



## **Kerry spoke of meeting negotiators on Vietnam**

By Michael Kranish and Patrick Healy  
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WASHINGTON -- In a question-and-answer session before a Senate committee in 1971, John F. Kerry, who was a leading antiwar activist at the time, asserted that 200,000 Vietnamese per year were being "murdered by the United States of America" and said he had gone to Paris and "talked with both delegations at the peace talks" and met with communist representatives.

Kerry, now the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, yesterday confirmed through a spokesman that he did go to Paris and talked privately with a leading communist representative. But the spokesman played down the extent of Kerry's role and said Kerry did not engage in negotiations.

Asked about the appropriateness of Kerry's saying that the United States had "murdered" 200,000 Vietnamese annually when the United States was at war, Kerry spokesman Michael Meehan said "Senator Kerry used a word he deems inappropriate."

Meehan said Kerry "never suggested or believed and absolutely rejects the idea that the word applied to service of the American soldiers in Vietnam." Meehan then declined to say to whom Kerry was referring when he said that the United States had murdered the Vietnamese; Kerry declined to be interviewed about the matter.

Kerry killed a Viet Cong fighter in an action his superiors deemed appropriate and for which he was awarded the Silver Star.

Kerry's speech before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 22, 1971, is one of the best-known moments of his life when he was involved in Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In that speech, Kerry asked: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"

But the follow-up session of questions and answers, made public at the time in the official proceedings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has received little mainstream notice until now.

When Kerry was asked by committee chairman Senator J. William Fulbright how he proposed to end the war, the former Navy lieutenant said it should be ended immediately and mentioned his involvement in peace talks in Paris.

"I have been to Paris," Kerry said. "I have talked with both delegations at the peace talks,

that is to say the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government and of all eight of Madam Binh's points . . . ."

The latter was a reference to a communist group based in South Vietnam. Historian Stanley Karnow, author of "Vietnam: A History," described the Provisional Revolutionary Government as "an arm of the North Vietnamese government." Madam Nguyen Thi Binh was a leader of the group and had a list of peace-talk points, including the suggestion that US prisoners of war would be released when American forces withdrew.

After their May 1970 marriage, Kerry traveled to Paris with his wife, Julia Thorne, on a private trip, Meehan said. Kerry did not go to Paris with the intention of meeting with participants in the peace talks or involving himself in the negotiations, Meehan added, saying that while there Kerry had his brief meeting with Binh, which included members of both delegations to the peace talks.

As Kerry runs for president, he is finding that many of his statements and activities over the last 33 years are drawing new attention. Last year, the Globe published White House transcripts of discussions about Kerry by President Nixon in the Oval Office. More recently, the Los Angeles Times focused on FBI surveillance reports, obtained by historian Gerald Nicosia, in which the FBI monitored meetings of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, a group that Kerry led in 1971.

Indeed, there may be a tie between Kerry's statement before the Senate committee and the interest of the FBI in his activities. One FBI report provided to the Globe by Nicosia shows that the government was monitoring whether Kerry planned to go to Paris again. Kerry was "planning to travel to Paris, France . . . for talks with North Vietnamese peace delegation," said the report, dated Nov. 11, 1971.

Kerry's Senate testimony spans about six pages in the committee publication, but the lesser-known question-and-answer session was another 24 pages. As he opened the latter session, Kerry said Nixon should declare a cease-fire and "accept a coalition regime which would represent all the political forces of the country which is in fact what a representative government is supposed to do and which is in fact what this government here in this country purports to do, and pull the troops out without losing one more American, and still further without losing the South Vietnamese."

Kerry then suggested that Congress should permit a special national referendum on ending the Vietnam War, leading Fulbright to remind Kerry that Congress "cannot directly under our system negotiate a cease-fire or anything of this kind. Under our constitutional system, we can advise the president." Kerry responded that, "I realize that full well as a study of political science. I realize that we cannot negotiate treaties, and I realize that even my visits in Paris, precedents had been set by Senator [Eugene] McCarthy and others, in a sense are on the borderline of private individuals negotiating,

et cetera."

Kerry's statement dealt with the question of whether he was trying to negotiate in Paris as a private citizen and was thus on that "borderline" of what was allowable. A US law forbids citizens from negotiating with foreign governments on matters such as peace treaties. Meehan said Kerry was not negotiating.

"Senator Kerry had no role whatsoever in the Paris peace talks or negotiations," Meehan said in his statement. "He did not engage in any negotiations and did not attend any session of the talks. Prior to his Senate testimony, he went to Paris on a private trip, where he had one brief meeting with Madam Binh and others. In an effort to find facts, he learned the status of the peace talks from their point of view and about any progress in resolving the conflict, particularly as it related to the fate of the POWs."

Kerry's suggestion before the Senate committee that there be an immediate pullout led to questions about whether such a move would endanger the lives of South Vietnamese allies.

Kerry responded that "this obviously is the most difficult question of all, but I think that at this point the United States is not really in a position to consider the happiness of those people as pertains to the army in our withdrawal." If the United States did not withdraw, Kerry said, then US bombing would continue, and "the war will continue. So what I am saying is that yes, there will be some recrimination but far, far less than the 200,000 a year who are murdered by the United States of America . . . ."

Meehan, asked to explain Kerry's comment, said: "During a very emotionally charged time in American history, Senator Kerry was testifying against a failed policy, which resulted in the killing of hundreds of thousands of people. That policy resulted in one of the highest civilian casualty rate in the history of war. In answering Senator [George D.] Aiken's question about the consequences of an American withdrawal and potential additional bloodbath, Senator Kerry used a word he deems inappropriate.

"Senator Kerry never suggested or believed and absolutely rejects the idea that the word applied to service of the American soldiers in Vietnam. While opposed to the failed policy, Senator Kerry insisted that Americans must never confuse the war with the warriors."

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