

NYTimes MAY 2 1972
Excerpts From the President's Colloquy on Vietnam

FLORESVILLE, Texas, May 1 (AP)—Following are excerpts from President Nixon's remarks during a question-and-answer session with a group of prominent Texas Democrats and Republicans last night at Secretary of the Treasury John B. Connally's ranch:

Q. Mr. President, do you anticipate any developments in Vietnam other than those outrageous statements we heard on the television the other night, that you might tell us here?

A. I would respond by saying that the evaluation of the situation in Vietnam today is the same that I gave then. As Gen. Creighton Abrams reported then, and as he has updated his report as of today, the South Vietnamese on the ground are resisting very bravely a massive Communist North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam. That invasion will continue. The offensive will continue in its intensity, and we can expect over the next four to five weeks that there will be some battles lost for the South Vietnamese and some will be won, but it is his professional judgment—General Abrams's professional judgment—that the South Vietnamese will be able to hold and deny to the North Vietnamese their goal, which, of course, is to impose on the people of South Vietnam a Communist government.

Now to keep it all in perspective, let us understand that when we hear about this town or that one that is under attack, we must remember that as of this time, the North Vietnamese have utterly failed in their ability to rally the South Vietnamese people to their cause.

We also must remember that despite their moving in on certain territory and in

certain towns, that over 90 per cent of the people of South Vietnam are still under the Government of South Vietnam, and not under control of the Communists.

So keeping it in perspective—we can expect some days when the news may be a South Vietnamese setback, and other days when it will be otherwise. It is the professional view of the men on the spot, best able to judge, that the South Vietnamese will be able to hold, provided—and this comes to what we do—provided the United States continues to furnish the air and naval support that we have been furnishing to stop this invasion.

Questions have been raised about the decision that I have made, which is to the effect that as long as the North Vietnamese were conducting an invasion, an offensive, in South Vietnam, and were killing South Vietnamese and Americans in South Vietnam, that I would, as Commander in Chief of our armed forces, order air and naval attacks on military targets in North Vietnam.

I realize that decision has caused considerable controversy in this country. I understand why that would be the case. There are many people who believe that the United States has done enough in South Vietnam; that what we should do is to find a way to get out as quickly as we can, and let whatever the consequences are flow from that, which would mean, of course, a Communist take-over.

Let me tell you the reasons why I feel that it is vitally important that the United States continue to use its air and naval power against targets in North Vietnam, as well as in South Vietnam, to prevent a Communist take-over.

First, because there are 69,000 Americans still in

Vietnam—that will be reduced to 49,000 by the first of July—and I, as Commander in Chief, have a responsibility to see to it that their lives are adequately protected, and I, of course, will meet that responsibility.

Second, because as we consider the situation in Vietnam, we must remember that if the North Vietnamese were to take over in South Vietnam, as a result of our stopping our support in the air and on the sea—we have no ground support whatever, there are no American ground forces in action in South Vietnam and none will be—but when we consider that situation, if there were such a take-over, we must consider the consequences.

There is first the consequence to the people of South Vietnam. If, at this particular point, the Communists were to take over in South Vietnam, you can imagine what would happen to the hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese who sided with their own Government and with the United States against the Communists. It would be a bloodbath that would stain the hands of the United States for time immemorial.

In the event that one country like North Vietnam, massively assisted with the most modern technical weapons by two Communist superpowers—in the event that that country is able to invade another country and conquer it, you can see how that pattern would be repeated in other countries throughout the world—in the Mideast, in Europe, and in others as well.

If, on the other hand, that kind of aggression is stopped in Vietnam, and fails there, then it will be discouraged in other parts of the world. Putting it quite directly then, what is on the line in Vietnam is not just peace for Vietnam, but peace in the Mideast, peace in Europe and peace not just for the five or six or seven years immediately ahead of us, but possibly for a long time in the future.

Earlier this evening I talked to President Johnson on the telephone. We are of different parties. We both served in this office. While I had my political differences with him, and he with me, I am sure he would agree that each of us in his way tries to leave that office with as much respect and with as much strength in the world as he possibly can —

that is his responsibility — and to do it the best way that he possibly can.

Let me say in this respect that I have noted that when we have traveled abroad to 18 countries, particularly even when we went to the People's Republic of China, the office of President — not the man, but the office of President — of the United States is respected in every country we visited. I think we will find that same respect in Moscow. But if the United States at this time leaves Vietnam and allows a Communist take-over, the office of President of the United States will lose respect, and I am not going to let that happen.

Targets in North Vietnam

Q. Mr. President, may I ask you about strategic targets in North Vietnam? I have been told for years by the pilots that there are dams up there that would be very much defeating to the North Vietnamese, who have defied what you have tried to prove in the way of peace. Is this true or false? Has this crossed your mind?

A. I would say on that score that we have, as you know, authorized strikes, and we have made them over the past four weeks, since the Communist offensive began, in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

I have also indicated, as this offensive continues, if it does continue, that we will continue to make strikes on military targets throughout North Vietnam.

Now, the problem that is raised with regard to dams or dikes is that, while it is a strategic target and indirectly a military target, it would result in an enormous number of civilian casualties. That is something that we need to avoid. It is also something we believe is not needed.

Just let me say that as far as the targets in North Vietnam are concerned, we are prepared to use our military and naval strength against military targets throughout North Vietnam, and we believe that the North Vietnamese are taking a very great risk if they continue their offensive in the South.

I will just leave it there, and they can make their own choice.

In other words, I believe that we can limit our strikes to military targets without going to targets that involve civilian casualties. That is what we have done, and we can do that in the future, and do the job.