

Text of President's Address

Following is the prepared text of President Nixon's address on additional reductions in U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Good evening, my fellow Americans. Over the past several weeks you have heard a number of reports on TV, radio and in your newspapers on the situation in Southeast Asia.

I think the time has come for me, as President and as Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces, to put these reports in perspective, to lay all the pertinent facts before you and to let you judge for yourselves as to the success or failure of our policy.

I am glad to be able to begin my report by announcing that I have decided to increase the rate of American troop withdrawals for the period from May 1 to December 1. Before going into details, I would like to review briefly what I found when I came into office, the progress we have made to date in reducing American forces, and the reason why I am able to announce a stepped-up withdrawal without jeopardizing our remaining forces in Vietnam and without endangering our ultimate goal of ending American involvement in a way which will increase the chances of a lasting peace in the Pacific and the world.

When I left Washington in January of 1961, after serving eight years as Vice President under President Eisenhower, there were no American combat forces in Vietnam. No Americans had died in combat.

When I returned as President eight years later, there were 540,000 American troops in Vietnam. Thirty-one thousand had died there. Three hundred Americans

were being lost every week. There was no comprehensive plan to end the United States involvement in the war.

I implemented a plan to train and equip the South Vietnamese; to withdraw American forces, and to end American involvement in the war just as soon as the South Vietnamese had developed the capacity to defend their country against Communist aggression. On this chart you can see how our plan has succeeded. In June of 1969, I announced a withdrawal of 25,000 men; in September 40,500; in December 50,000, and in April of 1970—150,000. By the first of next month we will have brought home more than 265,000 Americans, almost half of the troops in Vietnam when I took office.

Another indication of the progress we have made is in reducing American casualties. Casualties were five times as great in the first three months of 1969 as they were in the first three months of 1971. South Vietnamese casualties have also dropped significantly in the past two years. One American dying in combat is one too many. Our goal is no American fighting and dying anywhere in the world. Every decision I have made in the past and every decision I make in the future will have the purpose of achieving that goal.

Two Decisions Reviewed

Let me review now two decisions I have made which have contributed to the achievement of our goals in Vietnam.

The first was the destruction of enemy bases in Cambodia. At the time of that decision, many expressed fears that we had widened the war; that our casualties would increase and our

troop withdrawal program would be delayed. I do not question the sincerity of those who expressed these fears. But we can see now that they were wrong. American troops were out of Cambodia in 60 days, as I pledged they would be. American casualties did not rise after Cambodia; they were cut in half. American troop withdrawals were not halted or delayed. They continued at an accelerated rate.

Now let me turn to the Laotian operation, undertaken by South Vietnamese ground forces with American air support against North Vietnamese troops which had been using Laotian territory for six years to attack American and allied forces in South Vietnam. Since that operation was completed, there has been a great deal of understandable speculation—as there was after Cambodia—as to whether it was a success or a failure, a victory or a defeat. But, as in Cambodia, what is important is not the instant analysis of the moment but what happens in the future.

Did the Laotian operation

contribute to the goals we sought? I have just completed my assessment of the operation. Here are my conclusions:

First, the South Vietnamese demonstrated that without American advisers they could fight effectively against the best troops North Vietnam could put in the field.

Second—the South Vietnamese suffered heavy casualties. But, by the most conservative estimates the casualties suffered by the enemy were far heavier.

Third, and most important, the disruption of enemy supply lines and the consumption of ammunition and arms in the battle has been even more damaging to the capability of the North Vietnamese to sustain major offensives in South Vietnam—than were the operations in Cambodia ten months ago.

Consequently tonight—I can report that Vietnamization has succeeded. Because of the increased strength of the South Vietnamese, because of the success of the Cambodian operation, and because of the achievements of the South Vietnamese operation in Laos I am announcing an increase in the rate of American withdrawals. Between May 1 and December 1 of this year, 100,000 more American troops will be brought home from South Vietnam. This will bring the total number of American troops withdrawn from South Vietnam to 365,000 — over 2/3 of the number who were there when I came into office—as this chart shows. The Government of South Vietnam fully supports our decision.

Involvement Ending

Let us look now to the future:

As you can see from the progress we have made to date and by this announcement tonight, the American involvement in Vietnam is coming to an end. The day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight. Our goal is a total American withdrawal from Vietnam. We can and we will reach that goal through our program of

Vietnamization.

