

WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 1972

# Private Talks with Connally,

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE JR.

©, 1972, New York Times Service

WASHINGTON — 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. Monday—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.

There 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 a brief meeting, but it said much about Nixon's moods and his troubles. He had, of course, already made up his mind to take stern action to stem the flow of supplies to the 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 Russians and on the American people, before giving the final irrevocable order.

As such, this brief session symbolized and perhaps even encapsulated the uncertainty, frustration and finally 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, Nixon began thinking seriously of the mining strategy when Kissinger flew home from Paris last Tuesday and told the President, 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.

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

THE STATES-ITEM

## Kissinger Preceded

NEW ORLEANS

THIRTY-FIVE

### Nixon Decision

DURING THE WEEK, Nixon conferred frequently with Kissinger and, in his private office in the executive office building, held several long chats with Connally. With Kissinger 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.

In Connally's presence, 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. Connally did not challenge them and indeed reinforced

them.

According to his press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, the President consulted others inside and outside the White House, but by the end of the week he saw his options disappearing.

THE NEGOTIATING track to peace seems to lead nowhere; the prospects for Vietnamization, the alternate

strategy of disengagement in which he has poured so much energy for three years, 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 retreated to Camp David Friday evening, keeping in

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

When he had issued his orders and finished his speech, Nixon expressed no further public doubts at a briefing for congressional leaders early in the evening in the Roosevelt

Room in the White House. He seated himself between plaques of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt and 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 options he had rejected, and asked ac-

ording to one aide present — "gently" for their support. The men around the table, poker-faced, did not react, but Nixon had not by his manner, invited reaction.

The telegrams that came to the White House in vast numbers Tuesday were said by the White House to be running four to one in Nixon's favor, and Ziegler characterized the President's mood as "deter-

mined and resolute." But there was also a sense at the White House of wariness about the future and weariness about the past.

Perhaps Kissinger summarized it best at a briefing called to elaborate on the speech. When Peter Lisagor of the Chicago Daily News asked him why the President seemed confident that his latest move would work in view

of "the long history of miscalculations about the Vietnam war," he seemed to sigh and shrug and look painfully tired, and said:

"Peter, these decisions have to be seen in the context of the choices that are available . . . this decision was reached prayerfully and on the best belief that it will work, but only events will prove whether it will."