

'It Is Time to Strip Away

Following is the text of President Nixon's news conference yesterday:

The President: We will go ahead with some questions if you like.

Question: Mr. President, you have said that it is against U.S. policy to bomb the dikes and dams in North Vietnam. Yesterday, the State Department acknowledged there had been incidental and inadvertent damage from the bombing nearby.

My question is: Is it worth the risk of possible flooding and having world opinion turned against us as a result of bombing dams?

A. I think your question would be better answered by my discussing the policy toward bombing of civilian installations of North Vietnam generally, and then coming down to the specifics of your question, in giving a general answer.

Some of you who were in Texas with me will recall that that question was raised on the Connally Ranch, and it was raised, actually, by an advocate of bombing dikes as to why we did not bomb dikes. I said it had not been U.S. policy even before the bombing halt of 1968 to bomb the dikes; that it was not our policy now, and it would not be in the future, because it is the policy of the United States in all of its activities in North Vietnam to direct its attacks against military targets only.

This was the policy in the '60s and it is now the policy since we have had to resume the bombing for the reasons that I mentioned in my speech of May 8.

With regard to the situation on the dikes, let us understand what we are confronted with here. This is approximately a 2,700-mile chain of installations, including perhaps a half-dozen major dams which are the heart of the system, and then peripheral areas getting down to mounds, which have, of course, the purpose of controlling the floodwaters in that particular area.

If it were the policy of the United States to bomb the dikes, we could take them out, the significant part of them out, in a week. We don't do so for the reasons that I have mentioned, because we are trying to avoid civilian casualties, not cause them.

Now, with regard to the reports that have come from Hanoi that there had been some damage to some parts of the dike system, I think it is important to note two things: One, there has been no report of any flooding and second, there has been no report of any strikes on the major dike areas.

the Double

Standard'

What I am referring to is the big dams which are the heart of the system. There have been reports of incidental damage to some of the peripheral installations in this 2,700-mile system which covers the country of North Vietnam.

Now, under these circumstances, I think that it is well to keep in context first what our policy is, and second, what its effect has been. Our policy is not to bomb civilian installations and second, our restraint, it seems to me, rather than being subject to criticisms, should be subject to objective analysis and, it seems to me, a considerable amount of support.

As far as this matter is concerned, I think, too, it is time to strip away the double standard. I noted with interest that the Secretary General of the U.N., just like his predecessor, seized upon this enemy-inspired propaganda, which has taken in many well-intentioned and naive people to attack the American bombing of civilian installations and risking civilian lives, and yet not raising one word against deliberate bombing of civilian installations in South Vietnam.

Just so the record will be kept straight—and it should be stated at this point—all of you ladies and gentlemen are aware of it, of course; you have printed it, and perhaps you will see fit to again in this context:

I just got a cable from Ambassador Bunker. I had asked him what had happened to civilians in the new offensive. You recall in my speech of May 8, I said 20,000 civilian casualties, including women and children, have resulted because of the deliberate shelling of the cities and the slaughtering of refugees indiscriminately by the North Vietnamese.

The number is now 45,000, including women and children, of which 15,000 are dead.

I asked him for the number of refugees. It is higher than I had thought. There have been 860,000 made homeless by the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam, this newest invasion to date, 600,000 of them are still in refugee camps, away from their home.

Looking back over the pe-

riod of this very difficult war, we find that since 1965 there have been 600,000 civilian casualties in South Vietnam as a result of deliberate policies of the North Vietnamese Communists, not accidental, but deliberate.

In North Vietnam, in the period from 1954 to 1956, in their so-called land reform program, a minimum of 50,000 were murdered, assassinated, and according to the Catholic bishop of Danang, whom I talked to when I was there in 1956, in South Vietnam, in addition to the 800,000 refugees who came south, there were at least a half million who died in slave labor camps in North Vietnam.

Now, I did not relate this series of incidents for the purpose of saying, because they did something bad, we can do something bad.

