

President Took Nearly a Week To Reach His Vietnam Decision

NYTimes

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MAY 10 1972

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 9— Even though he began to move nearly a week ago toward his decision to mine the harbors of North Vietnam, President Nixon did not give the final signal to the military to execute the plan until nearly 2 P.M. yesterday— seven hours before his speech to the nation and minutes after a final, sober private talk with the two men who were closest to him during his deliberations.

They were John B. Connally, the Secretary of the Treasury, and Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser. Earlier that morning, they had attended a meeting of the National Security Council, and when they returned to their offices

after noon they found on their desks a summons to return to the Oval Office.

It was brief meeting, but it said much about Mr. Nixon's moods and his troubles. It was understood that already made up his mind to take stern action to stem the flow of supplies to the North Vietnamese.

He had made the decision in privacy and he had drafted the speech, by himself, at Camp David over the weekend. The council meeting that morning had been a formality.

But what he wanted to do in those brief moments with his two advisers was run through it all again, to talk about the impact on the So-

Continued on Page 19, Column 3

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

viet Union and on the American people before giving the final irretrievable order.

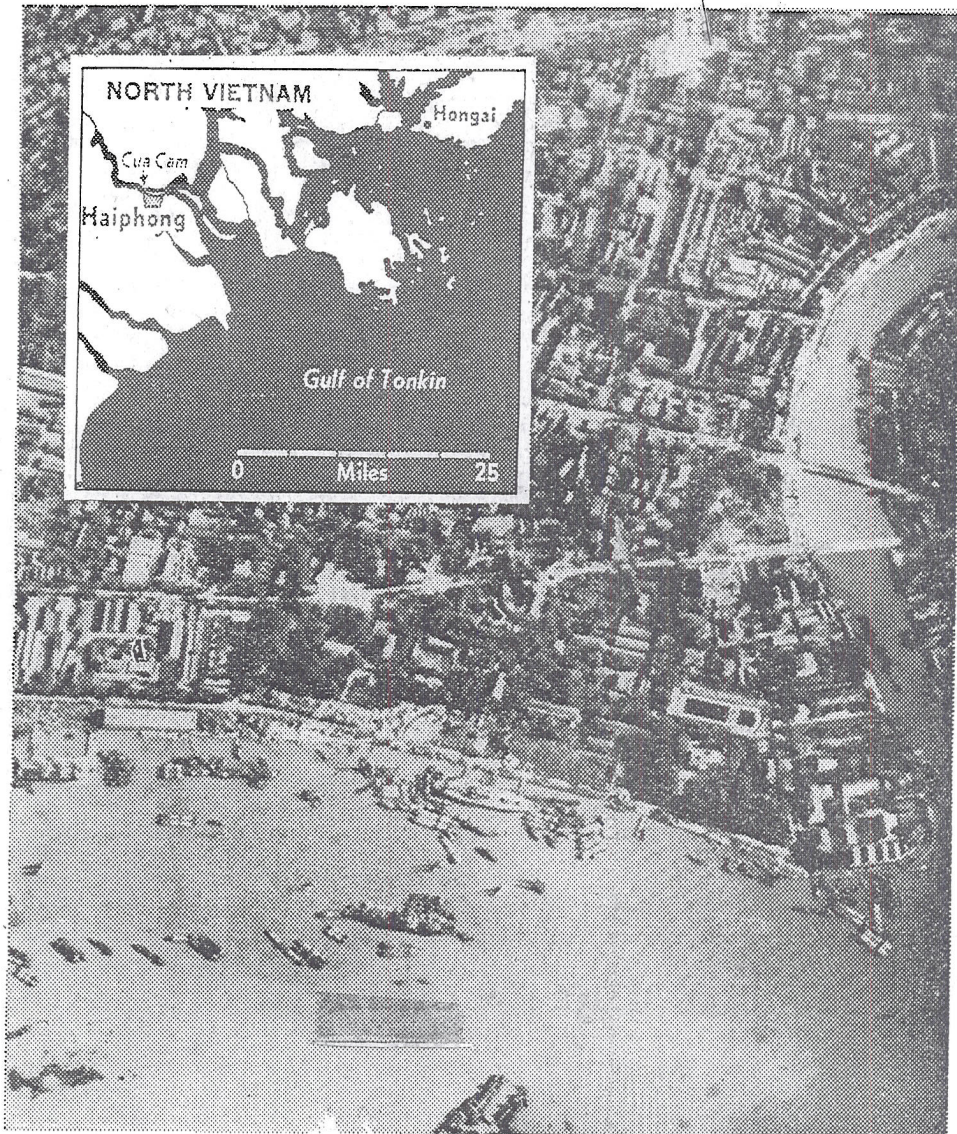
As such, this brief session symbolized the uncertainty, frustration and the sense of having no place else to go that has gripped the President and the White House for the last five days.

