

Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973)

"Two Threats to World Peace" - Remarks in Omaha on the Occasion of the Sending of the Five-Millionth Ton of Grain to India

given on June 30, 1966

Governor and Mrs. Morrison, Mayor Al Sorensen, Governor Phil Sorensen, my dear and good friend Congressman Callan, ladies and gentlemen of the great State of Nebraska:

I want you to know, Governor Morrison, that I haven't been able to hear much about anything, since you and Mayor Sorensen and Governor Sorensen and Mrs. Morrison kept Lady Bird out here beautifying for an entire day, except
5 about the glories of Nebraska. I am delighted to come back to Omaha and to this great State to confirm all the good things that she has said to me about you.

I have come to Omaha today because I want to speak to you about the most important business in our time--the business of peace in the world.

Two years ago this week, when I was also speaking out here in the Midwest, I said that the peace we seek "is a world
10 where no nation fears another, or no nation can force another to follow its command. It is a world where differences are solved without destruction and common effort is directed at common problems."

This is still true as we meet here this afternoon. I am convinced that after decades of wars and threats of wars, peace is more within our reach than at any time in this century.

I believe this because we have made up our minds to deal with the two most common threats to peace in the world.
15 We are determined to match our resolution with action. But what are these threats?

First is the desire of most people to win a better way of life. That is true of you here in Omaha, and that is true of most people who want to win a better way of life everywhere in the world.

Second is the design of a few people, the design of some people, to force their particular way of life on other people.

Now if we ignore these threats, or if we attempt to meet them only by the rhetoric of visionary intentions instead of
20 good works of determination, I am certain that tyranny and not peace will be our ultimate fate.

If the strong and the wealthy turn from the needs of the weak and the poor, frustration is sure to be followed by force. No peace and no power is strong enough to stand for long against the restless discontent of millions of human beings who are without any hope.

That is why we stand here this afternoon in Omaha, at the end of a very important lifeline. At the other end of that
25 lifeline, 8,000 long miles out yonder, is India--India, a nation of 500 million human beings. The wheat here this afternoon is part of their shield against the catastrophe of drought and famine.

This single load of grain will provide the margin of life for more than 2,500 families throughout the entire balance of this year. But it is only a very tiny fraction of what America's response to India's need has been.

I would remind you that since January 1, 5 million tons of American wheat have already been shipped to India. That is
30 more than 2 1/2 times the annual wheat production of the State of Nebraska.

And this is only about half the grain that we and other nations are providing India this year in order to help her overcome the worst drought that her people have ever suffered in the history of her nation.

And America's job is not yet over.

Here, today, in the center of the greatest food-producing area anywhere on this globe, we Americans must face a
35 sobering fact: Most of the world's population is losing the battle to feed itself. If present trends continue, we can now see the point at which even our own vast productive resources, including the millions of acres of farmlands that we now hold in reserve, will not be sufficient to meet the requirements of human beings for food.

In my Food for Freedom message that the President sent to the Congress, I requested the authority and the funds to provide food on very special terms to those countries that are willing to increase their own production.

40 We will lend America's technical knowledge. We will lend America's practical experience to those people who need it most and who are willing to prove to us that they are willing to try to help themselves. In addition to that, we will support programs of capital investment, water development, farm machinery, pesticides, seed research, and fertilizer.

We will introduce all the American know-how in their country to try to help them learn to produce the food that is necessary to satisfy the human bodies that live in their land.

45 Now these are only beginnings. We must work for a global effort. Hunger knows no ideology. Hunger knows no single race or no single nationality, no party--Democratic or Republican.

We recognize the contributions of the Soviet Union. We recognize the contributions of Yugoslavia in contributing food to India. We are glad that they saw fit to try to do their part. We welcome the support of every nation in the world when that support is given to feeding hungry human beings. In this kind of cooperation we find the seeds of
50 unity against the common enemies of all mankind.

I long for the day when we and others-whatever their political creed--will turn our joint resources to the battle against poverty, ignorance, and disease. Because I honestly believe that these enemies--poverty and ignorance and disease--are the enemies of peace in the world.