What I am simply saying is, let's not have a hypocritical double standard. The United States has been restrained, greater restraint than any great power has ever shown in handling this war. We will continue to be restrained. We have to bomb military targets in order to accomplish the objectives I have described in my goal, in my speech of May 8.

On the other hand, as far as this particular matter is concerned, I can only say if damage did occur, that we are making every possible effort to see that it will not occur again, which gets to your question. Military commanders, aircraft commanders and so forth, in terms of where military targets are, are instructed to avoid civilian damage where they can.

That is why some targets in the heart of Hanoi, for example, major power installations, fuel installations in the heart of Hanoi, have not been hit, because I have not wanted to have civilian casualties if we could possibly avoid it.

I will simply close by saying that this a major propaganda campaign, it is one that does concern us. But let us keep the record straight. In the event that the United States followed the course of action recommended by some of those who have voted for the so-called end-the-war resolution in the Senate of the United States, it would mean that there would be visited upon South Vietnam the same atrocities that were visited upon North Vietnam, with perhaps at least one million marked for assassination because they had fought against the North Vietnamese attempts to conquer South Vietnam.

I will add one other thing. As far as the negotiations are concerned, we are negotiating. We have had one private conference a week ago, lasting approximately six hours. We hope to continue to negotiate.

We have made fair offers on withdrawal, on a ceasefire, on political settlement. We have not made them on a take it or leave it basis.

We have made fair offers on exchange of prisoners of war and unaccounted missing in action.

Having done this, there is one thing we have not offered and this is one hangup in the settlement today. That is the demands of the enemy directly or indirectly to do what they cannot accomplish themselves, impose a Communist government in South Vietnam. That would be the height of immorality to impose on the 17 million people of South Vietnam a Communist government with the bloodbath that would follow.

Negotiated Settlement

Q. Mr. President, you mentioned the political settlement. What do you foresee as a possibility without necessarily elections — do you see the two factions in South Vietnam coming together in some kind of an agreement without an election as one possible solution in the Paris talks?

A. That is a very perceptive question, but it is one that I think any of you here would agree that I should not comment upon for the reason that negotiations are now under way. I have read these long negotiating sessions — the public ones, of course, and even more important, the private ones — in great detail. At a time that matters are being discussed, it is not well for me to state anything with regard to what is happening in the negotiations.

I will only say that we are negotiating with the desire of ending this war as soon as possible. The fastest way to end the war and the best way to end it is through negotiation. We would hope that public figures in their comments will not do anything to undercut the negotiations, that Congress, in its actions, will not in effect give a message to the enemy, "Don't negotiate with the present Administration; wait for us.



Associated Press

Workers, mostly women, repair a segment of the dike system in North Vietnam. The picture was taken in Ninhbinh Province by Amando Doronila of the Manila Times.

We will give you what you want in South Vietnam."

Q. Mr. President, to follow up the first question, if I may, there had been reports that SAM [surface-to-air missile] sites have been put on top of some of those dikes or dams. Does your policy rule out the bombing of that particular area where there are SAM sites?

A. I have seen those reports, Mr. Lisagor. As you know, the Secretary of Defense has made some indirect comments about it. The situation there is one that we would lean against taking out SAM sites on targets that would result in civilian casualties of a substantial amount.

However, I have not seen in recent days any reports indicating that any such SAM sites will be hit and in view of the present debate, I think we are going to be very careful with regard to hitting them. We would do so only if we had to do so in order to protect American fliers who otherwise would be hit down by the SAMs.

Eagleton Case

Q. Mr. President, do you think that anyone with a history of mental illness should run for high office?

A. Well, Miss Thomas, the question that you ask, of course, is related to some of the conjecture with regard to the ticket on the other side. Mr. Ziegler has correctly reported to all of you ladies and gentlemen of the press that I have given the strictest instructions that there are to be no comments directly, or, in the case of your question, indirectly, on this subject. This is a personal matter.

