

Don't believe we can win in SVN. If we send in 100,000 more, the NVN will meet us. If the NVN run out of men, the Chinese will send in volunteers. Russia and China don't intend for us to win the war. If we don't win, it is a catastrophe. If we lose 50,000+ it will ruin us. Five years, billions of dollars, 50,000 men, it is not for us.

At end of monsoon, quietly probe and search out with other countries—by moderating our position—to allow us to get out. Can't see anything but catastrophe for my country. . . .

President Johnson and advisers, meeting with congressional leaders, 27 July 1965 (beginning at 6:35 pm), discussing new initiatives in Vietnam.¹⁵

[President:] . . . We don't know if this will be 2 years or 4 years or what.

We didn't know World War I was going to be one year or five years.

RUSK: The attitude of the Communist world is the key question.

[Democratic senator from Florida George] SMATHERS: We are denying the VC the victory[,] aren't we? Is not our purpose not to be driven out—and avoid WW III by not bringing in China and Russia[?] Is this a change of policy?

PRESIDENT: As aid to the VC increases, our need to increase our forces goes up. There is no change in policy.

[Democratic senator from Louisiana Russell] LONG: If we back out, they'd move somewhere else. Ready to concede all Asia to Communists? Not ready to turn tail. If a nation with 14 million can make Uncle Sam run, what will China think?

SPEAKER [of the House and Massachusetts Democrat, John W. McCormack]: I don't think we have any alternatives. Our military men tell us we need more and we should give it to them. The lesson of Hitler and Mussolini is clear. I can see five years from now a chain of events far more dangerous to our country.

[Republican senator from Illinois Everett] DIRKSEN: . . . Tell the

country we are engaged in very serious business. People are apathetic. . . .

[Democratic senator from Montana and Senate Majority leader, Mike] MANSFIELD: I agree with Dirksen [on] apathy in the country.

I would not be true to myself if I didn't speak. This position has certain inevitability. Whatever pledge we had was to assist SVN in its own defense. Since then there has been no government of legitimacy. . . . We owe this government nothing—no pledge of any kind.

We are going deeper into war. Even total victory would be vastly costly. Best hope for salvation is quick stalemate and negotiations[.]

We cannot expect our people to support a war for 3-5 years. What we are about is an anti-Communist crusade . . . [.] Escalation begets escalation.

President Johnson, statement at White House press conference, 28 July 1965, justifying the dispatch of fifty thousand fresh troops to Vietnam.¹⁶

We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

Moreover, we are in Viet-Nam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American Nation. Three Presidents—President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President—over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Viet-Nam have fought for many long years. Thousands of them have died.

¹⁵ Ball did not attend this meeting. Meeting Notes File, box 1, Johnson Papers.

¹⁶ Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, 2: 794-95, 797-98.

Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

Let me also add now a personal note. I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth, our finest young men, into battle. . . . I have seen them in a thousand streets, of a hundred towns, in every State in this Union—working and laughing and building, and filled with hope and life. I think I know, too, how their mothers weep, and how their families sorrow.

This is the most agonizing and the most painful duty of your President.

There is something else, too. When I was young, poverty was so common that we didn't know it had a name. An education was something that you had to fight for, and water was really life itself. I have now been in public life 35 years, more than three decades, and in each of those 35 years I have seen good men, and wise leaders, struggle to bring the blessings of this land to all of our people.

And now I am the President. It is now my opportunity to help every child get an education, to help every Negro and every American citizen have an equal opportunity, to have every family get a decent home, and to help bring healing to the sick and dignity to the old.

As I have said before, that is what I have lived for, that is what I have wanted all my life since I was a little boy, and I do not want to see all those hopes and all those dreams of so many people for so many years now drowned in the wasteful ravages of cruel wars. I am going to do all I can to see that that never happens.

But I also know, as a realistic public servant, that as long as there are men who hate and destroy, we must have the courage to resist, or we will see it all, all that we have built, all that we hope to build, all of our dreams for freedom—all, all will be swept away on the flood of conquest.

So, too, this shall not happen. We will stand in Viet-Nam.