But that day is not here because some men, in some places, still insist on trying to force their way of life on other
55 people.

That is the second threat that I want to talk about out here in Omaha today.

That is the second threat to peace--trying to force their way of life on other people. That is the threat that we are standing up to with our proud sailors, soldiers, airmen, and Marines in South Vietnam at this hour.

Now I want to point out to you that the conflict there is important for many reasons, but I have time to mention only a
60 few. I am going to mention three specifically.

The first reason: We believe that the rights of other people are just as important as our own. We believe that we are obligated to help those whose rights are being threatened by brute force.

Individuals can never escape a sense of decency and respect for others; neither can democratic nations. If one man here in Omaha unlawfully forces another to do what he commands, then you rebel against the injustice, because you
65 know it is wrong for one man here in Omaha to force another one to do what he wants him to do. Unless human concern has disappeared from all of our values, you also know that it is necessary--I emphasize "necessary"--to help that man that is being forced to defend himself.

This same principle is true for nations-- nations which live by respect of the rights of others. If one government uses force to violate another people's rights, we cannot ignore the injustice, the threat to our own rights, the danger to peace
70 in the entire world.

That is what is happening at this hour in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese are trying to deny the people of South Vietnam the right to build their own nation, the right to choose their own system of government, the right to live and to work in peace.

To those people in America who say they have never had this thing explained to them, I want to repeat that again.

75 The North Vietnamese at this hour are trying to deny the people of South Vietnam the right to build their own nation, the right to choose their own system of government, the right to go and vote in a free election and select their own people, the right to live and work in peace.

South Vietnam has asked us for help. Only if we abandon our respect for the rights of other people could we turn down their plea.

80 Second, South Vietnam is important to the security of the rest of all of Asia.

A few years ago the nations of free Asia lay under the shadow of Communist China. They faced a common threat, but not in unity. They were still caught up in their old disputes and dangerous confrontations. They were ripe for aggression.

Now that picture is changing.

85 Shielded by the courage of the South Vietnamese, the peoples of free Asia today are driving toward economic and social development in a new spirit of regional cooperation.

All you have to do is look at that map and you will see independence growing, thriving, blossoming, and blooming.

They are convinced that the Vietnamese people and their allies are going to stand firm against the conqueror, or against aggression.

90 Our fighting in Vietnam, therefore, is buying time not only for South Vietnam, but it is buying time for a new and a vital, growing Asia to emerge and develop additional strength.

If South Vietnam were to collapse under Communist pressure from the North, the progress in the rest of Asia would be greatly endangered. And don't you forget that!

The third reason is, what happens in South Vietnam will determine--yes, it will determine--whether ambitious and
95 aggressive nations can use guerrilla warfare to conquer their weaker neighbors.

It will determine whether might makes right.

Now I do not know of a single more important reason for our presence than this.

We are fighting in South Vietnam a different kind of war than we have ever known in the past.

Sixteen years ago this month, North Korea attacked South Korea. By armed invasion across a national border, a
100 Communist country attempted to conquer and overrun its neighbor.

The United States of America recognized this kind of aggression immediately and we acted. North Korean aggression failed. Why? Because President Harry S. Truman and the American people, working with the forces of the United Nations, supporting that great leader, had the courage to help the people of South Korea protect their homes and protect their country.

105 Those people are helping us in Vietnam now.

Today South Korea is still free and thousands of its young men are again fighting side by side with the Americans to defend another small country from being swallowed up by a more powerful Communist neighbor.

Today in South Vietnam we are witness to another kind of armed aggression.

110 It is a war that is waged by men who believe that subversion and guerrilla warfare, transported across international boundaries, can achieve what conventional armies could not.

They believe that in the long run a modern scientific and industrial nation such as ours is helpless to defend a smaller and weaker country against the imported terror of guerrilla warfare.

That is what is going on there. The Communist guerrillas, the Vietcong, choose their targets carefully. They aim at the heart of a struggling nation by murdering the schoolteachers, by murdering the agricultural extension workers, by
115 killing the health workers, by assassinating the mayors and their families.