The question of the selection of a vice presidential candidate is one which is a matter for the presidential candidate to decide, with, of course, the advice and consent of his convention. I am not going to interject myself into that problem except to say that since it is a personal matter, it does give me an opportunity to say that not now on this matter, nor in this campaign in the future, are we going to campaign on personalities or on party labels.

The issues that divide the opposite side and this administration are so wide—in fact, the clearest choice in this century—that we must campaign on issues. There is an honest difference of opinion on foreign policy, an honest difference of opinion on domestic policy, and an honest difference of opinion on most major defense issues.

Under these circumstances, this is a campaign which I think should be waged—I think all should, but this one particularly should—be waged on the issues so that the American people can make their choice between the two: the present President and the challenger, who honestly so basically disagree on fundamental ends and goals for the American people.

North Viet Propaganda

Q. Mr. President, are we to understand that now that stop bombing the dikes has been made a political slogan this year, perhaps those who have gotten behind it have not thoroughly checked the background of those accusations?

A. I did not use the word "naive" unintentionally. The North Vietnamese are very skillful at propaganda. They have, of course, brought those who have been invited into the country to the areas where they have found bomb damage. They have not gone to any great pains to fill those holes, which they would naturally want to do before the possibility of rain and flood again comes to the North.

In my view, this is a deliberate attempt on the part of the North Vietnamese to create an extraneous issue, to divert attention from one

of the most barbaric invasions in history, compounded by a violation of all concepts of international law in handling the prisoners of war. For them, with their policy of deliberate murder, and assassination, and otherwise attacks on civilians for the purpose of killing civilians, for them to try to seize on this and divert attention from that, first, is a patent propaganda effort, and it is one that I think needs to be answered.

We have to, of course, be responsible for what we do. But it is time that in this terribly difficult war some Americans, or that most of us, should perhaps realize that when we talk about morality, that it is never an easy question.

If I can digress for a moment, and then I will come to your followup question on the other matter, I remember one of the first conversations I had with President Eisenhower about war. We were riding back from Quantico. You may remember it. (Defense Secretary) Charlie Wilson used to have those meetings in Quantico of the Defense establishment people. He asked me to ride back with him. It was very early in the administration, the first year.

He was talking a little about the decisions he had to make in World War II. One of the questions I raised with him was: Here, on our part, the deliberate bombing of German cities, the tragedy of Dresden, of Essen, of Hamburg, not to mention Berlin. Gen. Eisenhower said that was a terribly difficult decision for us, the strategic bombing of civilians in Germany. But he said, "On the moral question, we had to answer to ourselves this fundamental problem." He said, "The height of immorality would be to allow Hitler to rule Europe."

Now, in our case we have not gone that far. We are not going to bomb civilian targets in the North. We are not using the great power that could finish off North Vietnam in an afternoon, and we will not. But it would be the height or immorality for the United States at this point to leave Vietnam, and in leaving, to turn over to the North Vietnamese the fate of 17 million South Vietnamese who do not want a Communist Government, to turn it over to them.

'Prolong the War'

That is what this is about. That is the only issue that is left. Those who say "end the war" really should name their resolution "prolong the war." They should name it "prolong the war" not because they deliberately want to. They want to end the war just as I do, but we have to face this fact: We have only one President at a time, as I said in 1968. At that time, as you may recall, I was pressed quite often by you ladies and gentlemen, "What do you think we ought to do about negotiation?" I didn't think there was much chance for successful negotiation then.

But I said, correctly, we had only one President, and I didn't want to destroy any chance he might have to end this war. At this point, the chance for a negotiated settlement is better now than it has ever been. It is not sure, and I am not going to raise any false hopes, but the enemy is failing in its military offensive, although there is still some hard fighting to take place in the Quangtri-Hue area, but the enemy is also, of course, suffering the consequences of mining and cutting the roads and other systems that would bring in supplies to North Vietnam.

