

To the Editor:

I have hoped that press analysts would offer more than morning-after commentary on President Nixon's April 7 Vietnam speech. They have not done so.

Differences between that speech and past speeches are quite remarkable. Instead of demanding a "just peace" for Southeast Asia, the President asked merely for "a reasonable chance" of South Vietnam's survival as a non-Communist state. His language admitted the possibility that Saigon might fail. He put forward the most modest definition of U.S. aims in Vietnam since at least the Eisenhower Administration.

Furthermore, Mr. Nixon's speech set no conditions for American withdrawal. He did not even include the demand for release of prisoners of war, which he has since reiterated in extemporaneous remarks. Earlier, he had linked withdrawal to progress in Vietnamization, agreement at Paris, or reduction in the level of violence. On April 7, he indicated that withdrawal would continue, regardless of events in Vietnam or elsewhere.

Finally, Mr. Nixon uttered no threats. In the past, he had always taken occasion to warn the North Vietnamese of terrible consequences if they sought immediate military advantage from reductions in U.S. troop strength. The President's April 7 statement contained no such dangerous provisos.

The President's rhetoric was not at all what it was a year ago. Reporters, columnists and editorial writers may take the position that the changes are not necessarily meaningful; they may argue that the changes are not great enough; or they may feel that actions, not words, count.

Nevertheless, they ought at least to remark that the President no longer says what he used to say. Mr. Nixon can hardly be encouraged to take further steps downward if no one notices the steps he does take.

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