In 1965 alone the Communists killed or kidnaped 12,000 South Vietnamese civilians. That is equivalent to wiping out the entire population of Columbus, Nebraska, or Alliance County, or one out of every 25 citizens that live in this great city of Omaha.

120 If, by such methods, the agents of one nation can go out and hold and seize power where turbulent change is occurring in another nation, our hope for peace and order will suffer a crushing blow all over the world. It will be an invitation to the would-be conqueror to keep on marching. That is why the problem of guerrilla warfare--the problem of Vietnam--is a very critical threat to peace not just in South Vietnam, but in all of this world in which we live.

Let there be no doubt about it: Those who say this is merely a South Vietnamese "civil war" could not be more wrong. The warfare in South Vietnam was started by the Government of North Vietnam in 1959.

125 It is financed, it is supported, by an increasing flow of men and arms from the North into the South.

It is directed and it is led by a skilled professional staff of North Vietnamese, and it is supported by a very small minority of the population of South Vietnam.

The military tactics are different. The nature of the fighting is different. But the objective is the same as we found it in Korea. The objective is what? The objective is to conquer an independent nation by the force and power of arms.

130 Might makes right, so think these Communist invaders.

Well, the war took a new turn in 1964. The North Vietnamese decided to step up the conflict in the hope of an early victory. They recruited and drafted more young men from the Communist areas in the South.

They slipped across the borders of South Vietnam more than three divisions of the North Vietnamese Regular Army. Today there are more than three North Vietnamese divisions fighting in South Vietnam.

135 They built all-weather roads. The trails turned into boulevards to replace the jungle trails that they had once used.

They began sending troops in by trucks rather than on foot.

They shifted over to heavy weapons, using imported ammunition, most of it coming from Communist China.

By any definition you want to use--any definition--any lawyer can tell you this: This is armed aggression, the philosophy that might makes right.

140 Well, America's purpose is to convince North Vietnam that this kind of aggression is too costly, that this kind of power cannot succeed.

We have learned from their prisoners, their defectors, and their captured documents that the Hanoi government really thought a few months ago that conquest was in its grasp. But the free men have rallied to prevent this conquest from succeeding.

145 In the past 15 months our actions and those of our fighting allies of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, and the courage of the people of South Vietnam, have already begun to turn the tide.

The casualties of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese forces are three times larger than those of the South Vietnamese and their allies.

150 Battle after battle is being won by the South Vietnamese and by the troops under that gallant leader from the United States of America, General "Westy" Westmoreland. He is getting some military advice on the side from some of our armchair generals in the United States, but it looks to me like he is doing pretty good using his own judgment.

The air attacks on military targets in North Vietnam have imposed, and will continue to impose, a growing burden and a high price on those who wage war against the freedom of their neighbors.

155 In the South the Vietnamese are determined that their own economic development, their own social reform and political progress cannot wait until the war ends, so they are now moving toward constitutional government.

For the past 2 months the political struggles in South Vietnam have been dramatized in our newspapers. They have been published on our television screen every day.

160 But all during this time, the Vietnamese citizens, representing every important group in the society, have been quietly meeting in orderly assembly. They have formulated rules for their elections. The rules have been accepted with only minor modifications by the government in Saigon.

And in the provinces and villages, the Vietnamese have gone on building schools for their children, improving health facilities and agricultural methods, and taking the first steps toward land reform.

165 So we can take heart from all of this. We are backing the Vietnamese not only in their determination to save their country; we are supporting their determination to build, to construct, a modern society in which the government will be their government, reflecting the will of the people of South Vietnam.

Our objective in Vietnam is not war. Our objective is peace.

There is nothing that we want in North Vietnam. There is nothing we want from North Vietnam.

There is nothing that we want in Communist China. There is nothing the American people want from Communist China.

170 We have made it very clear by every means at our disposal that we wish the killing to stop.

We have made it very clear that we wish negotiations to begin on the basis of international agreements made in 1954 and 1962.

For 37 long days we halted bombing in the North in the hope that the government in Hanoi would signal its willingness to talk instead of fight. But I regret to tell you that no signal came during those 37 days.