According to a fragmentary reconstruction of events pieced together from private sources and public statements today, Mr. Nixon began thinking seriously of the mining strategy when Mr. Kissinger flew home from Paris last Tuesday and told him, on an evening cruise down the Potomac on the Sequoia, of his unsuccessful and humiliating session earlier that day with Hanoi's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho.

Long Talks With 2 Aides

Mr. Kissinger reported that despite earlier optimism, Hanoi's demands remained unchanged while hints from the Soviet Union that they might be able to induce the enemy to talk seriously had proved to be empty.

During the week, Mr. Nixon conferred frequently with Mr. Kissinger and, in his private office in the Executive Office Building, held several long chats with Mr. Connally. With Mr. Kissinger



A 1967 aerial photograph shows port of Haiphong, which has been mined by U.S. Navy

Associated Press

he talked philosophy and tactics, rejecting at one point a suggestion from elsewhere in the bureaucracy that he try to stem the flow of supplies by landing South Vietnamese marines in the north.

With Mr. Connally, he talked mainly about his philosophy of America's role and responsibility and about his conviction that the prestige of his office and the influence of the nation in world councils depended upon the manner in which he ended the war in Vietnam.

These are convictions he is said to hold as strongly in private as in public. Mr. Connally did not challenge them and indeed reinforced them.

According to the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, the President consulted others inside and outside the White House, but by the end of the week felt that his choices were dwindling.

The negotiating track to peace seems to lead nowhere; the prospects for Vietnamization, turning the fighting over to Saigon forces, seemed scarcely brighter.

In the words of one aide, he saw "the foreign policy of the United States resting on the backs of the Vietnamese," and suddenly they seemed far less strong than he had earlier advertised them to the public.

He went to Camp David

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touch with aides by telephone. Yesterday afternoon he asked for a critique of what he had written there from Raymond K. Price Jr., the head of his speech-writing section, but did most of the editing himself.

Briefed Congress Leaders

When he had issued his orders and finished his speech, he held a briefing for Congressional leaders early in the evening in the Roosevelt room in the White House. Seated between plaques of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt, he began by saying:

"Let me come directly to the point and tell you of a decision I have had to make."

Then he summarized the speech he was about to deliver, ran through the courses of action he had rejected, and asked—according to one aide present—"gently" for their support. The men around the table, sober-faced, did not react, but Mr. Nixon had not, by his manner, invited reaction.

The telegrams came to the White House in vast numbers today and were said by the White House to be running 4 to 1 in Mr. Nixon's favor.

Mr. Ziegler characterized the President's mood as "determined and resolute." But there was also a sense at the White House today of wariness about the future and weariness about the past.

Perhaps Mr. Kissinger summarized it best this morning at a briefing. He was asked why the President seemed confident that his latest move would work in view of "the long history of misassessments about the Vietnam war."

Mr. Kissinger seemed to sigh and shrug and look painfully tired as he said, "These decisions have to be seen in the context of the choices that are available." The decision, he said, was "reached prayerfully and on the best belief that it will work, but

only events will
prove whether it
will." [From
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