

Nixon's Nov. 3 Speech: Why He

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr.

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 18 — President Nixon's State of the Union Message Thursday is eagerly awaited in Washington, but it is not likely to be as revealing or profoundly important—to him, to his staff, perhaps even to the country—as his speech to the nation on Vietnam last Nov. 3.

The Vietnam address has been largely passed over in the assessments of Mr. Nixon's first year in office, but his aides say that few episodes tell more about the President's style of operations and his instincts about the country, or about how he is likely to conduct himself at critical moments in the future.

They say that the Vietnam address represented his greatest gamble and greatest triumph of the year. In a substantive sense, he bought time and public patience for his Vietnam strategy with a direct appeal to the "silent majority" to trust him to withdraw American troops from Vietnam at a pace he would not disclose.

A Deliberate Test

In psychological terms, he gave himself and his staff a welcome boost by putting his own capacity for leadership to what he considered to be a deliberate test.

Mr. Nixon's image in some quarters is said to be that of a man who is easily corseted by an overprotective staff, seeking a consensus, rationing his energy and avoiding major gambles. This may well be the prevailing Nixon style, but the Nov. 3 speech suggests that, on major occasions, he is likely to discard the entire apparatus in favor of his own instincts and judgments.

Against the advice of his chief foreign policy advisers, he offered a full justification for American intervention in the war; against the pleadings of his allies on Capitol Hill—notably Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the minority leader—he proposed no further diplomatic initiatives.

According to his associates, Mr. Nixon relied little on his staff and almost entirely on his own perceptions of what the country would accept.

Rather than depend on his stable of six full-time speech writers, sources say, the President wrote the address almost entirely himself in the solitude of his Camp David retreat. The evidence suggests that his first thoughts about the speech survived a two-week personal drafting process with only minor changes.

"I must tell you in all candor," his chief foreign policy adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, told him during the drafting process, "that I have no way of knowing whether this speech has any chance of being listened to."

"What this speech will tell," the President reportedly replied, "is whether the American people can be led in the direction we have to go."

Timing of the Decision

The decision to give the country an accounting of the Vietnam strategy was made during the President's August vacation in San Clemente, Calif., and was reaffirmed after he announced a second round of troop withdrawals in mid-September.

Mr. Nixon had told visitors all along that he wanted to key such an accounting of his war policy to the first anniversary of the bombing halt in early November. Lending urgency to the project was the fact that the negotiating package unveiled in the last full report to the people on May 14 had failed to energize the Paris peace talks and the related fact that, despite two separate troop withdrawals, public support for the Administration's position had rapidly eroded.

Accordingly, on Oct. 13, the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, announced that the President would deliver a "major address" Nov. 3. Critics immediately charged that the announcement itself was timed to defuse the antiwar moratorium scheduled for Oct. 15, and that the speech was timed to achieve maximum impact in the scattered state and municipal elections on Nov. 4.

Mr. Nixon's associates insist

otherwise. They contend that the President needed to announce the speech early, in the words of one high source, "to give Hanoi fair warning and a chance to turn around in Paris."

In addition, the President was said to have overridden the advice of his public relations specialists, who reasoned—correctly, as it turned out—that an early announcement would give critics three weeks in which to mount an attack and press for faster disengagement, and thus build expectations that the speech would contain precisely the sort of bold initiative that Mr. Nixon wished to avoid.

Set of 'Talking Points'

Although he wrote the speech himself, Mr. Nixon turned for preliminary data to his policy-making machinery. Mr. Kissinger asked for memorandums from the Secretaries of State and Defense and from Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon and Henry Cabot Lodge in Paris. He also asked two members of his National Security Council staff to propose a set of "talking points" for the President.

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Took the Gamble Alone

The following Sunday, Oct. 18, Mr. Kissinger went to Cambridge, Mass., to solicit the advice of old friends in the Harvard community. What he heard apparently did not relieve his earlier nervousness about the speech. He reported that nearly all of his friends wanted the President to announce some concrete initiative, or, at the very least, disclose a definite timetable for withdrawal.