175 In many more ways than I can now tell you here in Omaha, we have explored and we are continuing to explore avenues to peace with North Vietnam.

But as of this moment, their only reply has been to send more troops and to send more guns into the South.

Until the day they decide to end this aggression and to make an honorable peace, I can assure you that we, speaking for the United States of America, intend to carry on.

180 No one knows how long it will take. Only Hanoi can be the judge of that. No one can tell you how much effort it will take. None can tell you how much sacrifice it will take. No one can tell you how costly it will be.

But I can, and I do here and now, tell you this: The aggression that they are conducting will not succeed. The people of South Vietnam will be given the chance to work out their own destiny in their own way, and not at the point of a bayonet or with a gun at their temple.

185 I hear my friends say, "I am troubled," "I am confused," "I am frustrated," and all of us can understand those people. Sometimes I almost develop a stomach ulcer myself, just listening to them.

We all wish the war would end. We all wish the troops would come home. But I want to see the alternatives and the calculations that they have to present that give them a better chance to get the troops home than the very thing we are doing.

190 There is no human being in all this world who wishes these things to happen--for peace to come to the world--more than your President of the United States.

If you are too busy, or not inclined to help, please count 10 before you hurt. Because we must have no doubt today about the determination of the American men wearing American uniforms, the Marines who are out there fighting in the wet jungles, wading through the rice paddies up to their belts, the sailors who are searching the shores and
195 patrolling the seas, the airmen who are out there facing the missiles and the anti-aircraft guns, carrying out their mission, trying to protect your liberty. The least they are entitled to is for you to be as brave as they are and to stand up and give them the support they need here at home.

These men are not going to fail us.

Now the real question is: Are we going to fail them? Our staying power is what counts in the long and dangerous
200 months ahead.

The Communists expect us to lose heart.

The Communists expect to wear us down. The Communists expect to divide this Nation.

The Communists are not happy about the military defeat they are taking in South Vietnam.

But sometimes they do get encouraged, as they said this week, about the dissension in the United States of America.
205 They believe that the political disagreements in Washington, the confusion and doubt in the United States, will hand them a victory on a silver platter in Southeast Asia.

Well, if they think that, they are wrong. To those who would try to pressure us or influence us, mislead us or deceive

us, I say this afternoon, there can be only one decision in Vietnam, and that is this: We will see this through. We shall persist. We shall succeed.

210 Other Presidents have made the commitment. I have reaffirmed it. The Congress has confirmed it. I plan to do all that I can in my own limited way to see that we not permit 14 million innocent men, women, and children to fall victims to a savage aggression.

There are many nations, large and small, whose security depends on the reliability of the word and the reliability of the power of the United States. The word of the United States must remain a trust that men can live by, can live with,
215 and can depend upon.

Some day we will all work as friends and neighbors to grow more food, to build more schools, to heal the sick, to care for the old, to encourage the young.

We have programs in that direction in the United States going on now, and we are not going to junk them. But we are not going to tuck our tail and run out of South Vietnam either.

220 History is not made by nameless forces. History is made by men and women, by their governments and their nations.

This Nation, working with others, must demonstrate in Vietnam that our commitment to freedom and peace is not a fragile thing. It can--and it will--sustain the major test and any test that may confront it.

With your support--with your faith--we will fulfill America's duty.

We have a proud and a glorious heritage. We are going to be true to it.

225 It was only 20 months ago that the people of America held a great national election. The people of 44 States of this Union, including the great State of Nebraska, gave me a direction and voted me a majority for the Presidency of this country. I believe that their vote was a trust, that as long as I held this high and most responsible office and gift of the American people, that I would do my best as President of the country, as Commander in Chief of the Army.

Now, there are many, many who can recommend, advise, and sometimes a few of them consent. But there is only one
230 that has been chosen by the American people to decide.

With your support, with your prayers, with your faith, I intend to honor the responsibility and to be true to the trust of the office to which you elected me, and to preserve freedom in this country; to keep our commitments; to honor our treaties; and let the rest of the world know that when America gives its word, America keeps its word.

Thank you.

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