

Nixon Says The War Is Ending

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President Nixon, in a rare-on-the-record interview, said Monday that the Vietnam war is ending.

He added, "In fact, I seriously doubt if we will ever have another war. This is probably the very last one."

He spoke easily, sitting relaxed in an armchair and more or less thinking aloud as he began to recapitulate his aims, methods and hopes.

NOTES

As soon as the President confirmed that the contents of the conversation could be published, he was asked for permission to take notes, and he nodded agreement.

Later, asked if he would like to see a text of the notes, he declined.

While repeatedly emphasizing that the Vietnam war is ending, the President made no secret of his concern at being caught in a "vicious cross fire" between those he termed the superdoves and those he termed the superhawks. He said he thought each offered an unreasonable course of neoisolationism that is impractical and dangerous.

It disturbs him that he established and many former ardent internationalists are now wedded to what he views as neo-isolationism.

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"I'd like to see us not end the Vietnamese war foolishly and find ourselves all alone in the world," he said. "I could have chosen that course my very first day in office. But I want the American people to be able to be led by me, or by my successor, along a course that allows us to do what is needed to help keep the peace in this world."

"Part of the answer is simply that Americans, like all idealists, are very impatient people," he commented. "They feel that if a good thing is going to happen it should happen instantly."

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No Wars

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Mr. Nixon, recalling the ideals of his mother, a Quaker, described himself as a deeply committed pacifist but added: "It is not enough just to be for peace. The point is, what can we do about it."

"No one who is really for peace in this country can reject an American role in the rest of the world."

He described the Vietnamese conflict as exceedingly difficult for people to understand and "a war where there are no heroes, only goats." Nevertheless, he recalled having told Mrs. Golda Meir, the Israeli Premier:

"If America winds up the war in Vietnam in failure and an image is developed that the war was fought only by stupid scoundrels, there would be a wave of isolationism. This would embrace the U. S. role everywhere — including the Middle East."

"Mrs. Meir saw the point immediately," he added.

The greatest concern of the President, as he made plain, is that the United States withdraw in orderly fashion from Indochina but without falling into a mood of isolationism or stripping of national defenses.

He does not contemplate any risk of falling behind in the

arms competition with the Russians, nor does he foresee withdrawing American forces from Europe until balanced reductions can be arranged by mutual negotiation.

"We must not forget our alliances or our interests," he said. "Other nations must know that the United States has both the capability and the will to defend these allies and protect these interests."

But he stressed a desire to continue negotiations with Moscow and open the door of cooperation to Peking so that "there will be a chance of building a world that is relatively peaceful."

The President emphasized the importance of a non-Communist Asia and the fact that the United States was itself a Pacific power. This fact will soon be underscored, he said, when a supersonic transport is developed—by others, if not by the United States—and brings it within three hours flight from Japan.

He expressed deep concern for the internal problems of this country — environment, poverty, education—but said the nation had to deal both with these and with the mantle of responsibility imposed upon it abroad.

"After all," he said, "if we manage to improve the environment and living conditions in this country, we must also assure that we will be around to enjoy those improvements."

Asked if he could give any precise indication of how many American troops he expected to be in South Vietnam by mid-1972, Mr. Nixon grinned and replied:

"Well, you know I can't disclose the withdrawal figures. But let me say this: 'Those who think Vietnam is going to be a good political issue next year are making a grave miscalculation.'

Thoughts on a Second Term

"Now I am not applying our policy there for political reasons but for reasons of national security. Nevertheless, those who are counting on Vietnam as a political issue in this country next year are going to have the rug jerked from under them."

"Certainly the way the Laotian battle is going is helping our withdrawal program. And I can tell you that if I were running as a political candidate, I wouldn't select as an issue something that is likely to become a nonissue."

At that point Mr. Nixon was asked if he felt that it was

essential to his long-range plans that he be re-elected to a second term. Again he smiled in a relaxed manner and replied:

"I work here as if every day was going to be my last day. My theory is that you should never leave undone something that you will regret not having done when you had the power to do it."

"The fact of the matter is that for the next 25 years the United States is destined to play this superpower role as both an economic and a nuclear giant. We just have to do this. We cannot dodge our responsibilities."

"If I lived in another country that wanted to be sure and retain its right to self-determination, I would say: 'Thank God that the United States exists at this moment of history.'

"We are not bent on conquest or on threatening others. But we do have a nuclear umbrella that can protect others, above all the states to which we are allied or in which we have great national interest."

"This is the moral force behind our position. We could be a terrible threat to the world if we were to lose that restraint or if we were to sacrifice our own power and allow ourselves to become too weak to uphold the weak."