This was also the substance of much of the advice Mr. Nixon was reportedly getting from his allies on Capitol Hill, in the press, and from the middle levels of the bureaucracy. But he remained convinced that the address would accomplish little at home or abroad, if he made yet another gesture of reconciliation. He felt that he should confine himself to the philosophical direction of American policy, according to his aides.

The President received little contrary pressure from his Cabinet, it is said, but on one point there was a fundamental disagreement. Most of the memorandum from the bureaucracy urged him to address himself to existing policies for disengagement and spend little time defending the original American commitment.

Even Mr. Kissinger, it is said, argued that the American presence in Vietnam created a logic of its own and that the President should give heaviest emphasis to what the Administration had done to turn a war it had not made into a peace with which both sides could live.

The President, however, reportedly argued that to dismiss the past would be a disservice to the mothers of 40,000 men who had died in conflict; and that to imply that America should never have entered the war in the first place would have involved criticizing the judgment of not only President Johnson but also Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, and might well have shaken public confidence in the institution of the Presidency itself.

Finally, he told friends, he himself had backed the original commitment, and to say that the war had been mishandled would, at this late stage, be mildly irrelevant.

According to White House sources, Mr. Nixon began making notes Oct. 21. The first jottings covered four pages of plain White House stationery and were dated "Oct. 21, 1 A.M." They began: "I speak on a problem that concerns every American. . . ." He used roughly the same phrase to begin the actual speech. Near the end, he jotted down two significant phrases:

"If you want defeat, let me know. If you want peace, now is the time to speak up."

This phraseology was later abandoned, in part because the President did not wish to issue so blatant an invitation to demonstrators of any kind, friendly or critical. But they suggest that, from the beginning, he intended to draw more boldly than ever before the line between the Administration and its critics.

His aides say that Mr. Nixon required extensive research material only on the middle portion of the speech, which set forth his efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement—includ-

ing previously undisclosed private contacts—and a description of the parallel effort to transfer the bulk of the fighting to the Vietnamese.

Memorandums flew back and forth as the President tried to buttress his case with concrete detail. One, to Mr. Kissinger, reportedly requested the exact figures on enemy massacres in Hue; another requested a re-statement of the three criteria on which, in his May 14 address, Mr. Nixon had said he would base further withdrawals.

Trouble at the End

On Oct. 29, for the first time, the President read Mr. Kissinger an outline of what he had written, and the next day he gave three other close advisers—Attorney General John N. Mitchell, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird—essentially the same presentation. He said to have written a note to himself before the meeting and to have stressed it throughout his talk — "the burden is on them."

That afternoon, in his auxiliary office in the Executive Office Building, next door to

the White House, Mr. Nixon read Mr. Kissinger the entire text, and the following day, the 31st, he read aloud the ending. Associates recall that he was having trouble with the ending, and had collected scraps of yellow paper covered with phrases he wanted to use but could find no place for.

"I don't want demonstrations," read one, "I want your quiet support."

That evening, after delivering an address on Latin-American policy, the President flew to Camp David. Arriving by helicopter the next day, Mr. Kissinger said, he discovered that the President had been up until 4 A.M., reworking the ending. It incorporated some of the thoughts from the first jottings of Oct. 21 and the scraps he had not found room for. From these emerged perhaps the decisive paragraph:

"And so tonight, to you, the great silent majority of Americans, I ask for your support."

Mr. Kissinger and the President reviewed the speech page by page on Saturday, Nov. 1. The President spent most of

Sunday and Monday polishing it.

On Monday night, an hour before the President was to deliver the speech to the nation, copies were delivered to members of the press who had assembled for a briefing in the East Room of the White House. Fifteen minutes later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff—they were not consulted during the drafting process—received their copies.

Still nervous, Mr. Kissinger entered the East Room to brief the press. He says now that he fully expected to be overwhelmed with angry questions, because the speech contained none of the initiatives the press had forecast.

Mr. Nixon himself was not certain after the Vietnam speech whether he had accomplished anything. He called an aide, Patrick J. Buchanan, to ask: "How'd I do?" But on Nov. 4, telegrams of support began arriving in large numbers. The President said they came from the "silent majority," on whose existence he had risked the entire enterprise.