think you might near got to have the debate, though, haven’t you?

Mansfield: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: Do you think that we ought to send all these troops without a debate?

Mansfield: No, sir. I think that we’ve got too many in there now, and . . . we’ve been bombing the North without any appreciable results showing for us in the South. I think that this thing has got to be settled in the South someday. It’s not a question of withdrawal. It’s not a question of bombing Hanoi or Haiphong. It’s just something that’s going to take a lot of consideration, a lot of concentration in the South, and something to be done to try and revive, as I know you’re trying to with the proposal of [Norodom] Sihanouk for a Cambodian conference dealing with Cambodia only.

President Johnson: [*Pause.*] But what do we do about his [William C. Westmoreland’s] request for more men? Don’t we have to—if it assumes the proportions that I can see it assuming, shouldn’t we say to the Congress: “What do you want to do about it?”

Mansfield: Well, I would be—hate to be the one to say it because, as you said earlier, it's 75,000, then it's 150,000, then it's 300,000. Where do you stop?

President Johnson: You don't. That's right.

Mansfield: When do you stop?

President Johnson: You don't. I mean, if you—it looks like to me—I don't see where the—to me it's shaping up like this, Mike: you either get out, or you get in. I don't think there's much more neutral. I think we've tried all the neutral things. And we think they are winning. Now, if we think they're winning, you can imagine what they think.

Mansfield: Yes, they know they're winning.

President Johnson: And if they know that, you can see that they're not anxious to find any answer to it.

Mansfield: That's right.

End of excerpt.

CITATION: "Lyndon Johnson and Mike Mansfield on 8 June 1965," Conversation WH6506-02-8107-8108-8109, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Lyndon B. Johnson: Civil Rights, Vietnam, and the War on Poverty, ed. David G. Coleman, Kent B. Germany, Guian A. McKee, and Marc J. Selverstone] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014—). URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4002498>

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Full information about this conversation: ["Where Do You Stop"](#)