Under these circumstances, the enemy — because also we have made a very fair offer — has every incentive to negotiate. But

when you put yourself in the position of the enemy, and they hear that the Congress of the United States says, in effect, "We will give you what you want regardless of what the President has offered" why not wait? This is the problem, and I would hope that as senators and congressmen consult their consciences, they would realize that we have just three months left before the election. In those three months we hope to do everything we can to bring this war to an end, and they should take no action which would jeopardize those negotiations. I can only say that the resolutions to this point cannot help. They can only confuse the enemy, at best, and at the worst, they will prolong the war.

Picking Vice Presidents

Q: The vice presidential nominee often is chosen under great pressure. This means often that the Vice President eventually is under great pressure of time and circumstance. Sometimes this turns out all right and sometimes it doesn't. Do you think that method could be improved?

A. I was a Vice President once, too. (Laughter)

I will answer. I can only give my own experience and I know this was the experience of President Eisenhower. When an individual feels that he is quite, shall we say, has a better than even chance or an even chance to be President, he does a lot of thinking about who should be the vice presidential candidate, both because of his potentialities as a candidate and in terms of could he fill the office of Vice President, and in the case of an accident, the President.

I can assure you that naturally I went through that process in making my decision and I would think that any candidate would do that. I don't think it is quite as, shall we say, off-the-top-of-your-head as you would indicate, because most of us, when we are seeking the presidency, long before the convention, have a pretty good idea as to whether we have a good shot at it and we do a lot of thinking about the vice presidential nomination.

Medical Records

Q. Mr. President, given the continuing demands for revealing the financial backgrounds of candidates and office holders, what is your reaction to the suggestion that medical records of candidates and office holders be revealed and, as a corollary to that, which you will understand, have you ever felt your self in more danger of being overconfident? (Laughter)

A. Is that something for medical records?

Q. It is a bridge, but it is not direct.

A. Well, let me say that for me to answer that question is really so self-serving that I hesitate to do so. My medical records, of course, like my financial records, are already on the books, open to the press.

You will recall in 1968, the question was raised about my medical history and Mr. Ziegler, at that time, put out the medical history, including the examinations, some of the examinations, what the yearly examinations that we all have were, going back to the time that I came to Washington in 1946.

So, as far as my financial records are concerned, they also have been made public and then every year my medical record is made public by Dr. Tkach in briefings which seem to create some interest. I don't know why.

I would also suggest in my case, too, it was somewhat of a self-serving record, because Dr. Tkach was point-

ing out to me a few days ago that according to his computations, and I will not vouch for his figures, that I have been in this office 3½ years and have never missed an appointment because of health.

Considering what I have been through, some fairly stern crises and rather extensive travel, I don't think anybody would question the state of my health.

I think that in answer to your question, that is a matter that will inevitably be a subject that will be raised and in which the candidates, each of them, will have to make his own determination. I made mine. I don't suggest that others should do likewise.

As far as over confident—about what, my health?

Election Predictions

Q. No, sir, in terms of the circumstances and the situation, given your position today as an incumbent President running for re-election, you are the favorite. Events in the past two or three weeks, let alone the last two or three days, have enhanced that. That is what I was talking about.

A. Well, I recall historically, an incident, and you were covering us at that time. We both go back 25 years. I recall in 1952 when another vice presidential candidate was urged to get off the ticket and there were many who thought that the fact that he was urged to get off it, whether he stayed on or got off, that it was going to sink the presidential candidate. It did not.

So, I would say that the incident certainly would not enter into my predictions at this time. As far as making a prediction is concerned, I will give it more thought and will be glad to respond to it when I have what I call a political press conference, which I will have immediately after the Republican Convention at the Western White House in San Clemente.

As far as what the situation is now, thought, looking at the facts, the Democratic Party has a much higher registration than the Republican Party. Looking at the volatile mix of the American voting public, it is my belief—and I have told all of my associates this—that regardless of what the polls shown whether we are ahead or behind, this will be a close, hard-fought election right down to the wire.

People who make predictions now could look very, very bad later. We are going to assume throughout this election that we have a very hard fight on our hands. We think that it is a good thing that it is going to be a fight on the issues, a good hard clean fight on the issues before the American people. We think it will be close and we hope to win.

