

# Nixon Hails U.S. Role In Vietnam

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President Nixon said yesterday that 250 million people in Southeast Asia have a chance to remain free because of America's sacrifices in Vietnam.

Endorsing the controversial domino theory, Mr. Nixon said that the 17 million people of South Vietnam and the 7 million people of Cambodia "would certainly now be under Communist control" but for America's role in the Vietnam war.

Moreover, he said, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand would be in "much greater danger" of aggression.

The President made his comments at a Cabinet room ceremony at which he signed a proclamation designating March 29—the first anniversary of the departure of the last American combat soldier from Vietnam—as Vietnam Veterans Day.

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Mr. Nixon also said that his negotiating efforts with China and the Soviet Union would have been impossible "had not the United States proved that it was a dependable ally and also demonstrated in Vietnam that it would not join an enemy to overthrow an ally."

The President spoke earnestly and longer than usual at such a ceremony, emphasizing his continued defense of a policy which he acknowledged sorely divided the American people.

The 2½ million who served in Vietnam "deserve our thanks," the President declared, adding that the best way to repay the debt owed them "is to have a strong America militarily, but an America that is respected throughout the world, an America that will not back away from its great and destined role to be the peacemaker of the world, whether it is in the Mideast, in Europe, in Asia or in any other area of the world."

When a great power "shows

a lack of will it loses respect of allies, neutrals and adversaries, Mr. Nixon said.

In the future, under the Nixon doctrine, the United States will not furnish troops but will within its capacity furnish economic and military supplies to nations defending their freedom, he said.

The goal, he emphasized, is to "build a structure of peace in which all people in the world will be able to avoid a future war, large or small."

At the end of his address, the President turned to Donald Johnson, administrator of the Veterans' Administration, and told him he wanted him to meet with Sarah McClendon, a correspondent of several Texas newspapers, who vehemently questioned the President at his Monday evening news conference on charges the VA has been delinquent in providing GI assistance checks to Vietnam veterans.

Referring to the news conference question, the President told Johnson he wanted a "chapter and verse" report on just what problems the VA faced and why checks were delayed.

Later, at a news conference, Johnson sparred with Mrs. McClendon, maintaining that in all the United States there are currently only 1,052 outstanding complaints from veterans regarding non-receipt of benefit checks.

At the end of February, Johnson said, the VA was paying education benefits to 1,405,431 veterans under the GI bill. "More veterans will be trained this fiscal year than ever before since the new program started in 1966," he said.

He also said that plans were being made to ask Congress to increase benefits to disabled veterans, but he indicated the increase would not be as high as the 15 per cent some members of Congress have advocated.

Johnson conceded that the VA made errors, but he said some veterans qualified to receive educational benefits had failed to provide proper information of the schools they are attending had failed to do so, thus delaying the mailing of benefit payments.

The "vast majority of these millions of checks are indeed paid in timely fashion," Johnson insisted. He promised to try to improve the VA's record in the future.