

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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CONTACT: CLARKSON HINE
(202) 224-5358

VIETNAM EMBARGO

SMITH/DOLE AMENDMENT

In May 1970, I attended a meeting in Constitution Hall to help establish the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in southeast Asia. The League, incorporated on May 28, 1970, has been one credible and consistent voice for the families whose loved ones remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

It is the families that have endured the pain of not knowing for twenty or more years. Families who deserve final answers. Let's finally have an answer for Jane Duke Gaylor in El Dorado, Kansas as to what happened to her son, Charles Duke, a civilian technician missing from Pleiku, Vietnam, since May 30, 1970. Answers to Mary Hall in Altoona, Kansas, as to what happened to her husband, Technical Sergeant Willis R. Hall at Lima Site 85 overrun March 11, 1968. And answers to Carol Hrdlicka in Conway Springs, Kansas, as to what happened to her husband, Col. David. Hrdlicka, shot down over Laos in 1965, and whose picture appeared in Pravda and in Vietnamese newspapers in 1966.

In that time, there has been some progress -- 345 Americans have been accounted for. But this progress only occurred after serious and sustained pressure from the U.S. The track record is crystal clear: Vietnam has lied, concealed and dissembled for twenty years. They give up information and remains only when the government makes a political decision that it serves their political goals. And, as the Administration's decisions to support IMF loans to Vietnam in July 1993, and to ease the embargo in September 1993 show: the Vietnamese strategy to control release of remains and information for political leverage is working.

The Kerry-McCain Amendment says the embargo should be lifted expeditiously. The Smith-Dole Amendment says the President should not lift the current embargo until he makes a determination that Vietnam has provided remains and information our own government has reason to believe Vietnam continues to withhold. If Vietnam has already fully cooperated -- as some of their supporters appear to believe -- the President can make this determination tomorrow.

If, however, Vietnam is allowing highly publicized searches of already excavated crash sites, while holding back remains, crucial documents and information about cases our intelligence community believes they could provide -- we should not lift the embargo. And, if Vietnam is holding back information as many credible observers believe, lifting the embargo would be the worst possible decision. It would let the Vietnamese government know that the U.S. no longer considers accounting for Americas' POW/MIA's a matter of the highest national priority. It would let the Vietnamese know that the fullest possible accounting is now on the back burner. And it would let the Vietnamese know that business interests take precedence over the interests of seeking knowledge about the fate of Americans who served their country in a war too many are willing to forget.

I hope all senators can agree that we should respect the views of the families of those unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. They are not unreasonable. They are not saying keep the embargo until after the fullest possible resolution is obtained. What they are asking for is simple: don't lift the embargo until Vietnam provides information that our own intelligence community says it can easily provide if Vietnam makes the political decision to do it. What the families oppose is payment in advance. What they support is reciprocity -- a clear sign that Vietnam has done what it can easily do to resolve their uncertainty.

(more)

The Smith-Dole Amendment simply lays out a determination by the President on Vietnamese POW/MIA cooperation before the embargo is lifted. I would hope all my colleagues could support it. If POW/MIA cooperation is as good as many senators stated last night, they should be able to support this language. The amendment is simply an affirmation of President Clinton's position. On November 11, 1992 -- Veterans Day -- President-Elect Clinton said: "I have sent a clear message that there will be no normalization of relations with any nation that is at all suspected of withholding any information. We must have as full an accounting as is humanly possible."

This amendment simply asks the President to make a determination on his own standard: is Vietnam "suspected of withholding any information." Maybe the President will think things have changed since his statement. Maybe the President thinks Vietnam is not withholding information. Then he should welcome this amendment as an opportunity to address our concerns on the issue.

I happen to believe, based on the information available to me, that Vietnam is not being fully forthcoming. Yes, Vietnam is allowing a lot of activity. But, as President Clinton said in a letter to Senator Smith last month: "I will not accept mere activity by Vietnam on POW/MIA issues as 'progress.'" Supporters of normalization with Vietnam talked about remains turned over in 1993. But remains alone do not provide a final answer to the families' uncertainty -- unless cases are resolved. According to information prepared by the National League of Families, only three Americans previously unaccounted for in Vietnam have had their status fully resolved in the last year.

We need to compare apples with apples. Previous administrations counted resolved cases -- not unidentified remains -- as a measure of progress. Maybe some of the remains will lead to cases being finally resolved in the future -- I hope so. But it does not seem to me that 3 resolved cases in 1993 is sufficient to justify a decision to lift the embargo -- especially when so many qualified experts say Vietnam is holding back.

Can it truly be that difficult to provide the answers that Dr. Kissinger sought in February, 1973 when he presented over 80 folders to the Vietnamese in Hanoi. Information contained in these folders -- from Vietnamese sources -- proved that American POW's were at one time alive, because their pictures were published in newspapers in Laos, Vietnam, Russia and other communist countries. These are easy cases for Vietnam to solve. The United States has waited far too long for these answers -- answers Vietnam could provide if it wanted to.

Let me quote Carl Ford, a career intelligence officer and senior Defense Department official from 1989-1993: "the amount of information the Vietnamese could share with us but are concealing and withholding is enormous. Everybody knows the Vietnamese are holding out." Richard Childress, NSC official throughout the Reagan years said: "It is also clear that the Vietnamese have studiously avoided giving us documents that would resolve many outstanding cases." Mr. Ford and Mr. Childress are not among those accused of harboring conspiracy theories on the POW/MIA issue. On the contrary, they have been savaged by many accusations over the years for being "too soft" on Vietnam.

In my view, there is room for legitimate disagreement over the issue of Vietnamese cooperation. The Smith-Dole Amendment would allow the President to make his view known -- before he lifts the embargo on Vietnam.

I ask unanimous consent that several documents prepared by the National League of Families, including a record of the Clinton Administration's commitments, and an article entitled, "will Clinton buy Hanoi's POW charade" appear in the record after my remarks.

Let me say to my colleagues, lifting the embargo -- if Vietnam is holding back information and remains -- is not about "healing the wounds of the past." Lifting the embargo will help heal those wounds -- only if we can all be assured that Vietnam is no longer withholding information and remains for political purposes. Vote for the Kerry-McCain Amendment if you believe the embargo should be lifted. But also vote for the Smith-Dole Amendment if you believe the families of those who served for this country deserve answers before the embargo is lifted. Passage of the Smith-Dole Amendment will help achieve the end we all seek, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

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Remarks delivered on the Senate floor, approximately 10:02 AM, ET.