Mideast Policy

Q. What impact on the American policy in the Middle East is the withdrawal of Soviet personnel likely to have?

A. This question I noticed has been reflected on by some lower level officials in the Government, but not because Secretary Rogers and I have talked about this matter and Dr. Kissinger and I, not by us. For this reason, our goal, as you know, is a just settlement in the Middle East. The situation there is still one that is not clear and any comment upon it, first, might possibly be erroneous, and second, could very well be harmful to our goal of a just settlement.

So I am not trying to dodge your question, but I don't think it would be helpful to our goal of a just settlement in the Middle East. It might exacerbate the problem by trying to evaluate what happened between Sadat and the Soviet leaders.

Selection of Agnew

Q. On the subject of your selection of the Vice President, of your selection of Mr. Agnew, could you tell us if you considered anybody else for the job and who they were.

A. No. My thoughts with regard to Vice President Agnew were expressed at rather great length in this very room in an interview with one of the other networks. I think it was CBS.

On that occasion, I expressed my confidence in the Vice President. I wouldn't go over those matters that I covered at considerable length then now, except to say that I reaffirm that confidence as expressed then.

Under the circumstances, I believe that the choice I made four years ago is one that should now be reaffirmed by asking him to run for the office again.

Now, there has been speculation, I would hasten to say, about other people for the vice presidency. That is inevitable. The Vice President could get sick or the

Vice President might decide not to run, all of these things. I don't think he is going to get sick. He is also in excellent health, better than I. He plays tennis. But, in any event, there has been a lot of speculation. Secretary Connally's name comes to mind.

I should point out that a really great injustice was done to Secretary Connally in the suggestion, I think, on one of the news reports to the effect that I gave Secretary Connally the bad news that he was not going to be the vice presidential candidate when I saw him Friday night.

This was not bad news to him. As a matter of fact, it was not news at all. He and I had discussed this problem when he came to California after his world trip. At that time, I discussed the vice presidency. After all, not only from the standpoint of ability to hold the office of Vice President, but from the standpoint of ability to win the election, Secretary Connally, whose political judgment I respect very much, strongly urged that Vice President Agnew be continued on the ticket.

Military Recommendations

Q. Mr. President, on the bombing of the dikes and dams, would you say that you have been resisting pressure from the military to bomb such installations?

A. No. The pressure does not come from the military. I have talked this over with Adm. Moorer and naturally Gen. Abrams. As a matter of fact, let me just say one thing about our military, because somebody ought to speak up for it now and then.

We get the idea they are a bunch of savage fly-boys and they love to get down and machine gun all the innocent little civilians and all the rest.

We can be very proud of our military, not only the men who are flying, they are brave and courageous, but also the men on the ground. We can be very proud of the Marines, all of them have gone now, for what they have done—the Marines, the Army and the ground soldiers—for the civilians and refugees there. It is a story of generosity in a country that has never been equalled by American fighting men or anybody else.

As far as our military commanders are concerned, while they do give me their judgment as to what will affect the military outcome in Vietnam, they have never recommended, for example, bombing Hanoi. You have seen some of these signs "Bomb Hanoi," in fact, they were around in '68 even, a few, as well as '64.

Our military doesn't want to do that. They believe it would be counterproductive; and secondly, they believe it is not necessary. It might shorten the war, but it would leave a legacy of hatred throughout that part of the world from which we might never recover. So our military have not advocated bombing the dikes; they have not advocated bombing civilian centers. They are doing their best in carrying out the policy we want of hitting military targets only.

When, as a result of what will often happen, a bomb is dropped, if it is in an area of injury to civilians, it is not by intent, and there is a very great difference.

Agnew's Contribution

Q. Sir, a similar question was asked another President in your experience. Would you please tell us what policy decisions Vice President Agnew has contributed to in your administration?

