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3
4 ISSUES AND ANSWERS

5
6 SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1968

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8 GUEST: SENATOR EVERETT M. DIRKSEN (R. Ill.)

9
10 INTERVIEWED BY:

11 Frank Reynolds, ABC White House Correspondent
12 Bob Clark, ABC Capitol Hill Correspondent.

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15 MR. REYNOLDS: Senator Dirksen, you have been a consistent
16 supporter of the President's broad objectives in Vietnam.
17 Have the events in the past week and the current communist
18 offensive there caused you to change your view and do you
19 agree with the President that the communist offensive in
20 military terms has been a complete failure?

21 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let's separate the question.
22 First of all, I have not forsaken the President's position
23 in respect to North Vietnam -- North Korea, or with respect
24 to South Vietnam. Let's look at that Korean picture
25 for just a moment. Here were such delicate questions as

1 MR. RYAN: Senator, how do we go about any military
2 action and still achieve the objective of getting those men
3 back?

4 SENATOR DIRKSEN: That is the reason I have not projected
5 myself into a speculation about military action. We saw
6 a thing like this happen once before. I think in one of his
7 press conferences the President alluded to that fact.

8 MR. RYAN: In the case of the M-47?

9 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Yes. And you probably were there.
10 It did take quite a while before that was negotiated.
11 When you negotiate with other countries, it is not quite
12 so expeditious, not quite so easy, and it is not quite
13 so simple. And I make allowances for those things. But
14 I do press the point that I think we were on good, defensible
15 grounds that the North Korean action was absolutely
16 inexcusable and for that reason I am very reluctant to ever
17 give and utter an apology when no apology is called for.

18 MR. RYAN: Senator, could we come back for a moment
19 to Vietnam and in view of what has happened there in the
20 current offensive, they still hold parts at least of some
21 provincial towns. Do you agree with the President who said
22 that their military campaign was a total failure, a complete
23 failure?

24 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, let's not use the word "total"
25 let's say that it was a failure. And as I analyze the

1 thing from time to time on the basis of the kind of
2 information that is available to me, this looked like
3 something that had been dictated by councils of both
4 desperation and despair. I think you get that from the
5 fact that as you look at these captives and you get
6 reports on them -- youngsters, 12, 13, 14 years old -- what
7 would that probably translate to the average citizen, or
8 the average military commander? That they are running out
9 of manpower.

10 Now then when it comes to weapons, maybe the same
11 thing you can get there, namely that supplies are beginning
12 to run short. So, put it all in the one thing. Wasn't
13 it General Westmoreland who said "They are
14 going for broke"? Maybe that is the expression that applies
15 in this case. It is now or never.

16 MR. CLARK: One of your fellow Republicans, Senator
17 Tower, said this might be the death rattle of the Viet
18 Cong. Do you agree with that?

19 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I think I am inclined to go along
20 with that general assessment, because this was a deadly,
21 dangerous undertaking that they got into, and they wouldn't
22 do it unless they were desperate. I can't imagine that
23 they would.

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25 (Announcement)

1 MR. CLARK: Your fellow Senator from Illinois,
 2 Charles Percy, seems to take a much more serious view
 3 than you do of the Viet Cong escapades these past few days
 4 in Vietnam. He says that the President has been misleading
 5 the American people about the extent of our military progress

6 Do you think there is any justification for this
 7 statement?

8 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, it is difficult indeed to make
 9 a military assessment of something that is taking place 12,000
 10 miles from home. In the first place, I am not a military man.
 11 In the second place, I have not been out there in a great
 12 many years, although I was there, even in North Vietnam,
 13 ~~some~~ before Dienbienphu fell. That is when the French
 14 finally caved in. So who shall say whether we have enough
 15 troops, whether the deployment of our troops is very proper,
 16 whether we are adequately weaponed. Until I see in detail
 17 those reports, then I could better tell, I think.

18 MR. REYNOLDS: Well, Senator, does it not give you pause
 19 that they were able to mount this kind of a coordinated
 20 offensive that had obviously been planned in advance, and
 21 they were able to humiliate the United States in some measure
 22 by at least occupying part of the Embassy ground there?

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1 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Frank, it does, but there is an
2 offsetting factor there. Having watched people move in
3 those countries like Vietnam, on foot, on bicycles, in motor
4 lorries, in every way known to mankind, how easy it is for
5 them to move into a city.

6 And then, of course, ethnically there is little sub-
7 stantial difference, if any, between a North Vietnamese and
8 a South Vietnamese; not very much.

9 I remember the story they used to tell about how to
10 identify a North Korean as against a South Korean, because
11 they wear a different type of sandal and the strap case in one
12 case between the big toe and the next toe; in the other case,
13 between the second toe and the third toe, and wherever they
14 found the callouses that determined who they were.

15 Now, with that kind of condition and with the hundreds
16 of thousands of refugees moving in and out, I do not know
17 that that is so surprising, that they could stage this kind
18 of an assault. And particularly, if they were wearing
19 uniforms that deceived the defenders of the place.

20 MR. CLARK: Senator, you have talked of the enemy's
21 manpower problem in Vietnam. Secretary McNamara's only
22 appearance this week, before the Senate Armed Services
23 Committee, pointed out that North Vietnam has an army of
24 480,000 men and thus far has committed only about 50,000
25 of those troops to battle in South Vietnam. Does that

1 sound like a very critical manpower problem?

2 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, are you mentioning now that
3 the Viet Cong and North Vietnam have committed only 50,000--

4 MR. CLARK: No, that would be the North Vietnam. The
5 total is something like 115,000.

6 SENATOR DIRKSEN: That is right. That is quite a
7 different thing, because the Viet Cong are very much in
8 there and for all practical purposes, they are the real milit
9 enemy out there.

10 MR. CLARK: Well, the expected assault on Khesanh will be
11 mounted apparently mainly by troops from North Vietnam
12 and still they have an uncommitted army of something like 430
13 thousand men.

14 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Yes. Now the question is, who is
15 in that uncommitted army? Because on the basis of what we
16 have captured, these kids -- you have to call them kids--

17 MR. CLARK: I would have to cite again Secretary McNamara's
18 report that 480,000 is only 3 percent of the population
19 of North Vietnam, which is much lower than the percentage
20 we had in our army--

21 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Oh, that might well be, but you are
22 talking about a force of 480,000. What does it include?

23 MR. CLARK: Well, Secretary McNamara said basically
24 that they are inducting each year into the North Vietnam
25 Army the youths that are becoming of draft age that given

1 year, but his whole point is that there is a great reservoir
2 of manpower in North Vietnam that has not yet been committed
3 to the war.

4 SENATOR DIRKSEN: If you put it all together I have
5 no doubt about it. But if you include down to age 14 in our
6 own population, why look at what our potential would be
7 military-wise. We have never done it.

8 MR. REYNOLDS: But isn't that precisely the point,
9 Senator: Nobody in this country has any intentions of including
10 our people down to the age of 14 or carrying a thing of that
11 nature --

12 SENATOR DIRKSEN: Well, I cited the matter only to fortify
13 one conclusion. I said, was this a matter dictated by desperation
14 or not, when you take all the factors into consideration,
15 and that is certainly one of them.

16 MR. CLARK: Senator, many of your colleagues in the
17 Senate and in the House, too, are concerned that we are
18 already so overcommitted in Vietnam and other parts of the
19 world that we would be unable or certainly it would be very
20 hazardous for us to get involved in another full-scale war in
21 Korea. Do you share this sort of concern?
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