We would infinitely prefer to reach it even sooner—through negotiations. You will recall that on Oct. 7 in a national TV broadcast, I proposed an immediate cease-fire throughout Indochina; the immediate release of all prisoners of war in the Indochina area; an all-Indochina Peace Conference; the complete withdrawal of all outside forces; and a political settlement. Tonight I again call on Hanoi to engage in serious negotiations to speed the end of the war. I especially call on Hanoi to agree to the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of war throughout Indochina. It is time for Hanoi to end the barbaric use of our prisoners as negotiating pawns and to join us in a humane act that will free their men as well as ours.

Let me turn now to a proposal which at first glance has a great deal of appeal to the American people: If our goal is a total withdrawal of all our forces why not announce a date now for ending our involvement? The difficulty in making such an announcement to the American people is that I would also be making that announcement to the enemy. And it would serve the enemy's purpose and not our own.

If the United States should announce that we will quit regardless of what the enemy does, we would have thrown away our principal bargaining counter to win the release of American prisoners of war; we would remove the enemy's strongest incentive to end the war sooner by negotiation; and we will have given enemy commanders the exact information they need to marshal their attacks against our remaining forces at their most vulnerable time.

The issue very simply is this: Shall we leave Vietnam in a way that, by our own actions, consciously turns the country over to the Communists? Or shall we leave in a way that gives the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to survive as a free people? My plan will end American involvement in a way that would provide that chance. The other would end it precipitately and give victory to the Com-

munists.

In a deeper sense, we face the choice of ending our involvement in this war on a note of despair or on a note of hope. I believe as Thomas Jefferson did that Americans will always choose hope over despair. We have it in our power to leave Vietnam in a way that offers a brave people a realistic hope of freedom. We have it in our power to prove to our friends in the world that

America's sense of responsibility remains the world's greatest single hope for peace.

Above all, we have it in our power to close a difficult chapter in American history, not meanly, but nobly, so that each one of us can come out of this searing experience with a measure of pride in our nation, confidence in our own character, and hope for the future of the spirit of America.

I know there are those who honestly believe that I should move to end this war without regard to what happens to South Vietnam. This way would abandon our friends. But even more important we would abandon ourselves. We would plunge from the anguish of war into a nightmare of recrimination. We would lose respect for this nation, respect for one another, respect for ourselves.

Reports of Brutalities

I understand the deep concerns which have been raised in this country, fanned by reports of brutalities in Vietnam. Let me put this into perspective.

As one who has visited Vietnam many times and as Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces, I feel it is my duty to speak up for the two and a half million fine young Americans who have served in Vietnam. The atrocity charges in individual cases should not and cannot be allowed to reflect on their courage and their self-sacrifice. War is a terrible and cruel experience for a nation and particularly for those who bear the burden of fighting.

Never in history have men fought for less selfish mo-

tives—not for conquest, not for glory but only for the right of people far away to choose the kind of government they want.

While we hear and read much of isolated acts of cruelty, we do not hear enough of the tens of thousands of individual American soldiers who have built schools, roads, hospitals, clinics, and, who through countless acts of generosity and kindness, have tried to help the people of South Vietnam. We can and should be proud of these men. They deserve not our scorn but our admiration and our deepest appreciation.

The way to express that appreciation is to end America's participation in this conflict, not in failure or in defeat, but in achievement of the great goals for which they fought—a South Viet-

nam free to determine its own future and an America no longer divided by war but united in peace.

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That is why I have charted the course outlined tonight. To end this war—but to end it in a way that will strengthen trust for America around the world, not undermine it; in a way that will redeem the sacrifices that have been made, not insult them; in a way that will heal this nation, not tear it apart.

I can assure you tonight with confidence that American involvement in this war is coming to an end.

But can you believe this? I understand why this question is raised by many honest, sincere people. Many times in the past in this long and difficult war, actions have been announced from Washington which were supposed to lead to a reduction of American involvement in Vietnam. Over and over these actions resulted in increasing American forces in Vietnam and higher American casualties.

Tonight I do not ask you to take what I say on faith. Look at the record: Every action taken by this Administration, every decision made has accomplished what I said it would accomplish. They have reduced American involvement. They have drastically reduced our casualties.

In my campaign for the presidency, I pledged to end American involvement in this war. I am keeping that pledge. You should hold me accountable if I fail.

Often I am asked what single thing, above all others, I would rather accomplish as President. I always give the same answer—the answer I give you tonight. I want peace for America. Not just in Vietnam. But in the Middle East, in Europe, in the world. And not just peace for our time, but peace for a generation—a full generation of peace, something Americans have not known in this century.

Tonight, I am confident we are on the way to achieving that goal in Vietnam and in the world. With your support we can, and will, build that kind of peace.