A. Well, I only need a couple of minutes. (Laughter)

Miss McClendon, as a matter of fact, one of the considerations that motivates a President when he selects a Vice President for running again is: How does he handle himself with the tough decisions? Now, the Vice President does not make decisions. I learned that, and Vice President Agnew knows that. Decisions with regard to his schedule, yes; advice, and so forth; but not decisions. The President only makes them.

But in the Cabinet Room, and sometimes in this office, we have had some pretty hard ones—the May 8 decision; the Cambodian decision was not easy, the Nov. 3 decision that I made on that occasion; the decision with regard to the SALT agreements, which involved a fight between the hawks and doves, was not an easy one.

I don't mean to indicate that Vice President Agnew just sat there as a yes man. He is very outspoken—very quiet but very outspoken—and articulate. What has impressed me in those meetings is that he is a man of poise, calm and judgment. When it gets down to the

final tough decision, he is, from my evaluation, always cool and poised, and is one who therefore could be expected to make decisions in the future in a calm, cool, judicial way.

Now, that does not mean that all of his decisions will be good because calm, cool, judicial men make bad decisions just as emotional men sometimes make good decisions, but my point is that in his case, in all of the so-called mini-crises and major crises we have had in the administration, he has been strong, courageous and loyal. Those are attributes that are interesting to come by.

Let me say one other thing since you are talking about the vice presidency. I think we who have been Vice Presidents ought to form a little club. It is the most maligned office, you know. The reason is that we tend not to look at the records of Vice Presidents who have become President. Now that did not happen to me so this is not a self-serving statement in this case. I mean became President as a result of being Vice President.

But look at this century: Two striking examples. Around the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt—and some of you remember Mark Hanna, a great McKinley man. McKinley was in marvelous health and he was shot. Theodore Roosevelt came in to the Presidency and Mark Hanna, who did not care much for Theodore Roosevelt, said, "Now we have this fanatic in the White House" and yet Theodore Roosevelt became a great President.

Perhaps that is not the best analogy because Theodore Roosevelt added, they though, a great deal to the ticket.

Let's look at Harry Truman a moment—and I must say I was in the group at that time, being in the other Party—but here is Harry succeeding the towering figure of his time, Franklin Roosevelt. I remember the editorials: "Harry Truman, the man from Independence."—the very question somebody asked here a few moments ago, "Shouldn't we have a better method of selecting Vice Presidents?" They said, "How in the world? Now we have this little man from Missouri in the Presidency." You all know Harry Truman and I have had our differences. You will also remember that on public occasions I have praised him for three very tough decisions he made.

I was reading Winston Churchill the other night, about the first meeting with Truman at Potsdam where Truman took him over in a corner and told him about the use of the bomb. This was a terribly difficult decision. But he thought, probably correctly—and President Eisenhower agreed with this—that it would save a million American lives, as probably it did, and that is why he used the bomb in ending the war with Japan.

The second decision, which I had the opportunity to support, was the Greek-Turkish aid program. That was a tough one. It split his Party. It split it into the Henry Wallace wing and his wing. Byrnes and Wallace, remember, had their fight. It was a good decision and I supported it in the Congress of the United States.

Incidentally, I still support aid to Greece and Turkey. It is just as necessary today as it was then, for most of the same reasons, now particularly added because of the fact that without aid to Greece and aid to Turkey you have no viable policy to save Israel.

Finally, there were, of course, decisions that Mr. Truman made on the Korean War. I criticized the conduct of the war as did many of us who were out. But his decision to go into Korea was right; it was necessary, and it was tough.

Just before Dean Acheson died I was in this office and we talked about how Truman had made that decision. I have talked too long on that but what I am simply saying is this: Here was the little man from Missouri. He was the Vice President. People said, "Why did not Roosevelt pick some of the others, the towering figures in his cabinet or the Senate, or the rest, rather than the little man from Missouri?"

But the little man from Missouri had that indefinable quality, as did the big man from New York, Theodore Roosevelt, of character, that made him a man capable of making tough decisions and that is the most important thing that a Vice President needs.

The Press: Thank you.